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Parents Win 'Math War' Maryland school district loses grant to expand controversial programs

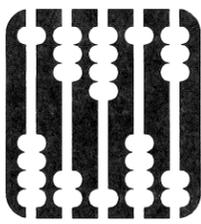
MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MD — In December, the Montgomery County School District lost its bid for a \$6 million grant from the federal government to expand "fuzzy" math programs that were vigorously opposed by parents and some educators. The controversy pitted parents against school officials, many of whom favored the curricula.

School Superintendent Jerry Weast announced the loss of the grant during a press conference on the district's budget, and the embattled programs are expected to disappear next fall. Weast has also announced that the school district will pilot the use of math textbooks from Singapore during the 2000-2001 school year, which reportedly emphasize "rigorous content" and "traditional math instruction."

The federal grant would have expanded three pilot programs backed by the National Science Foundation (NSF), including the controversial "Connected Math Project" (CMP). John Hoven, co-president of the Gifted and Talented Association of Montgomery County and a critic of the NSF programs, told the *Journal* newspaper: "Connected Mathematics is not the kind of program that fits with the kind of superintendent [Weast] is. He likes programs that work and are developed in consensus with the community."

CMP and other "fuzzy" math programs have come under fire from parents

across the country. Last August, parents in Plano, Texas filed a lawsuit against their school district over Connected Math, accusing the district of failing to provide their children with basic math instruction.



In Illinois, parents have clashed with schools over "Chicago Math," produced by the University of Chicago Mathematics Project (UCMP), complaining that the curriculum neglects basic computation. (See *Education Reporter*, October 1999.)

Education Department Endorsements

On Oct. 6, 1999, the U.S. Department of Education (E.D.) officially endorsed CMP and Chicago Math as "exemplary" along with eight similar K-12 math programs. (See list, page 4.) The department urged local school districts to "seriously consider" adopting one of these programs if they had not already done so.

The recommended programs were approved by an "expert" panel commissioned by the E.D. to pinpoint "exemplary" and "promising" school curricula. Critics say, however, that most of the panel's "field reviewers" — those making the initial program recommendations — were teachers, not math experts, and that the panel making the final decisions did not include "active research mathematicians."

Nonetheless, the E.D. gave all 10 programs its stamp of approval. Education Secretary Richard Riley noted that they conform to the standards adopted in 1989 (See *Math*, page 2)

Texas School Board Wins Reading Textbook Battle Publishers include 80% 'decodable' text

AUSTIN, TX — The Texas State Board of Education (SBOE) has succeeded in producing a national first for the state — all 1st grade reading programs placed on its "conforming list" for local adoption this year exceed the state-mandated 80% decodability, that is, at least 80% of the text uses letters and sounds that have already been taught.

Texas law now requires that every 1st grade teacher in every school district be trained in phonics instruction, both decodability and literature. State Board Member and Vice Chairman Geraldine Miller, herself a trained reading specialist who works with dyslexic students, will personally supervise the Teacher Training Academies to be held this summer at the University of Texas to ensure that the program is not watered down.

Background

In 1996, 40 reading experts from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and other Massachusetts universities jointly signed a letter blaming the whole language reading program for America's "serious decline in reading achievement." They argued that a mastery of phonics is fundamental to reading. The Texas SBOE took up the experts' challenge to return phonics-based reading programs to all K-3 classrooms.

"Due to the hard work and diligence of our elected school board, Texas was first to actually prescribe a definite percentage of decodable text," says former educator-turned-researcher Marilyn Prokup. "The board had plenty of support from pro-family groups, with Texas Eagle Forum at the forefront, and from teachers who were demanding decodability."



Marilyn Prokup

Prokup notes that while the SBOE in its Nov. 5 meeting required 80% decodable selections in order to place books on the "conforming" (to standards) list for 1st grade readers, the good news is that all five "conforming" programs that have been approved for Texas schools this year will exceed that percentage. The *Open Court* (SRA/McGraw Hill 2000) textbooks scheduled to come off the press in June 2000 will contain more than 95% decodable selections.

