

EDUCATION REPORTER

NUMBER 171

THE NEWSPAPER OF EDUCATION RIGHTS

APRIL 2000

Promoting the Gay Agenda

School Alliances cause concern in Massachusetts

BOSTON, MA — A state-funded organization aligned with Gay/Straight Alliances in the schools, called the Boston Alliance of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgendered Youth (BAGLY), sponsored a program last year called "The Young Men's Health Project." The program offered incentives including cash, subway tokens and meals to teenage boys willing to visit its headquarters to discuss homosexual sex, and included an invitation for a "free, three-day, lakeside weekend retreat in New Hampshire with other boys up to 25 years who are 'attracted to or have sex with other men.'"



The *Massachusetts News* (Nov. 1999) published the project's advertising brochure, which promised attendees "a chance to really get to know yourself and other queer youth on a much deeper level." The editors charged that the brochure was distributed at meetings attended by high school students through the Gay/Straight Alliances (GSAs), which are described on the Massachusetts Department of Education's web site as "school-based support groups for gay, lesbian and heterosexual students."

A "Student Guide" for the GSAs refers to "community-based groups" (such as BAGLY) as "providing a safe and informal place where students can: (1) talk

about feelings and experiences; (2) learn about homophobia; (3) educate each other and the school community about sexual orientation issues; and (4) plan events such as dances, group games, attendance at political rallies and marches, and hosting speakers and guest artists.

Last spring, the *Massachusetts News* published a report about the American Psychological Association study that provoked nationwide outrage with its suggestion that pedophilia is harmless or even beneficial if "consensual." The report raised the question of why the schools aren't investigating the relationships between GSAs and community groups such as BAGLY to make sure children aren't being exploited. In response, GSA faculty advisors accused the paper of sending "hate mail" and held a public rally in the city of Newton that was attended by representatives of the Massachusetts Department of Education.

Instead of the public support organizers envisioned, many citizens turned out to claim they saw no "hate" in the report. One parent told officials: "I've seen what is happening with these gay/straight alliances . . . essentially, they take kids who are very confused . . . they're having trouble dealing with life, and these activists give them an identity. They say they're homosexual, and before long they're going to gay parties and proms."

BAGLY insists that its leaders are carefully screened and that youth safety is its primary concern, yet the organization has no lower age limit while its upper age limit is 22. (Another complaint (See *Agenda*, page 4)

Into the Mouths of Babes

The drugging of preschoolers is on the rise, study shows

CHICAGO, IL — The Feb. 23 *Journal of the American Medical Association* reported on new research by the University of Maryland which shows that the number of children ages 2-4 taking powerful stimulant and anti-depressant drugs increased 50% between 1991 and 1995. The greatest increase was in the use of stimulants (Ritalin) and the newer class of anti-depressants (Prozac, Zoloft and Paxil). Researchers believe this rise reflects an ongoing trend.

The study results have caused alarm among experts, who worry about the dearth of research on the effects of psychiatric medications on very young children. Many are concerned about the potential danger of these drugs to the developing brains of preschoolers. Dr. Joseph Coyle, chairman of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, commenting in the Feb. 23 *New York Times*, said: "These interventions are occurring at a critical time in brain development, and we don't know what the consequences are."

According to *U.S. News & World Report* (3-6-00), psychiatrists are especially alarmed at the increased number of prescriptions for older "tricyclic" antidepressants, which "have never been proven to work in children" and which "can cause fatal overdoses." They also find worrisome the jump in prescriptions for

clonidine, a blood-pressure medication used as a tranquilizer for young children which "also has dangerous side effects."

As Dr. Julie Magno Zito, associate



Ritalin is now prescribed even for preschoolers.

professor of pharmacy and medicine at the University of Maryland and lead author of the study, points out, few of the psychiatric drugs currently prescribed for young children are approved for such use by the FDA. "It is not really clear that children this young could meet the diagnostic criteria for either attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or depression,

and those are the probable diagnoses given to justify the use of stimulants, antidepressants, and clonidine," Dr. Zito told the *New York Times*.

Many experts, including Dr. Coyle, believe that diagnosing ADHD in toddlers is difficult at best because their normal behaviors are considered signs of the disorder in older children.

Indeed, diagnosing ADHD at any age is a matter for dispute. The American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* admits there are no "laboratory tests that have been established as diagnostic" for ADHD, and the *Physicians Desk Reference* describes it (See *Drugging*, page 2)

Favorable Climate Evolving for Teaching Creationism?

