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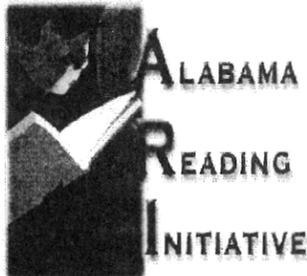
THE NEWSPAPER OF EDUCATION RIGHTS

FEBRUARY 2000

Alabama Reading Initiative Is Bright Spot for Learning

BIRMINGHAM, AL — When more than 97,000 Alabama students in grades 3-11 scored among the lowest 23% in the nation in reading on the Stanford Achievement Tests three years ago, the State Board of Education appointed a Reading Panel to find out why. Made up of teachers, higher education faculty, and representatives of business and grassroots organizations, including Alabama Eagle Forum, the panel studied the research for a year, then developed a comprehensive strategy designed to improve the reading skills of *all* students.

Called "The Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI)," the program targets reading achievement on three fronts: beginning reading, expanding reading power, and effective intervention.



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Beginning Reading

The ARI insists upon using what scientific research has established as successful with beginning readers — emphasis on the development of phonemic awareness (the individual sounds in a word) and the systematic teaching of skills needed to decode words in the context of language-rich, literature-rich classrooms. Teachers are encouraged to read to students and discuss the meaning of words and ideas in the material. This requires highly-skilled teachers trained in the most effective instruction methods.

Expanding Reading Power

The Alabama Reading Panel discovered that the reduced emphasis on reading and comprehension during the critical middle school years resulted in lowered test scores. The ARI encourages (See Reading, page 4)

Sounding Out Success *Phonics teacher wins national award*

MURRIETA, CA — Teacher Pam Barret helps students at Tovashal Elementary School become avid readers by the end of the first grade with her immensely successful phonics instruction program.

Armed with the skills necessary to decode progressively difficult words, her first-graders can read paragraphs of text by early spring that include words such as "determined," "ashamed," and "particularly." Last May, the Virginia-based National Right To Read Foundation (NRRF), a non-profit literacy group, recognized Mrs. Barret's success by naming her its 1998 Teacher of the Year. She was the only teacher honored with the prestigious award in 1998.

Pam's colleagues, friends and family surprised her with an awards ceremony at Tovashal on Nov. 17 following her students' annual Thanksgiving reading and song program. Sponsored by NRRF, the festivities were led by NRRF senior advisor Patrick Groff. A parade of public officials showed up to offer commendations, including State Representative and former education committee chairman Steve Baldwin, Murrieta Mayor Chuck Washington, Riverside County Supervisor Bob Buster, and representatives of Governor Gray Davis (D), U.S. Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), U.S. Rep. Ken Calvert (R), and State Sen. Ray Haynes (R-Riverside). California Eagle Forum's

Sally Myers presented Pam with an Eagle Award on behalf of the national Eagle Forum.

Mrs. Barret credited parents and phonics for her students' reading prowess. "Our first graders are well on their way to becoming productive and informed citizens, thanks to the real success they are achieving through the use of systematic phonics instruction," she explained. "We use quality language arts materials such as *Open Court*, the Phonics Game (purchased by the Tovashal PTA), *Phonics Pathways*, and Phyllis Schlafly's *First Reader*."



Teacher of the Year,
Pam Barret

In 1998, the California Board of Education approved new teaching guidelines for reading and math, including a return to phonics. Though not mandatory, the guidelines are used by public-school teachers, teaching colleges and textbook publishers in devising teaching methods. The new guidelines replaced a 1988 plan that had made "Whole Language" — teaching children to guess at words from pictures and context — the preferred method of reading instruction. Many educators and parents blamed the subsequent drop in California students' test scores on the use of Whole Language.

By December 1999, opposition to phonics had dwindled. The criteria for textbook adoption in California for language arts in 2002 will require that 75% of the words be "decodable," that is, the text must use letters and sounds students have already learned through phonics in-

(See Phonics, page 2)

Idaho Buries School-To-Work

BOISE, ID — When Idaho Board of Education Chairman Harold Davis officially proclaimed the death of School-to-Work (STW) last month, grassroots citizens breathed a sigh of relief. In announcing that the state's STW offices would close their doors on Oct. 1, 2000, Davis stated: "There is no evidence that there are any STW efforts going on in Idaho, and we don't anticipate that there will be. A couple of local partnership councils have had some limited activity, but there is no indication of any public interest in their continuation."