Rocky Road for Textbooks

The road to 80% decodable texts was rocky for the SBOE and for textbook publishers. According to Neal Frey of the Mel Gablers' Educational Research Analysts in Longview, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) initially told major publishers that the rules required only 51%

(See *Textbooks*, page 4)

Crying Fowl: Tale of 'Missing Link' Embarrasses Scientists

Last year, the National Geographic Society came across what it believed was a major scientific discovery — the fossil of a birdlike creature with the tail of a meat-eating dinosaur. Dubbed "archaeoraptor," the fossil was smuggled from the remote Liaoning Province of China to the United States, where, according to an article in *USA Today* (2-01-00), it was originally purchased by an anonymous collector at a gem show in Arizona.

Evolutionists are divided in their opinions of how modern birds evolved. One theory holds that birds evolved from dinosaurs, a notion popularized by the blockbuster Hollywood film *Jurassic Park*. The theory held by many ornithologists, however, is that birds evolved independently of dinosaurs, though both had "a common ancestor that lived in trees."

In its zeal to find the "missing link"

between birds and dinosaurs, the National Geographic Society jumped on the "discovery" of "archaeoraptor." Without obtaining independent scientific corroboration that the find was genuine, Geographic guarded its secret until the fossil was "unveiled" last October. An article in the November *National Geographic* magazine titled "Feathers for T-Rex?" promoted archaeoraptor as the "missing link" between dinosaurs and birds.

The fossil was displayed at the National Geographic Society's Explorers Hall in Washington, DC, and viewed by 110,000 visitors from October through January, most of them schoolchildren. *USA Today* noted that, "Whether a deliberate fake or an honest mistake, [this] tale of a tail has children believing in feath-

ered dinosaurs that never existed"

Meanwhile, scientists including Storrs Olson, the curator of birds at the Smithsonian Institute's National Museum of Natural History, tried to persuade Geographic that the fossil could be a fake. Olson's warning fell on deaf ears, primarily because of his contrary beliefs about the evolution of birds.

The hoax was finally uncovered when Geographic circulated clear pictures of the fossil at a meeting of the Society of Vertebrate Paleontology. Scientists for the first time got a good look at the fossil material. What they saw was a composite; an alleged 120-million year old fossil with a tail that had been attached shortly before its departure from China.

Chinese paleontologist Xing Xu, a



member of Geographic's scientific team, discovered in December that the dinosaur fossil was a composite, but the magazine story had already been published. Critics told *USA Today* that the team was so convinced of the fossil's importance that it "jumped the gun" with the *National Geographic* article.

USA Today also reported that Chinese scientists have discovered a second embarrassing forgery. An enterprising Chinese farmer added a tail to the fossil of a flying pterosaur. That forgery managed to fool a group of scientists, along with the editors of the British journal *Nature*. Last April, *Nature* published a paper about the find, which came from the same fossil area as archaeoraptor. The farmer added the tail from his "yard collection" before selling the fossil to a Chinese museum.



EDUCATION BRIEFS

Schools are using students to promote political causes. Last month, children at two northern Virginia middle schools brought home fliers decrying school voucher legislation pending before state lawmakers. The fliers warned that "to provide school vouchers and tuition tax credits to private and parochial school parents" would "divert much-needed funding away from public schools." The group "People for the American Way" was listed as the contact for additional information, and one of the fliers was printed on PTA letterhead. Virginia lawmakers have subsequently enacted legislation requiring that information sent home with students about political candidates or issues remain neutral. Last spring, schoolchildren in Post Falls, ID were given fliers printed by the PTO (Parent/Teacher Organization) in support of the re-election of two school board members who were sympathetic to their agenda. An assistant superintendent and two principals were reprimanded in that incident for violating the state's ethics code.

Investigators say the cause of a mysterious illness at a Tennessee school was hysteria. The illness closed the school for two weeks in 1998, and more than 170 students, teachers and administrators sought emergency treatment costing nearly \$100,000. The *New England Journal of Medicine* reported that, after a thorough investigation ruled out environmental and epidemiological causes, investigators concluded that mass hysteria (or psychogenic illness) may have been to blame in the majority of the cases.

More colleges are recruiting homeschooled students. Those disclosing that they are homeschooled are among the highest scorers on the SAT and ACT tests, and homeschooled students consistently surpass both their public and private school counterparts in academic achievement. Recent data also show that home schoolers defy the stereotypes. Most have family incomes lower than the median range of \$50,000- \$60,000, and blacks and Hispanics make up about 8% of the nation's nearly 1.5 million homeschooled students.