ROCHESTER, NY — A new charter school slated to open next fall will include creationism — the theory that there is scientific evidence of intelligent design in the universe — along with evolution in its curriculum. Dr. John R. Walker, sponsor of the Rochester Leadership Academy's charter application, points out that the theory of evolution is unproven and that the school will present contrasting theories, including creationism.

The academy has a potential enrollment of 436 students K through 8th grade, and will be managed by National Heritage Academies of Grand Rapids, Michigan, which operates 22 charter schools in Michigan and North Carolina. The State University of New York's (SUNY) trustees granted the new charter in January.

In a related development, the Okla-

homa state textbook committee, which screens textbooks for the state's 540 public school districts, is challenging the teaching of evolution.

The committee voted in November to require that biology textbooks admit evolution is a "controversial theory." Last October, Kentucky's education department replaced the word "evolution" in its state standards with the phrase, "change over time."

These actions come on the heels of the Kansas Board of Education's decision last summer to minimize evolution in its new state testing standards. The move did not forbid the teaching of evolution in Kansas schools, but was designed to

curtail teaching it as indisputable scientific fact. (See *Education Reporter*, October 1999.) The resulting uproar has shown no signs of abating.

According to the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (3-12-00), an initiative called Save our Science (S.O.S.) has been started for the purpose of "raising awareness on campuses nationwide" of the "efforts of fundamentalist Christians to stifle scientific education in public schools and replace it with the study of religious creationism." Organizers claim they found it "frightening" that "religious belief" could be so easily introduced into public school curricula in Kansas.

The S.O.S. campaign was developed by the Campus Freethought Alliance and the Young Freethinkers' Alliance, "an outgrowth of the Council for Secular

Humanism." The group has also expressed concern about efforts by state legislatures and the U.S. House to allow the posting of the Ten Commandments in schools, courts and other public buildings.

Last month, Indiana legislators approved a bill, signed into law by the Governor, allowing schools to display the Ten Commandments along with other historical documents. Similar bills are pending in at least eight states, including Colorado, Georgia, Florida, Illinois, Missouri, Mississippi, Oklahoma and South Dakota.

These bills were sparked by parents and legislators concerned with the recent rash of school shootings, who blame the violence in part on the lack of moral teaching in the schools. Posting the Ten Commandments, they say, would be a symbolic step in the right direction. 



EDUCATION BRIEFS

Florida mother sues school district over daughter's tattoo. A West Palm Beach 13-year-old allowed a classmate to create a 2½" x 3½" flower tattoo on her shoulder during art class with "a needle he found" while the teacher and fellow students watched. The girl's mother wants the school district to reimburse her for the HIV, syphilis and hepatitis tests the child underwent after the procedure, and for the \$2000 it will cost to have a plastic surgeon remove the tattoo.

Alabama pediatricians adopt resolution against forcing schoolchildren to watch advertising. The state chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics' has resolved that schools should not sign contracts obligating students to view ads during class time in exchange for supplies and other materials. The Alabama chapter plans to present its resolution to pediatricians in other states and will work for its adoption by the national organization.

Education is high on voters' list of concerns. A national survey taken in February shows that education is "the single most important issue" among the American people. While 42% approved of increased funding for education, only 38% favored a greater federal role, and 35% said the federal government's role should shrink. Forty-nine percent of those polled favored education savings accounts, which would transfer some education dollars to allow tax breaks for parents.

Billionaire CEO donates \$100 million for online university. Michael Saylor, the 35-year-old head of Microstrategy, a computer software company based in Vienna, Virginia, plans to include lectures from the world's "geniuses and leaders" in his nonprofit cyber hall of higher learning. He plans to donate more of his \$13 billion fortune to the project over time and has invited other philanthropists to contribute. Unlike existing Internet degree programs, Saylor's courses will be free of charge.

(See page 4 for more Briefs.)

Education Reporter (ISSN 0887-0608) is published monthly by Eagle Forum Education & Legal Defense Fund with editorial offices at 7800 Bonhomme Ave., St. Louis, MO 63105, (314)721-1213. Editor: Sue Kunstmann. The views expressed in this newsletter are those of the persons quoted and should not be attributed to Eagle Forum Education & Legal Defense Fund. Annual subscription \$25. Back issues available @ \$2. Periodicals postage paid at Alton, Illinois.