His words were music to the ears of Idaho Eagle Forum members and education activists who have worked tirelessly to bury the program. "STW has been hanging on by a thread for three years," says pro-family leader Dani Hansen. "Our six STW partnerships, only two of which were very active, have turned down federal dollars and informed the Idaho Board of Education that they are happy with their individualized, locally-controlled programs."

Apparently, those partnerships did little to foster the type of program envisioned by STW proponents. Their "Certificates of Employability" had little to do

with federal SCANS competencies and more to do with whether or not students could read, spell, punctuate, and perform accurate math computations. They created optional "career pathways" that focused on helping students go to college rather than simply getting a job.



Dani Hansen

According to Dani Hansen, the turning point in the battle came when the partnerships told the state board that they had no interest in making their individualized Certificates of Employability transferable. "In other words," she notes, "they had no desire to participate in a uniform, state-controlled program."

Four years ago, Mrs. Hansen reviewed Idaho's STW grant proposal and found that the regulations did not allow for local control as promised. "We immediately began traveling around the state holding two or three meetings per day with citizens in various communities. We wanted them to understand what STW would really mean for their children and businesses."

"We publicized the criteria for work-based learning and school-based learning, and the people in the communities said 'we're not doing that,'" she relates. "We exposed the mandates for tracking students. We informed businesses about the liability they would face while students were actually present in their buildings."

Mrs. Hansen and her fellow activists posed questions including:

◆ If your business becomes a state-funded classroom, who will eventually own your business?

◆ If students damage your equipment and the school district pays to replace it, who owns your equipment?

◆ If a student is using a half-million dollar X-ray machine at a hospital, is it considered curricular material? If so, will the taxpayers have to pay for it? (Under Idaho's STW plan, curricular materials were defined as "anything students use.")

Hansen and company next defeated the bill that changed Idaho's education code to define equipment such as X-ray machines as "curricular materials." They demanded that clear definitions be given for new terms in the code. The code revisions took the muscle out of STW's rules and regulations.

The citizen activists also constantly reminded decisionmakers of their promise of local control. "We got local control," Mrs. Hansen notes, "and our communities decided that they could live without STW and surely don't want to pay for it."

Some grant money from the STW program actually accomplished good things in Idaho. "Schools received a lot of computers," Mrs. Hansen says. "A career access center was established that did not involve data collection but did allow students to interact directly with the state's Department of Employment Security. Kids were able to search for jobs on their own terms for their own purposes."

Funding for Idaho STW has now expired. "In the end, people just got bored with the concept," explains Mrs. Hansen. "Local business owners said they didn't like it or need it."

EDUCATION BRIEFS

States fail to meet 1989 education goals set by Governors. None of the eight goals set at the nation's first Governors' summit on education 10 years ago have been met, despite the year 2000 deadline. Significant numbers of students have failed to achieve competency in core subjects, graduation rates and teacher training have not increased, schools are not safer, and parents are no more involved in education than they were a decade ago.

States move to soften new testing standards. Following widespread student failure on new "high stakes" reading and math tests, some states are responding to pressure and retreating from their recently-adopted standards. Arizona's Board of Education will revisit and possibly revise a new 10th-grade math test which only one in 10 students passed last year. New York, Massachusetts and California have relaxed or delayed new standards, and Wisconsin has withdrawn a test that every student would have been required to pass in order to graduate from high school.

Maryland communities are forbidden to name their own schools. Citizens in Montgomery County must instead choose from an approved list because too many "dead white males" have been accorded the honor. The list includes locals Thomas Henry Andrews Jr., a murdered cab driver, union leader Vincent T. Foo, janitor Lee Jordan, and the left-wing author James A. Michener. Some citizens blame the Clinton Administration's policies on "diversity" for fostering the notion that too many public schools have been named after America's founding fathers.

A Virginia 6th grader was punished for refusing to read a curse word in class. The 12-year-old skipped over the word "damn" because she said it violated her Christian beliefs. The teacher sent her to the principal, who ordered her to say the word aloud or face suspension for the remainder of the day. The Rutherford Institute has demanded that the school apologize in writing to the student and reprimand the teacher and principal.