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Math (Continued from page 1)

by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM). "These are the prevailing standards in the country," he said. The NCTM standards have been widely criticized as shortchanging traditional arithmetic skills while heavily promoting the use of calculators.

Mathematicians Renounce Choices

Within six weeks of the E.D.'s announcement, more than 200 mathematicians, physicians and scholars banded together to denounce the government-anointed curricula for failing to teach basic skills. The group wrote an open letter to Secretary Riley, signed by each member, decrying the programs and asking the department to reconsider its choices. The group published the letter as a full-page ad in the Nov. 18 *Washington Post*. (The document is available on the Internet at <http://www.mathematicallycorrect.com/riley.htm>)

Despite the prestige of the letter's authors and signers, including four Nobel Laureates and two winners of the Fields Medal (a top mathematics honor), the E.D. has refused to back away from its endorsements.

Media Reaction

A *Wall Street Journal* commentary (1-04-00) called the recommended curricula "horrifyingly short on basics," citing the program, Mathland, as an example. "Mathland does not teach standard arithmetic operations," noted the *Journal*. "No carrying and borrowing at the blackboard here. Instead, children are supposed to meet in small groups and *invent* their own ways to add, subtract, multiply and divide. This detour is necessary, the handbook informs, to spare youngsters the awful subjugation of teacher-imposed rules."

The *Journal* also criticized CMP, observing that, "The division of fractions, an immutable prerequisite for algebra, is absent from its middle-school curriculum."

The commentary included a quote from David Klein of California State University at Northridge, one of the co-authors of the *Washington Post* letter, who said: "In shutting the door to algebra, Connected Math also closes doors to careers in engineering and science for its graduates."

A Dec. 13, 1999 editorial in *The Weekly Standard* described a review exercise in one of CMP's 7th grade units that gives incorrect answers to a percentage

problem involving basic algebra and arithmetic. "Both answers are wrong by a wide mark," noted the *Standard* — "deeply, essentially wrong." (See box below.)

The editorial accused CMP of exhibiting "outright hostility towards the precision, coherence, and content of mathematics as an academic discipline worthy of study in its own right." The editors further lamented that classic math topics are "investigated in CMP booklets but never explicitly defined as such, and the standard algorithms they involve are never introduced."

The editorial suggested that Congress abolish the "expert panel system," which was created by law, calling it "self-evidently untrustworthy and dangerous."

"The [Education] Department's math curricula endorsements are the first ill fruit of this system," observed the *Standard*. "Before the damage spreads to other disciplines, Congress can do something simple and overdue . . . abolish it."

Congressional Hearings

Early this year, the House Education and the Workforce Committee heard from parents, students and educators who have first-hand experience with the E.D.-recommended math programs. Witnesses complained about low test scores and reduced student performance.

A student told the committee that flawed K-12 math instruction prevented her from doing well in college math courses, a claim supported by Stanford University mathematician James Milgram, one of the authors of the open letter. He testified that, in California, where many of the programs are in place, the number of college freshmen requiring remedial math courses has more than doubled in the past 10 years. In 1989, he noted, 23% of freshmen needed remedial help in math. By 1999, the figure had risen to 55%.

Education Department deputy Kent McGuire defended the math programs and the panel that recommended them. "We should respect the members of the panel and applaud their good-faith efforts," he said.

One parent's testimony summed up the feelings of many who have battled fuzzy math in their children's schools for years: "If medical doctors experimented with our kids in the same fashion school districts do, they would be in jail." 🍌

What's the Problem?

In 1980, the town of Rio Rancho, located on a mesa outside Santa Fe, New Mexico, was destined for obscurity. But as a result of hard work by its city officials, it began adding manufacturing jobs at a fast rate. As a result, the city's population grew 239% from 1980 to 1990, making Rio Rancho the fastest-growing "small city" in the United States. The population of Rio Rancho in 1990 was 37,000.

A. What was the population of Rio Rancho in 1980?

B. If the same rate of population increase continues, what will the population be in the year 2000?

Reasoning that Rio Rancho's population was 2.39 times larger in 1990 than in 1980, and would be 2.39 times larger again in 2000, the CMP booklet goes on to recommend dividing 37,000 by 2.39 to arrive at the answer it lists for question A (15,481) and multiplying it by the same amount to get answer B (88,430). (*Connected Math Project*, 7th Grade Unit)

Both answers are wrong. As every schoolchild was once drilled to know, increasing a number by 239% produces another number not 2.39 but 3.39 times its size.