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Drugging (Continued from page 1)

as "a general term for several behavioral problems previously known as minimal brain dysfunction in children."

The APA manual suggests that children who exhibit at least eight of 14 "symptoms" for at least six months have the disorder. These symptoms include fidgeting or squirming in seat, difficulty remaining seated when told to do so, difficulty following through on instructions, interrupting others, refusing to listen to others, and losing things necessary for completing tasks, such as pencils. Many experts say these "symptoms" sound suspiciously like normal childhood. Dr. Fred Baughman, pediatric neurologist and a Fellow of the American Academy of Neurology, calls ADHD "a contrived illusion of a disease that was invented in-committee at the American Psychiatric Association."

An article in the Nov. 1999 *Massachusetts News* notes: "Some experts think a hyperactive child is reacting to a stressful home environment, not the pain of a chemical imbalance in the brain that could make it hard for a child to concentrate." The article adds that while many doctors tell parents their children "are suffering from a chemical imbalance in the brain that can be corrected with medication, it can't be seen or measured."

"Conflicts between children and adults are being redefined as diseases or disorders within the children," says Dr. Peter Breggin, International Director of the Center for the Study of Psychiatry and Psychology. "Treatment with stimulant drugs such as Ritalin will produce greater docility in any child (or animal) without actually improving conduct or academic performance. Parents are not informed that they are trading behavioral control for toxic drug effects."

Why are parents so willing to medicate their young children when the effects of drug therapy are for all intents and purposes unknown? A greater reliance on daycare and the need to have children "conform in their behavior" is one factor cited by study author Zito. Experts also point to the ironic acceptance in the 1990s of legally-prescribed mind-altering drugs while the "war" on illegal mind-altering drugs continues unabated.

According to *U.S. News & World Report*, doctors who prescribe psychiatric drugs to children often complain that they are "pressured by managed-care companies and insurers to avoid referring their patients to mental health specialists and to reduce the time they spend with families." To properly assess a child's behavior relative to family problems or situations is time-consuming, they say. "You need at least four 45-minute sessions, observing the child with the family, taking a family history," child psychiatrist and author of *Building Healthy Minds*, Dr. Stanley Greenspan, told *U.S. News*. "In many situations, a child is being prescribed and diagnosed on a one half-hour

meeting. Insurance coverage doesn't support the kind of assessment you need."

The study analyzed prescription records from 1991, 1993 and 1995 for 200,000 pre-school age children enrolled in two state Medicaid programs and an H.M.O. The states and the H.M.O. were



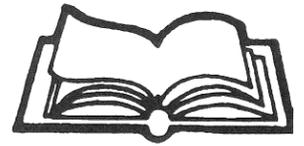
not identified. Methylphenidate (the generic for Ritalin) was by far the most popular drug prescribed, accounting for 90% of the prescriptions in the midwestern state's Medicaid program. While Ritalin has been decried by critics as "violence against boys," researchers found that prescriptions for Methylphenidate increased faster for girls than for boys in the mid-Atlantic state's Medicaid program and in the H.M.O., indicating that diagnoses of attention disorders in girls are on the rise.

According to a March 9 article entitled *Kids on Drugs*, by behavioral pediatric specialist and author of *Running on Ritalin* Dr. Lawrence H. Diller, stimulant drug use in children rose 23% between 1995 and 1999. The use of Prozac and other anti-depressants for children under 18 was up 74%, for ages 7-12 up 151%, and for children six years of age and under, anti-depressant drug use rose a shocking 580%. IMS Health, a company that tracks and reports the latest trends in medication usage for the pharmaceutical industry, compiled the statistics.

Dr. Diller places the number of American children now taking at least one psychiatric drug at 5 million, and notes that American kids use twice per capita the amount of Ritalin as Canadians, and far more than children in other developed countries. "The use of psychiatric drugs other than Ritalin on preteen children is virtually unheard of outside this country," he says.

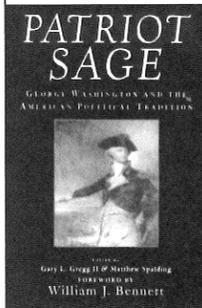
While Diller is not against prescribing psychiatric drugs for kids, he admits he has become "increasingly uneasy" with the frequency of parents' requests for medication and with doctors' willingness to accommodate them. He blames the new mindset on society's shift over the past 20 - 30 years from believing that most behavioral disorders have a psychological basis to the belief that they have a biological basis. "A logic developed that if a drug improved behavior, the problems must be biologically based," he writes. "No one speaks of a headache as an 'aspirin deficiency,' even though the drug relieves the symptoms. Nevertheless, terms like 'chemical imbalance' became increasingly fashionable in explaining problem behavior."