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Phonics (Continued from page 1)

struction. "Sight" words in the books must have been previously introduced, preferably no more than one per day.

According to her admirers, no teacher could be more dedicated to teaching phonics than Pam Barret. In his column in *The Californian* newspaper of Dec. 4, former teacher and principal Gene Vitamanti wrote: "Based on my 34 years in education, I can say that Pam Barret is truly one of the finest teachers I have ever seen. Phonics is her cornerstone and she refuses to accept any student not reading at least to grade level, but she always aims higher and most of her kids achieve at a higher level." He noted that she is a strong believer in the basics and that, "In addition to the three Rs, she emphasizes music, art, manners, fun, and morality."



Pam Barret pledges allegiance with her class of high achievers.

A mother of five children of her own, Pam says her greatest satisfaction comes from knowing that students leave her classroom able to read. "Many schools

still demonstrate the mentality that first graders can't start learning to read until the second semester," she says. "So much time is lost, and it's such a disservice to the children, some of whom may need lots of practice with sounds and blends before they really learn them."

She adds: "We're fortunate that at Tovashal, the parents, the administrators, led by our principal, Chuck Jones, and assistant principal, Terry Olson, and the faculty, including the wonderful first-grade teachers I work with, Lucy Blumenshine, Jenelle Eady, Jean Faulk, Cindy Dimler, and Karen Harris, are absolutely committed to literacy."



Education World Loses Phonics Champion

CAMBRIDGE, MA — Supporters of the phonics method of reading instruction lost a champion last November with the death of reading expert Jeanne S. Chall, who died of heart failure at age 78.

Born in Poland, Dr. Chall's family emigrated to the United States when she was seven. She attended City College of New York, then earned both her master's degree and Ph.D. from Ohio State University, where she also taught. She later joined the faculty at Harvard's Graduate School of Education where she was a professor for 26 years until her retirement in 1991. Dr. Chall spent her entire academic life investigating how children learn to read.

As a result of her studies, she became a tireless proponent of phonics and a vigorous opponent of Whole Language. According to the *New York Times* (12-12-99), she attacked the view of reading specialists during the 1970s who claimed that, if children were given difficult reading assignments, "they would become frustrated and give up trying to master

[them]." She supported challenging reading primers that teach children to decode words by learning the sounds of the alphabet.

In 1967, Harcourt Brace published Dr. Chall's notable work, *Learning to Read: The Great Debate*, which is still considered the "definitive analysis of reading research." The book was the result of a three-year research project she conducted while at City College. She analyzed nearly 70 studies comparing various beginning reading approaches and methods. She also personally observed how reading was taught in classrooms across the U.S. and in the United Kingdom and talked with teachers and administrators.

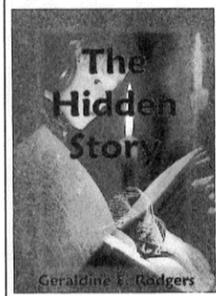
Learning to Read is a synopsis of the facts Chall uncovered, along with her analysis of the research that existed at the time. She concluded that "a code-emphasis method," i.e., "one that emphasizes learning the printed code for the spoken language" (phonics), is the better method for beginning reading.

Book of the Month



The Hidden Story, Geraldine E. Rodgers, B.A., M.S., 1st Books, 1998, 628 pps., \$28.05

Geraldine Rodgers packs 20 years of comprehensive research along with 23 years of elementary school teaching experience into this fascinating and complex history of reading instruction. She even visits the worlds of the ancient Greeks and Etruscans while tracing the history of what she terms "the teaching of psycholinguistic guessing" (sight reading) to beginning readers, which "manifestly results in lifelong disability." She writes that the failure of modern "Whole Language" instruction has successfully been kept hidden since



1930 when oral tests for accuracy in reading and spelling were banished from most classrooms and replaced with "silent reading" tests on which students employ "intelligent guessing."

Rodgers began her quest during the mid-1970s after becoming painfully aware of the extent of her 3rd grade students' reading disabilities. She took a sabbatical from teaching and embarked on a year-long journey during which she tested the oral reading skills of about 900 2nd graders in their own languages in the United States and Europe. She found two distinct types of readers (or mixtures of those types) based on whether the children were taught to read by "sound" (phonics) or by "meaning" (whole word context) in the first grade.