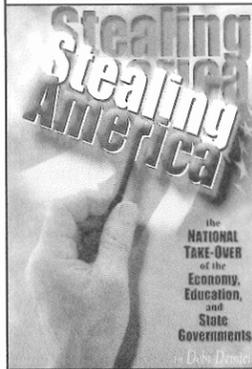
— From *The Weekly Standard*, Dec. 13, 1999

Book of the Month



Stealing America, the National Takeover of the Economy, Education and State Governments, Debi Demien, 1999, 80 pps., soft cover, \$10

At last! — someone has written a short, easy-to-read guide to the complex and deceptive patchwork of laws and programs that constitute School-to-Work (STW). After four years of exhaustive research, education advisor and former teacher Debi Demien has compiled a magazine-size book, *Stealing America*, which simplifies STW and clearly demonstrates how, under the guise of "education reform," this



massive restructuring effort is actually a national takeover of our economy, education system and state governments.

Demien describes STW's "Big Picture" as a "puzzle," which she breaks down into ten separate "pieces" or sections. For example, parents who wonder why academics have been "dumbed down" in favor of psychological manipulation and skills training will find out in section five. Legislators and school board members who are losing their voices in the battle for local control will understand why after reading section eight.

Stealing America's text is sprinkled with helpful visuals that illustrate the author's points, including flow charts, graphs, pie charts, newspaper articles, and official documents in the change agents' own words. First-person accounts from real people aid in explaining each of the 10 pieces of the STW puzzle and demonstrate how the system is already impacting the lives of our children.

While much of the evidence presented in the book is specific to the State of Missouri and local schools in St. Charles County, similar evidence could be produced in nearly every state. A section entitled "State of the States" provides brief notes about what is happening across the country.

Stealing America is an excellent resource for everyone in the battle to reclaim our schools and is a perfect tool for convincing skeptics because of its brevity, clarity and use of the framers' own words. These brief 80 pages paint an unsettling picture of American education and the future of our Republic at the dawn of the third millennium.

Send \$10 to Restoring America, 160 Fort Sumter Way, St. Charles, MO 63303-6172, fax 636/332-8730, email richardvieth@msn.com

FOCUS: Does the Route to Teaching Need a Fresh Start?

By Martin L. Gross

Prior to 1910, most American physicians either apprenticed or went directly from high school to medical college, a system that produced a large number of inferior doctors. That year, with financing from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, Abraham Flexner, a former teacher, published his study of medical education. He concluded that physicians were generally poorly selected and trained in unscientific "diploma mills."

As a result of Flexner's work, the states subsequently closed all undergraduate schools of medicine. They made the training of doctors a postgraduate course for the brightest college graduates, the system now in effect.

Today, we face the same dilemma in the selection and training of our public school teachers. Most teachers enter the profession directly after high school, going to one of the 1,300 schools and departments of education. After receiving a degree in education or its equivalent, they pass a simple licensing examination and are certified to teach in our schools.

This system is badly flawed. It replicates the unreformed selection-and-training method that once existed in medicine, and is at the core of many problems that now confront American public schools.

Most developed nations have advanced beyond that. They select better students as future teachers and train them in non-education colleges with a strong curriculum of knowledge, or "content" as educators call it. Germany, for example, requires that teachers first complete a regular four-year college without education courses before going on to postgraduate teacher training. Some American teachers do the same, but they make up only a relatively small minority of our K-12 teacher cadre.

What's wrong with our system of trainees — what the profession calls "pre-service teachers" — generally going directly from high schools to schools and colleges of education? Virtually everything.

The first problem is the selection procedure. Since education schools usually have lower admission standards than regular liberal arts and science colleges, they attract a weaker student body.

An Educational Testing Service study showed that those high school students who intended to become teachers scored near the bottom on the SAT college-entrance exam. They scored only 964 out of a possible 1600, while typical students scored 1016 and suburban children closer to 1050. A similar situation exists on the ACT admissions test.

But educators countered that these studies involved only students who in-

tended to become teachers. What about those who actually entered training?