Book of the Month



Patriot Sage, George Washington and the American Political Tradition, Edited by Gary L. Gregg II and Matthew Spalding, Intercollegiate Studies Institute (ISI), 1999, 308 pps., 29.95

This timely compilation of factual essays refutes recent entertainment industry portrayals of our country's most important Founding Father as a casual swearer motivated to lead the American Revolution by a base desire for



the profits to be gained by eliminating taxes. John G. West Jr.'s essay entitled "George Washington and the Religious Impulse," for example, quotes from an official order given by

Washington in 1776 that included "a rebuke of swearing, a reprimand he repeated with increasing fervor in the years that followed."

A statement by William Bennett in the foreword also rebuts the rewriters of history and sets the book's tone: "From 1775 onward, Washington was the *de facto* leader of the colonial struggle and the personification of the American Revolution. At the darkest moments of the war he stood virtually alone in the pursuit of independent nationhood."

Patriot Sage is the welcome result of a conference held in June 1999 by the ISI and the Heritage Foundation in commemoration of the 200th anniversary of Washington's death. Twelve essays explore in roughly chronological order the many varied aspects of Washington's exemplary and heroic life. Yet they do not spare the reader his humanness. In the opening essay, University of Alabama Research Professor and author Forrest McDonald describes the first president's "aura of strength and invincibility," declaring that "he was the most trustworthy man" who "never abused or sought to aggrandize his power." Yet, McDonald writes, Washington was "a bit pretentious and hot tempered."

Editor-writers Gregg and Spalding, who contribute their own essays to the work, hope *Patriot Sage* will "contribute to the renewal of Washington's rightful authority in our political tradition." They lament that while generations of Americans learned of Washington's life at home and in the classroom, many today know little more about our greatest statesman beyond the folklore and legend — that as a boy he chopped down a cherry tree and could not tell a lie.

ISI Books, P.O. Box 4431, Wilmington, DE 19807-0432, 1/800-526-7022, web site www.isi.org

FOCUS: Generation Hex



By Dr. Stan Watson

Last year, a 15-year-old Maryland high school student was sent home from school with a note that she was being disciplined for "casting a spell" on another student. The girl, who was an admitted practicing witch and the daughter of a witch, had upset some of her classmates by telling them she had put a hex on them.

In March a suburban Detroit high school settled a lawsuit brought by a student who claimed her rights were violated when she was told she couldn't wear symbols of witchcraft to school. As a practicing witch, she claimed she had a right to wear the symbols of her religion to class.

In May what was apparently a budding "coven" of eight witches was discovered at a middle school in Colorado. The 12-year-old girls were known to read books about witchcraft and to sit in a circle during recess threatening to cast spells on classmates they didn't like.

Let's face it, witchcraft is the latest adolescent fad. Television programs such as *Sabrina, The Teenage Witch* and *Charmed* have been teen hits. Feature films with titles like *Practical Magic*, and *The Craft* have also been popular. *Spin Magazine*, in its "Grrl (sic) Power" issue, ranked witchcraft as the top interest among teenage girls.

Now the elementary schools are helping to bring the "witchcraft is cool" message to the preteen set. Public school teachers around the country are reading the *Harry Potter* stories to 6-, 7-, and 8-year-olds who are apparently eating them up.

Who is Harry Potter? He is the hero of a hugely popular series of books by British author J.K. Rowling. The self-proclaimed experts on children's literature call them delightful.

The only problem is that some parents have raised a fuss. You see, Harry is a witch, or at least a wizard, who is attending Hogwart's School of Witchcraft and Wizardry so he can reach his full potential as a witch/wizard. The books tell the story of Harry's experiences at Hogwart's and how he uses "good" witchcraft to fight off the "bad" witchcraft of his foe, the evil Voldemort, who killed Harry's parents when he was a baby.