In 1978, she stumbled upon the fact that these two types of readers had been identified 75 years previously (in 1903) by German researcher Oskar Messmer. She spent the next 18 years investigating why such facts in the history of reading as Messmer's research have been buried.

She found that, while our present-day whole language instruction can be traced back to the 1870s and the teachings of "America's first experimental psychologist, William James," its roots actually predate James to the "Age of Enlightenment" in the 18th century.

Rodgers' painstaking research took her to the Library of Congress, the Harvard libraries, the British Library in London, the University of Chicago, and many other research centers. *The Hidden Story* is a compelling summary of her findings.

Available at Barnes & Noble, ISBN #1-58500-022-1, or 1st Books Online Library (disk or download), www.1stbooks.com, 205 N. College Ave., Bloomington, IN 47404.

FOCUS: Title I Not Making the Grade ^{A B C D} _{F ✓}

By Sam Blumenfeld

If any proof is needed that federal education programs don't work, and in fact make things worse, all one has to do is look at the sorry record that Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 has produced. Title I was supposed to provide "compensatory education" for the economically and socially deprived — the minorities and the poor, but mainly the minority poor. Its goal was to help the inner-city poor reach the same academic level of achievement as those living in affluent suburbs.

After an expenditure of over \$118 billion during the last 30 years, the achievement gap between those who were supposed to be helped by Title I and everyone else is as great as ever. Why? Because Title I never addressed the problem of faulty reading instruction in the schools. Why? Because if children were taught to read by intensive, systematic phonics, there would be no need for Title I!

Believe it or not, most of the \$118 billion was used to hire more than 50,000 local Title I directors, plus thousands of school aides and teacher assistants. In fact, more than 132,000 classroom positions have been paid for by the billions put into the program. This is an example of how throwing money at a problem produces even more failure, because now 132,000 jobs are at stake, and the only way to keep those jobs alive is to keep producing enough learning disabled students to fill the Title I classrooms, and

If children were taught to read by intensive, systematic phonics, there would be no need for Title I!

whole language instruction does the job.

Earlier this year the *Boston Globe* interviewed Jerome T. Murphy, dean of Harvard University's Graduate School of Education, who helped write Title I legislation in 1965. In response to Title I's failure, he said, "It's a classic situation where yesterday's reform becomes today's obstacle." But we doubt that Dean Murphy would want to get government out of the education reform business. The report states that Title I "was created to help students overcome inherent barriers that poverty poses to academic achievement."

Millions of impoverished people were able to achieve academic excellence in this country throughout our history. Marva Collins, with her private school in Chicago, has proven that there are no inherent barriers to academic achievement in poverty. In fact, poverty is a strong incentive to achieve academically, since such achievement is the surest road out of poverty.

Of course, the Congress has no intention of eliminating Title I or the rest of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Once a federal river of cash flow has been opened for the education establishment, the latter has enough clout not only to keep it open, but to increase its flow. This was seen last [October] when the House voted 358-67 not only to renew Title I, but to increase the funding from \$7.7 billion last year to nearly \$10 billion.

The government should get out of the education business, for it has created a stranglehold monopoly that gives the American people the worst possible education at the highest possible price. Over \$118 billion has been squandered on so-called compensatory education that has been a total bust as education.

In an attempt to put a conservative spin on the \$10 billion authorized for Title I, House Majority Leader Dick Arme proposed that \$100 million of that

\$10,000 million be used to fund vouchers that students in failing schools could use to attend private schools. That amendment was defeated by 257 to 166, with 52 Republicans joining 204 Democrats and one Independent in opposing vouchers. Not that conservatives necessarily think that government vouchers are a good idea.



Sam Blumenfeld

The opposition to vouchers by conservatives is, however, for different reasons than given by those who opposed the Arme amendment. Conservatives are concerned that government vouchers would simply bring government control into the private sector, and they want to get government out of education, not more deeply into it.

Conservatives in Congress are forced by political pressures to do the wrong thing. If conservatives in Congress cannot vote to get the government out of the education business, then they have no business calling themselves conservatives. Or maybe we are using the wrong terms. Maybe to them "conservative" means conserving the present governmental status quo. What we need in Congress are constitutional radicals who want our government to return to basic constitutional principles. The simple truth is that you are a radical if you want your government to adhere to the Constitution of the United States.