That question was answered in Pennsylvania by the state's secretary of education, Eugene Hickok. He studied the high school grades of every teacher trainee in the state's 91 colleges. The result? The wo u l d - b e teachers had

scored only a C-plus average in high school, well below the norm, just before coming to their undergraduate schools of education. This is a clear demonstration of insufficient academic skill for such a demanding profession as teaching.

Many teachers are bright, and most are dedicated to their calling. But that does not gainsay the fact that as a group they lag behind their academic colleagues. On the Graduate Record Examinations taken by college seniors, educators score at the bottom of the eight graded professions.

The second problem is that once in an education school, trainees take a thin, eccentric curriculum. Thirty to 40 credits are devoted to learning "how" to teach, rather than "what" to teach. This is the stubborn sine qua non of the profession. The theory is that only by knowing the sociological and psychological basis of learning can we teach children, a concept that is increasingly shown to be false.

The education college curriculum stresses such courses as Childhood Development and Adolescent Behavior, and rests its professionalism on often unproven psychological theory rather than on advanced courses in content, whether English, history, science, or mathematics. In fact, the liberal arts and science requirements in schools of education are often not any more extensive than those of a two-year community college.

But what about the fact that a majority of our teachers now hold master's degrees in education? Unfortunately, that advanced study is also overwhelmingly weighted toward "how" to teach, with little actual academic content.

Surely, though, our middle and high school teachers who specialize take a curriculum worthy of our students. Hardly. In almost every state, teachers seeking specialty training — say in mathematics — take fewer credits in their specialty than do ordinary college students. In my state, Connecticut, for example, to earn a Bachelor of Science degree in mathematics at the state university, a student must complete 40 credits in math. But to train to be a high school math teacher, one need take only 30 credits. In Pennsylvania, the regular bachelor's program in mathematics requires that students pass integral and differential calculus. But those training to become math teachers are excused from these difficult calculus courses, studying

the simplistic History of Mathematics instead.

If the selection and training of teachers is poor, then how do private schools manage to get good teachers? Not by paying higher salaries, which good teachers, public and private, surely deserve. Private schools typically pay less than public schools. The answer is that, by law in virtually every state, private schools need not hire certified teachers. Nor do they usually want to.

Parochial and secular private schools generally hire whom they want as long as the teacher has a college degree. Choate Rosemary Hall, one of the nation's top secondary schools (Choate alumni include President John F. Kennedy), has over 100 faculty members with strong academic backgrounds, but only three are state-certified.

The education laws are plainly discriminatory against scholars. Many are forced to teach in private schools and community colleges, losing valuable talent for the public schools. In fact, our K-12 education system is topsy-turvy academically. A summa cum laude graduate of Yale in history, for example, cannot teach history in my public high school because he is not an education graduate. Supposedly, he or she does not know "how" to teach. Yet such scholars often teach successfully in private schools, proving the fallacy of that theorem.

Then why do we need undergraduate schools of education at all? The answer is that we do not.

Further proof comes in the form of a trend toward "alternative certification," in which college graduates without education backgrounds are invited to teach. In New Jersey, where a pioneer program was begun in the 1980s, graduates of regular colleges who want to teach can start teaching immediately, picking up methods as they progress. The program has spread to California and Texas, where alternatively certified teachers receive a short training course before they begin. According to state spokespeople, these teachers are often more mature and stay

on the job longer than do education school graduates. A New Jersey peer review showed that the state's basically "un-trained" alternative-certification teachers were on the whole superior to regularly certified teachers, coming from better colleges and with better grades.

There is little doubt that the present system of selecting and training public school teachers does not fit the need. It is probably the reason the American K-12 curriculum is so thin. Only one in five American high school graduates has studied trigonometry, physics, or geography, according to federal statistics. Only about half the students have taken chemistry or intermediate algebra.

It may also explain why on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) exams, 38% of 4th graders are not reading at grade level, and why a majority of high school seniors have never heard of Thomas Paine, Patrick Henry, the Great Society, the Marshall Plan, or know the meaning of the Emancipation Proclamation. Nor can they find Southeast Asia or the Mediterranean Sea on an unmarked map.

The strongest remedy for most of our K-12 problems is to close all undergraduate schools of education. We should instead select our teachers from a pool of superior non-education graduates of colleges of liberal arts and sciences. Practice teaching and some training in instructional methods should follow, with a de-emphasis on so-called educational psychology.