Who could object to a harmless set of stories about how a "good" witch triumphs over a "bad" witch and also gets the best of the crass and unimaginative "Muggles" who surround him? "Muggle" is the derogatory term used in the books to refer to the non-witches (*i.e.* normal people) who are just too dull-witted to appreciate the magical arts. With such terms

we convey the message that, not only is witchcraft cool, but opposition to witchcraft is totally uncool – a product of underdevelopment in a person's mental and spiritual capacities.

Even some notably "conservative" reviewers have failed to see the harm in these stories and have instead promoted the virtuous

character qualities that are sometimes displayed by Harry and his sidekicks. But this reviewer is not in their camp.

Certainly, the books tell a story that holds the reader's interest and keeps you turning pages. The author also displays a clever wit in her humorous portrayal of Harry's dysfunctional relatives and the topsy-turvy world at Hogwart's.

But it is the portrayal of witchcraft as a fun-filled and morally neutral activity that is the most troubling aspect of the books. Indeed, witchcraft is presented not just as morally neutral, but as "totally cool." It is clear in the books that the worst fate that could befall a person is to be merely a "Muggle" — someone who has no involvement in witchcraft whatsoever.

The reply of Potter defenders is that the books only present a fantasy world and aren't about real world witchcraft. But the books themselves betray this argument. First of all, the stories are not set in some fantasy world or parallel universe such as the "middle earth" of the Tolkien *Hobbit* stories or the "Narnia" of the *Chronicles of Narnia*. When children's literature presents a fantasy world that is clearly detached from our own the author thereby makes it clear that what is normal and acceptable in the fantasy world is not necessarily so in the real world. But in the Potter books, Hogwart's is depicted as being located in this world, in England, although its existence is magically concealed from "Muggles."

Furthermore, we are told in book two that Hogwart's was built in England a thousand years ago, "far from prying Muggle eyes, for it was an age when magic was feared by common people, and witches and wizards suffered much persecution." The implied message here is that Harry's morally neutral witchcraft is directly connected to witchcraft in the real world and that "real world" witchcraft is also morally neutral. It has only been labeled as "evil" by paranoid "Muggles" who used to persecute well-meaning witches.

Concerned parents have argued persuasively that this is not a message we want to convey to our children. The real world of witchcraft is not harmless and

morally neutral. It is powerful and evil. It is confusing to children to suggest that there is a "good side" to witchcraft, and especially to suggest that concerns about witchcraft are simply the result of narrow-minded paranoia. This can only have the result of breaking down the child's natural aversion to the evils of witchcraft and promoting an unhealthy fascination with such things. Such a fascination, as we have seen, can lead young children to terrorize their classmates with threats of magic spells, and it could lead older adolescents into a dangerous involvement in the occult.

Some have suggested that the Harry Potter books are no different from such children's classics as the *Chronicles of Narnia*, which also include witches and magic. But there is an important difference that I, as a dedicated *Chronicles of Narnia* fan, would like to point out.

In Narnia, the witches are villains. They are never presented as heroes. And while many magical things happen in the imaginary world of Narnia, the idea of dabbling in magic in this world is strongly discouraged. For example, in one Narnia book, *The Magician's Nephew*, the boy who is the title character of the book discovers that his uncle has spent a lifetime dabbling in magic. It is made clear that in his pursuit of "the magical arts" his uncle has become heartless and cruel, and not at all someone to be admired or emulated. When Digory, the main character, suddenly discovers what his uncle has become, he says, "I didn't believe in magic till today. I see now it's real. Well if it is, I suppose all the old fairy tales are more or less true. And you're simply a wicked, cruel magician like the ones in the old stories. Well, I've never read a story in which people of that sort weren't paid out in the end, and I bet you will be. And serve you right."

Another important episode dealing with magic can be found in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, another of the

Chronicles. In this episode, Lucy, one of the main characters, is forced to read through a book of magic spells in order to find a spell that will undo an enchantment that has been worked upon some of the inhabitants of the Narnian world. As she looks for the necessary spell to undo the damage, however, she cannot resist using another of the spells to find out what some of her friends in this world think about her. Soon Aslan appears, the Christ-figure who represents moral authority in Narnia. He scolds Lucy for this improper use of Narnian magic. Ultimately this episode shows clearly the line that C. S. Lewis drew between using magic to affect events in the fantasy world of Narnia and trying to use magic to affect events in this world. One is pure fantasy not strictly bound by the moral framework of this world. The other is bound by that moral framework and is clearly presented as wrong.