The word radical comes from the Latin word "radix," meaning roots. My Webster's *New World Dictionary*, Third College Edition, 1988, gives the first definition of radical as "of or from the root

or roots; going to the foundation or source of something; fundamental; basic." That's not what our so-called conservative Congressmen are about. There are among them, undoubtedly, a few who truly want the government to adhere to Constitutional principles. They are true radicals. But they are a small number, and their "moderate" colleagues can always side with socialist Democrats to frustrate radical Republicans.

It is obvious that the politically correct who control vocabulary change have corrupted our language to such an extent that we really cannot use words properly without being misunderstood. This is particularly the case in politics. Today's liberals are really socialists. Today's moderates are liberals. Today's conservatives are really statisticians who want to maintain the present status quo. If you are a right-wing radical, or Constitutional fundamentalist, you are called an extremist. And the American people are kept in check more by the use of words than by the use of force.

Meanwhile, the Senate is planning to renew the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in a single bill [in 2000], undoubtedly with more money for Title I. We hear that a new federal preschool program is also in the works. Wait till the federal government gets its molesting hands on the preschoolers. You can be sure that the 10 million students now in Title I programs will be doubled.

Samuel L. Blumenfeld is the author of eight books on education, including "NEA: Trojan Horse in American Education," "Is Public Education Necessary?" "The Whole-Language/OBE Fraud," and "Homeschooling: A Parents Guide to Teaching Children." Call 208/322-4440 or visit Amazon.com. This commentary originally appeared on the web site of Internet news source WorldNetDaily, Oct. 27, 1999.

Deliberately Dumbing Us Down

By Sam Blumenfeld

Charlotte Thomson Iserbyt's new book, *The Deliberate Dumbing Down of America*, is one of the most important publishing events in the annals of American education in the last hundred years.

Iserbyt has done what no one else wanted or could do. She has put together the most formidable and practical compilation of documentation describing the well-planned "deliberate dumbing down" of American children by their education system. Anyone who has had any lingering hope that what the educators have been doing is a result of error, accident, or stupidity will be shocked by the way American social engineers have systematically gone about destroying the intellect of millions of American children for the purpose of leading the American people into a socialist world government controlled by behavioral and social scientists.

Iserbyt decided to compile this book because, as a "resister" to what is going on in American education, she was constantly told that she was taking things out of context. The book, she writes, "was put together primarily to satisfy my own need to see the various components which led to the dumbing down of the United States of America assembled in chronological order — in writing. Even I, who had observed these weird activities taking place at all levels of government, was reluctant to accept a malicious intent behind each individual, chronological activity or innovation, unless I could connect it with other, similar activities taking place at other times."

And that is what this book does. It connects educators, social engineers, planners, government grants, federal and state agencies, billion-dollar foundations, think tanks, universities, research

projects, policy organizations, etc., showing how they have worked together to advance an agenda that will change America from a free republic to a socialist state.

What is so mind boggling is that all of this is being financed by the American people themselves through their own taxes!

One of the interesting insights revealed by these documents is how the social engineers use a deliberately created education "crisis" to move their agenda forward by offering radical reforms that are sold to the public as fixing the crisis — which they never do. The new reforms simply set the stage for the next crisis, which provides the pretext for the next move forward. This is the dialectical process at work, a process our behavioral engineers have learned to use very effectively. Its success depends on the ability of the "change agents" to continually deceive the public, which tends

to believe any lie the experts tell them.

It was during Iserbyt's tenure in the Department of Education in Washington, D.C., where she had access to the grant proposals from change agents, that she came to the conclusion that what was happening in American education was the result of a concerted effort on the part of numerous individuals and organizations — a globalist elite — to bring about permanent changes in America's body politic.

Therefore, getting this book into the hands of thousands of Americans ought to be a major project for lovers of liberty in the year 2000. It will do more to defeat the change agents than anything else I can think of.

(This review is excerpted from worldnetdaily.com, 12-02-99. Also see *Education Reporter*, Nov. 1999.) To order *The Deliberate Dumbing Down of America*, contact 3D Research Company, 207/442-0543, fax 207/442-0551.