This would go a long way toward solving what some pessimists believe is the intractable dilemma shaped by our presently weak American public schools — schools that can, and must, be academically revived.

Martin L. Gross is an accomplished author and social scientist. His most recent work is The Conspiracy of Ignorance: The Failure of American Public Schools (Harper Collins) 1999, ISBN 06-019458-8. This article originally appeared in Education Week, Feb. 16, 2000, page 52. Reprinted by permission.



Martin Gross

What's wrong with our system of training teachers? Virtually everything!



Textbooks (Continued from page 1)

decodability. At its meeting last November, the SBOE disavowed that percentage and ordered publishers to raise to 80% the decodability level of their 1st grade readers for adoption in 2000.

"Demanding 80% decodability was gutsy as well as right," Frey says. "The heroic conservative members of the board, led by Geraldine Miller, were unanimous in backing the revisions."

The SBOE publicly broke ranks with the TEA, rejecting the claim that some publishers might not submit textbooks the next time around if TEA's requirements were overruled so late in the adoption process. "The board ignored the liberals' pretense that it lacked authority to set standards and defied bogus hints of a publishers' lawsuit," Frey states.

Early in the book-writing phase, publishers asked TEA what the percentage of decodable text should be for the 1st grade readers. "By law, the TEA should have consulted with the board," Frey explains. "Instead, the agency interpreted the standards and gave publishers the 51% figure on its own authority. The SBOE only learned of this shortly before members were to vote to approve the new programs."

While the issue of decodable text received all the media attention, textbook analysts at the Gablers say that comprehensiveness, intensiveness, and consistency of phonics instruction are also important. They ranked a total of eight 1st

grade readers, including the five "conforming programs" that have been approved for adoption in Texas. (See *Grade 1 Reading Programs* at right.)

Effects of Texas Initiative

Because Texas has the second-largest school system in the country with a \$90 million budget for K-3 English reading books, publishers were persuaded to meet its demand for the shift in decodability. "It's important that publishers who significantly improved their textbooks at the last minute find a market for them in order to keep the phonics instruction momentum going," Marilyn Prokup points out.

She adds: "Texas is very fortunate to have an elected state school board that does not simply rubberstamp whatever the 'educrats' dictate. As a result of the board's action, smaller school systems across the country now have the opportunity to avail themselves of good phonics-based reading instruction materials."

Texas is not the only state to mandate phonics. "California has been doing exceptional work with pilot programs funded by the Packard Foundation using the *Open Court* program," Mrs. Prokup explains. "Test scores rose dramatically when this program was implemented."

California's 2002 Language Arts Adoption law calls for 75% decodable texts, and phonics proponents say that the state should continue its very positive trend towards true systematic phonics instruction.

Grade 1 Reading Programs Approved for Adoption in Texas School Districts

(Programs include all improvements ordered by the State Board of Education. Rankings compiled by the Mel Gablers' Educational Research Analysts, P.O. Box 7518, Longview, TX, 75607-7518, phone 903/753-5993, fax 903/753-7788, email TxtbkRevws@aol.com Exhaustive documentation available at no charge.)

McGraw-Hill Reading (McGraw 2000)	Open Court Reading (SRA/McGraw 2000)	Collections (Harcourt 2000)	Scott Foresman Reading (Addison 2000)	Scholastic Literacy Place (Scholastic 2000)
Decodability:				
97%	89%	85%	81%	84%
Comprehensiveness:				
100% plus 29 additional sound-spellings	83% plus 9 additional sound-spellings	86% plus 6 additional sound-spellings	87% plus 7 additional sound-spellings	81% plus 5 additional sound-spellings
Intensiveness/Consistency:				
100%/A-	43%/B	37%/B-	44%/C	56%/D
Overall Rank:				
Best	Better	Better	Fair	Fair

Additional programs not approved for local Texas adoption but which were reviewed by Gablers include: *Sing, Spell, Read & Write* (International Learning 1998) with 99% decodability and an overall ranking of "Excellent," *Saxon Phonics* (Saxon) 1996 with 99% decodability and an overall ranking of "Good," and *Journeys* (SRA/McGraw 2000) with 100% decodability and an overall ranking of "Fair."