When it comes to the moral training of young children, it is important that children's books make these sorts of clear distinctions. It is important to show that those who dabble in magic and witchcraft are "paid out in the end." *The Chronicles of Narnia* and other great children's books are careful to observe this convention. The morally ambiguous world of Harry Potter, on the other hand, can only leave children morally confused. Haven't we seen enough of the damage that morally confused adolescents can do? Can't we all, by now, agree that the morally ambiguous message of the Harry Potter books is not the sort of message our schools need to be conveying to impressionable young minds?

Stan Watson, Ph.D., is director of research at the Alabama Policy Institute, a non-partisan, non-profit research and education organization dedicated to the preservation of the family. His weekly column is a copyrighted feature distributed free of charge. Call 205/870-9900 for more information.

Now the elementary schools are helping to bring the 'witchcraft is cool' message to the preteen set.

Examples of Outrageous Classroom Assignments



Our 10-year-old daughter has been reading a book aloud in her class called *My Brother Sam Is Dead*. This book is filled with profanity and violence.

Given the current violent climate in our schools, we are appalled at the fact that forcing children to read such "literature" is even possible. We feel as if the school is condoning the behavior described in the book, and that our daughter's innocence has been violated.

The school district has informed us of its policy to automatically list the Newbery Awards and Honor Books (of which *Brother Sam* is one) for use in the classroom without reviewing them. This is a travesty and must be stopped. Please get the word out so we can eliminate this atrocity for the sake of all children.

— Kelly Dunn

— *Editor's note:* For 78 years, the American Library Association has given Newbery Awards in recognition of "the most distinguished contributions" to children's literature. For many of those years the award-winners were excellent examples of wholesome children's stories. Since the late 1960s, however, researchers caution that the books increasingly reflect a humanist world view, and many include profanity, violence, sexual content, and death.

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

Agenda (Continued from page 1)

made by Massachusetts parents is that explicit "safe sex" materials are distributed to all BAGLY members regardless of age. Some of these materials feature "graphic pictures of condom use on live models along with graphic descriptions of sexual activities" that would be in violation of pornography laws were they not under the umbrella of "safe sex education."

Massachusetts has GSAs in approximately 170 high schools, more than any other state. The *Massachusetts News* stated that while parents' tax dollars support BAGLY both directly and through the GSAs — schools sponsoring alliances

receive "safe-schools" grants from the state Department of Education — some administrators apparently believe that:

◆ Teenagers, regardless of sexual orientation, should be encouraged to be sexually active for their well being and mental health.

◆ Teenagers should be able to have sex with anyone they wish.

◆ Because many parents may not agree with the above, it is necessary for the schools to determine the sexual orientation of each child without the parents' knowledge or involvement and to help students develop their sexuality.

Judge orders school board to allow gay club

ORANGE, CA — A Gay/Straight Alliance club began meeting at the El Modena High School in February after a federal judge ordered the local school board to recognize the group. The 31,000-student district's board, with the support of many parents and students, voted unanimously in December to deny the group's

application for inclusion as a school club.

According to *Education Week* (2-16-00), the school board reacted to the judge's order by requiring "written parental permission and a 2.0 grade point average for all students to join clubs." The new policy would prohibit any discussion of sexual activity at all club meetings.

Group helping homosexuals comes under attack

BRANDON, FL — Former gay activist John Paulk, now a policy analyst for the Colorado-based pro-family organization Focus on the Family, is in his second year of conducting "Love Won Out" symposia around the country. During these conferences, he shares the message (based on personal experience) that homosexuality can be treated and even prevented in young people. While stressing that science has not proven a biological origin for homosexuality, Paulk cites a variety of emotional causes, and urges parents to "stay involved in your children's lives" and "get them to open up."

About 700 parents, teachers, pastors, youth group leaders, and interested citizens showed up at the Brandon symposium (near Tampa) in late February. In retaliation, homosexual activists sprayed two area church buildings with pink paint and claimed to have planted a bomb inside one of them. The group telephoned a local TV station to claim responsibility

for the vandalism and threatened to disrupt worship services.

Vandalism has not been the only response to Paulk's message. According to the *New York Times* (11-23-99), a coalition calling itself "Just the Facts," representing organizations including the American Academy of Pediatrics, the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Psychological Association, sent a 12-page booklet to the nation's nearly 15,000 school superintendents claiming there is "no support among health and mental health professional organizations" for the concept that homosexuality is "abnormal or mentally unhealthy."