Reading (Continued from page 1)

teachers to maintain high literacy levels among students in the middle and high school grades by continuing to develop vocabulary and comprehension, increasing the amount of students' reading, and connecting reading with writing.

Effective Intervention

Often cited as the most noteworthy aspect of the ARI is its insistence on effective intervention instruction. Research suggests that up to 40% of students may experience some level of difficulty in learning to read and that highly specialized instruction combining lessons in phonemic awareness, explicit phonics instruction, and direct, integrated instruction in text reading and comprehension is needed. Early intervention by highly skilled teachers accelerates learning and has proven the most powerful remedy.

Solutions & Goals

Having designed ARI's extensive teacher training program to show teachers how to achieve high levels of literacy for all their students, the Alabama Reading Panel serves as a grassroots support group for the program. During the 1998-99 school year, 16 schools, called Literacy Demonstration Sites, became the first to implement the program. They were selected from a pool of applicants that agreed to: (1) set 100% literacy as a goal; (2) attend the required 10-day training program; (3) adjust reading instruction accordingly; (4) model effective reading instruction for other schools; and, (5) be evaluated by an outside evaluator.

The program also involves teachers' colleges as trainers and mentors to the schools and provides advanced study to teacher educators to ensure future success. Evaluations are conducted at all levels to guide continuous improvement.

ARI's goals include statewide expansion over a four-year period. Teacher training was conducted for the initial 16 sites in the summer of 1998 in prepara-

tion for an expansion to 80 schools in 1999, and training will continue each summer until all Alabama's schools serve as Literacy Demonstration Sites. Expectations are for 240 schools to be included in 2000-2001, 720 schools in 2001-2002, with all schools involved by 2002-2003.

Early Successes

ARI's first two training efforts received contributions in the amount of \$650,000 from businesses, professional organizations, and government. Last year, the state legislature awarded \$6 million to train faculty from the 80 schools involved in the program this year. "We are now preparing to ask for \$10 million to include another 240 schools next year," explains Joan Kendall, a member of the



Joan Kendall

ARI's Steering Committee and education chairman for Alabama Eagle Forum.

The first training academy received rave reviews from the 600 teachers who took the instruction. ARI schools are already reporting that more students are reading at grade level and that struggling readers are improving. Substantial drops in discipline referrals have accompanied these successes.

ARI has received support from all segments of Alabama's education community, as well as from the media and the general public. It has also garnered national attention and received mention in the National Education Association's 1999 Winter Journal, *Teaching and Change*.

"We know that the willingness of the faculties at the initial 16 sites to pull together and ensure that each of their students is able to read grade-level materials exists in other Alabama schools as well," says Joan Kendall. "This gives us hope that our vision of 100% literacy can become a reality. The ARI is clearly the most positive and promising effort to happen in Alabama for a long time, and we are very excited about it."

STW Harms Students, Businesses

ST. CLOUD, MN — A small manufacturing firm has been fined nearly \$59,000 for federal child labor law violations which came to light after a 17-year-old student operating a power driven pallet-notching machine lost his arm last April. The boy was one of six students working at the company as part of the state's School-to-Work program. Federal child labor laws prohibit employees younger than 18 from operating power-driven woodworking equipment.

The Wage and Hour Division of the U.S. Department of Labor notified the firm of the penalty on Jan. 10, and OSHA levied an additional fine of \$7,000. The business owner claims he did not know the boy was underage, and says the school should have checked into the type of work the students were doing. He said the tragedy and resulting fines will force his small company out of business.

Notes the Maple River Education

Coalition of Minnesota (MrEdCo): "Students who should be in school learning history, geography, literature and composition are employed in businesses across Minnesota during school hours.

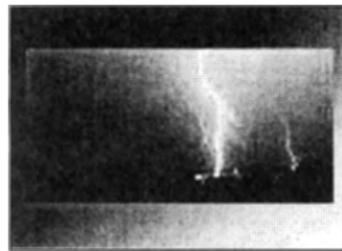
"In this redefined system, students are being trained in specific skills for jobs. This young man lost his arm. All the kids have lost their opportunity for 12 years of liberal arts education that previous generations had the opportunity to receive."