Examples of Outrageous Classroom Assignments



Since my now 11th-grade daughter was in 5th grade, she has been subjected to some form of depressing death education in our public schools. I have been fighting with the school district over this issue all these years and deprogramming her every day when she comes home.

For a "Writing Across the Curriculum" assignment, the "band" teacher at the junior high instructed the students to pretend one of their parents was dead and to write his or her eulogy. I am pleased to say that several brave students refused to do the assignment.

One of my daughter's English teachers brought poems for the students to read and discuss in class. Some were written by his acquaintances and most dealt with death. His favorite was a poem written by a former student about suicide. My daughter had just lost her grandmother at the time and left the classroom quite upset.

In October 1999, she was assigned the

William Cullen Bryant poem, "Thanatopsis" to analyze. Thanatology is the study or science of the experience of dying and bereavement.

When I saw her class notes I was beyond angry. Per the class discussion, she was to decide who the pallbearers would be at her funeral and describe how she would look in her shroud. I demanded a meeting with the school to arrange for an alternative assignment.

Last month, the high school brought in a "motivational" speaker. During a three-hour assembly, she talked about teens who have committed suicide, and read poems and stories about suicide and death.

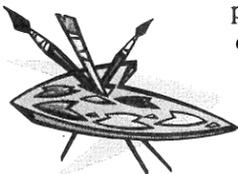
— C. Stribling, Fraser, Michigan

Send your examples of ridiculous classroom assignments to "Outrageous Assignments," *Education Reporter*, 7800 Bonhomme, St. Louis, MO 63105, or send an email to education@eagleforum.org

Mosaic 2000 No Work of Art

Questionnaire mimics law enforcement profiling

A new pilot program for identifying potentially violent students called Mosaic 2000 began testing at up to 30 schools nationwide in December. The program was designed by computer software company Gavin de Becker Inc., which has also developed "high stakes" assessments, and the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF).



Mosaic 2000 will be tested in grades 1-12, with high schools the main focus. While all the test sites have not officially been announced, at least one school in Reynoldsburg, Ohio, and two schools in Orange County, California are participating in the program. As many as 10 schools in Los Angeles County are expected to be included.

Mosaic 2000 programs are questionnaires that rate "potentially violent" students on a scale of one to 10. The questions are modeled on those used for years by law enforcement and government agencies to identify violence-prone individuals. The 40-question format includes: "Has the student made references or threats about committing suicide?" "Has the student experienced victimization by peers within the last 18 months?" "Has the student made threats to harm others?"

There is no scoring — the questionnaires are to be used by school officials to make decisions about counseling and

other corrective action. Educators in Reynoldsburg, Ohio, have stated that they are confident that Mosaic programs will protect the confidentiality of student records, and that the software "would not be connected to any central data program." (*New York Times*, 10-24-99)

Unlike the many privacy-invasive surveys routinely given to schoolchildren without their parents' consent, Mosaic 2000 questionnaires are filled out by teachers and school administrators. This has raised concerns among parents, who worry that their children will be unfairly stereotyped or labeled "harmful." The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) has also expressed misgivings. An ACLU spokesman complained to the Associated Press (12-15-99), "Shouldn't we be talking face-to-face with our kids about what's going on in their lives? The human element seems to be missing in this equation."

A federal firearms official told the *New York Times* that school officials need Mosaic 2000 to identify the "relatively good students with easy access to guns" who "may erupt because they feel victimized by bullies or by the school system." He claimed that gang members are easy to identify, and that "it's these other people that kind of surprise administrators, and these are the ones they really need to identify."

U.S. Department of Education Math Program Endorsements

Mathematics programs recommended for "exemplary" status:

- ◆ College Preparatory Mathematics Program (four-year secondary school program)
- ◆ Connected Mathematics Project (grades 6-8)
- ◆ Core-Plus Mathematics Project (integrated high school program)
- ◆ Interactive Mathematics Program (integrated high school curriculum)
- ◆ Pact Algebra (full-year, technology-based course, grades 7-12)

Mathematics programs recommended for "promising" status:

- ◆ Everyday Mathematics (K-6)
- ◆ Mathland (K-6)
- ◆ Middle School Mathematics Through Application Project
- ◆ Number Power (supplemental program for K-6)
- ◆ University of Chicago School Mathematics Project (curriculum for grades 7-12)