An NEA spokesman said the coalition was formed "after members heard about the 'Love Won Out' conferences." The publication warns against "reparative therapy" (such as Paulk's) and cautions superintendents that, because of its religious nature, any endorsement of "transformational" ministries "in a school-related context could raise constitutional problems."



Mall School Mauls Academics

PROVIDENCE, RI — A new alternative public high school, set in the Providence Place mall, is taking the concept of School-to-Work to a new level.

Providence Place Academy was created by the mall's developers and Johnson & Wales, a Providence university, with the help of the mayor and other city officials, school administrators, and the Chamber of Commerce. It is likely the first vocational school in the nation to be located inside a mall.

Fourteen students were enrolled in afternoon internships during the Christmas sales rush in December, stocking shelves, ringing up sales, and busing tables in the mall's restaurants. (Students are paid for their labor after the first 90 minutes.)

According to a report in the *New York Times* (12-24-99), "the whole thrust of the school is to help students parlay their work experiences into learning and into aspirations that can make the difference between success and failure in the real world." Juniors are required to take "a full academic course load in the mornings" and link their work experiences to the traditional 'three R's' by such things as keeping "grammatically correct" logs.

Critics worry that these children will be funneled "into dead-end cashier jobs they could have had anyway." A letter to the *Providence Journal* complained that the mostly minority students are being

trained "in menial jobs such as sales clerks, maids, food servers, and janitors." The author questioned whether this situation was "just another coincidence."

Paul Gounaris, director of the School-to-Careers program in the Providence public schools, says that the mall academy's "focus on learning by experience fits into a broader movement intended to shift schools in that direction." He noted that it also fits with the trend toward school/business partnerships, prompting many to wonder not only about the dearth of traditional academics, but also about issues of personal injury liability and equipment ownership.

Some critics question whether businesses that become state-funded classrooms will eventually become the property of the state. "If students damage a business's equipment and the school district pays for its replacement, for example, who owns the equipment?" asks Dani Hansen, a pro-family activist and education researcher who has studied the potential impact of School-to-Work in her home state of Idaho. Others wonder who will be held liable if a child is injured while "working" at school.

Providence Place Academy is expected to expand to 100 students next fall. Mall classrooms provided by Johnson & Wales are to be completed in late spring, and university students are acting as mentors for the high school interns.



Activists strategize against the 'Right Wing'

ATLANTA, GA — More than 700 educators, students and activists gathered last fall for the 3rd annual conference of the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) entitled "Teaching Respect for All '99." Organizers claimed the conference was necessary to address the "atmosphere of fear" that oppresses homosexual students in U.S. schools. Congressman John Lewis (D-GA) was the keynote speaker. Activities included a "prom" for homosexual youth and interactive sessions covering topics such as "Responding to the Right Wing," "Youth Organizing 101 and 201, Becoming a Change Agent" and "Making Media Work for You."

According to Conservative News Service senior staff writer Justin Torres, Rep. Lewis "pledged the support of the civil rights community for homosexual activists" and asserted that "we have a moral obligation and a mandate to speak out [on homosexual issues]." The symposia focused on "the necessity of making today's

students more friendly to the homosexual agenda."

Torres reported that leaders of the session on the "Right Wing" assured attendees that, "If we do our jobs right, we're going to raise a generation of kids who don't believe [the claims of] the Religious Right." Strategies discussed included "creating Gay-Straight Alliances in high schools and middle schools," incorporating "lessons on homosexuals in otherwise unrelated classes, such as emphasizing homosexual victims of the Holocaust in history classes and inviting homosexual partners and their adopted children to speak in schools about 'diverse families.'"

"Above all," Torres said, "both presenters and attendees focused on strategies to portray religious voters as extremist and homosexual activists as mainstream. They said: 'We have the high ground, we have the facts, and we don't have to go one-on-one with these people. We're the mainstream now.'"

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Colorado College is offering a Lego-building test in lieu of the SAT for some admissions. The program is part of a national experiment to attract students who may not otherwise qualify for college admission because of failing standardized test scores. Groups of 8-10 students individually view a robot on display in a room separate from the testing

room. The group must then build a replica of the robot from memory in 10 minutes using Legos. Principals, teachers and college admissions personnel evaluate the group's work. Other paperless tests include conflict resolution exercises and personal interviews. Participating colleges are expected to enroll about 100 students as a result of the experiment.