The coalition believes that knowledge prepares students for a lifetime of roles and responsibilities, but that STW "robs them of their education, which is foundational to a free, self-governing people."

Correction . . . The December 1999 *Education Reporter* published Jeremiah Films' web site extension as .com (Video Review, page 2). The correct web address is: www.exodus2000.org — Ed.

Schools Zapped by Advertising

ZapMe! Corp. brings commercials into the classroom via computer



For Channel One-weary parents, another in-school marketing program has arrived, courtesy of the ZapMe! Corp.

ZapMe! will loan 15 computers and other accessories free of charge to schools along with software called "Netspace" that allows students to visit up to 10,000 ZapMe!-approved Internet web sites. The software enables students to have personal email addresses at school and possibly even at home, so they can send messages to classmates, teachers, and anyone else who has an email address.

What's the catch? Schools must promise to have a student sitting at every computer for at least four hours of every school day to provide an audience for ZapMe!'s advertisements. The ads run constantly, taking up a third of the computer screen, and change frequently to attract students' attention. With a click of the mouse, the ads can be enlarged, and many become full-blown video commercials.

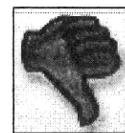
Some web sites accessible on ZapMe!'s "Netspace" contain lists of soft-

core pornographic movies and advertisements for violent video games. The software includes more than 100 computer games kids can play during school time and reportedly allows for the monitoring of students' browsing habits as they surf the net.

"The ZapMe! Corp. openly admits that they will track children and compile information about their web-browsing habits to better target the advertising on the computer screens," contends Jim Metrock, president of Obligation Inc., a pro-family organization that opposes in-school advertising. "Marketers can use the information collected to target their products directly to students."

Metrock says schools must agree to send commercial information home with students three times a year as part of ZapMe!'s home marketing program. "This is exploitation that surpasses our friends at Channel One," he notes, "but Channel One's success allowed this California company to even try this concept. Believe me, it is not a joke."

Examples of Outrageous Classroom Assignments



In December, we began a series on outrageous classroom assignments that are routinely being given to schoolchildren. Following is our example for February.

A high school English teacher in Pocola, Oklahoma, asked her students to write a poem about a hypothetical school shooting. She instructed the students to imagine the shooting and then write poems from different points of view. One of her students, a 16-year-old boy, wrote a four-line poem from the viewpoint of the shooter. He was subsequently threatened with suspension and jail.

His mother was appalled at the assignment and has lodged a complaint with the Pocola Board of Education. She told the

Tulsa World newspaper (12-16-99) that she had always told her children "to do what the teachers ask you to do." She admitted regretting that statement. "Why would we have an assignment to put this [idea] in someone's head?" she asked.

The high school is investigating the assignment. Principal Steve McGinnis promised in the *Tulsa World* article that, "There will be an end to it."

Send us your stories of ridiculous or outrageous classroom assignments given to children in grades K-12. We'll try to print at least one per month. Send your examples to "Outrageous Assignments," *Education Reporter*, 7800 Bonhomme, St. Louis, MO 63105, or email education@eagleforum.org

Candy & Trinkets for Good Grades, Behavior

Time was when rewards for academic achievement and good conduct included high grades, gold stars, smiley face stickers, and extra credit. Today, many teachers are supplementing or even replacing these with incentives such as candy, baked goods, and trinkets. They say times have changed and that students have shorter attention spans due to family and societal problems. These teachers point out that they are under considerable pressure from states, school districts, and parents to improve student performance.

Corporations eager to market their wares to schoolchildren are also getting into the act. Pizza Hut's "Book It!" program rewards kids with a free pizza for reading a certain number of books. McDonald's distributes photo ID cards redeemable for French fries and other goodies to students with good grades

and behavior.

Some critics say these extracurricular rewards can turn classrooms into contests, where the prize, not the learning, is the object. Others contend that such enticements reinstate the flawed philosophy of researcher B.F. Skinner, who proved how behavior can be learned by offering food rewards to laboratory animals. This Skinnerian operant conditioning, they say, unfairly manipulates children and turns them into robots.

Stanford University psychology professor Mark Lepper studied the effects of giving children rewards for performing certain activities and found that it leads them to concentrate less on learning and focus more on the prize. He and his colleagues say students actually perform worse in the long run when given tangible or edible rewards.