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Surprise! Study Shows Phonics Best for Teaching Reading

WASHINGTON, DC — Following a landmark two-year study, the National Reading Panel (NRP) has announced what many reading experts have known all along: that, to be effective, reading instruction must include phonics. The study is being called

“the largest, most comprehensive evidence-based review ever conducted of research on how

children learn reading.” Its conclusions? That children should be taught:

- ◆ Phonemic awareness — the smallest units composing spoken language;
- ◆ Phonics — how to use letter-sound relationships to read or spell words;
- ◆ Fluency — reading orally with speed, accuracy, and proper expression;
- ◆ Comprehension — strategies for understanding what is read.

The panel found that the research conducted to date is “clear cut” and “strongly supports” teaching children to “manipulate phonemes” to “significantly improve” reading and spelling abilities. It also concluded that the research “provides solid evidence that phonics instruction produces significant benefits for children from kindergarten through 6th grade and

for children having difficulties learning to read.” In fact, the panel found that “the greatest improvements in reading were seen from systematic phonics instruction.”

The NRP was mandated by Congress in 1997 and established by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD). Members included leading scientists in reading research, educators, administrators, teachers and parents. They reviewed more than 30 years of research on how children learn to read.

The NRP developed rigorous scientific standards for evaluating the research on the effectiveness of different reading instruction methods. The panel based its conclusions on clinical trials in which reading methods were compared — the same method used to evaluate drugs and medical treatments. Public input was allowed at all its meetings.

Some experts say the data from the panel’s report clearly demonstrate why educators don’t already know how to teach reading. “Small wonder that reading education is in such a serious mess when most of the education school crowd involved with developing and furthering (See *Phonics*, Page 4)



CDC Sex Ed Programs Spark Furor in Illinois

SPRINGFIELD, IL — The same federal Centers for Disease Control (CDC)-backed sex education programs that scandalized Ohio residents earlier this year have caused an uproar in Illinois. Outraged Ohioans forced their state legislators in January to refuse nearly \$1 million in CDC grants, a portion of which would have been required to fund the CDC’s controversial “Programs That Work” (PTW). (See *Education Reporter*, May 2000.)

Details about the use of the PTW in Illinois became public when the CDC, through the Illinois Board of Education, contracted with Illinois State University to pay \$120,000 to train teachers to teach the curriculum called “Reducing the Risk.” The Associated Press reported that the “potential three-year contract” with CDC would by November 2000 train teachers to teach the curriculum to 9th and 10th graders. “Reducing the Risk” includes explicit sex instruction, student field trips to family planning clinics, and visits to drugstores (preferably with a partner) to explore condom availability and compare brands, textures and colors.

Pro-family groups accused the Illinois Board of Education of ignoring state law that requires sex instruction to emphasize abstinence until marriage as the “expected norm.” State Sen. Patrick O’Malley (R)

spoke for many parents and concerned citizens when he told the *Peoria Journal Star* (5-24-00): “Anything that is a promotion of teenage sexual activity rather than preventing it is counterproductive.”

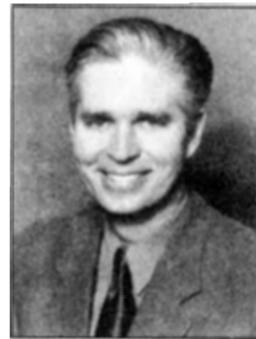
He described “Reducing the Risk” as “startling.”

Columnist Phil Luciano blasted the programs in the same newspaper on May 26. “Our schoolhouses have been overtaken by condom minions,” he wrote. “In the process, the state has given me another reason to keep my daughter far away from public schools.” He glibly

noted: “I don’t even want to know what they have to do to get an A in that class.”

Luciano quoted guidelines from “Reducing the Risk,” including what he termed “advice for friskier students”: “You can engage in sex that does not put you in contact with someone else’s blood, semen or vaginal fluids.”

Later in the editorial, he observed that even students who get moral training at home shouldn’t be given the temptation of being sent “on prophylactic field trips.” He warned parents with children in sex ed classes to “grill teachers” about the curricula. “Otherwise,” he opined, “don’t be surprised if your child’s textbook includes *Hustler* magazine.”



Sen. Patrick O’Malley

Scandalous ‘Teach-Out’ Exposed in Massachusetts

MEDFORD, MA — The Massachusetts Department of Education, the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN), and the Governor’s Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth sponsored a statewide conference on homosexual sex at Tufts University on March 25 called “Teach-Out.” Conference goals were to “build more Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs)” in the state’s public schools, and “expand homosexual teaching into the lower grades.” Children as young as 12 were invited, and many were bussed in from all over the state. Teachers and administrators attended, and homosexual activists from across the country reportedly showed up. Teachers received developmental credit for their participation.

Also attending was Scott Wightman, a member of a local parents group, the Parents Rights Coalition (PRC), which has been monitoring the gay agenda in the state’s public schools. Wightman

tape-recorded several of the workshops, and his recordings expose the shocking graphic descriptions of homosexual sex acts that were given at the conference.

In one well-attended session entitled “What They Didn’t Tell You About Queer Sex and Sexuality in Health Class: A Workshop for Youth Only, Ages 14-21,” the practice of “fisting” was discussed. Students were encouraged to talk openly about a variety of homosexual sex acts in the most explicit manner. While the instructors — two of whom are employed by the Massachusetts Department of Education and one by the state’s Department of Public Health — are listed as HIV counselors and consultants, Wightman states that 55 minutes elapsed during this workshop before any mention was made of condoms or “safe sex.”

Other workshops included: “Ask the Transsexuals,” “Early Childhood Educators — How to Decide Whether to Come Out or Not,” and “Lesbian Avengers —

How to Promote Queer-Friendly Activism in Your Schools and in Your Lives.”

The PRC tried to report publicly on the conference, offering Scott Wightman’s tape as proof, but was unable to interest anyone in the “establishment.” On April 25, Wightman traveled with a group of citizens to a Board of Education meeting in Pittsfield to offer testimony about the conference, but the board’s reaction was to pass a law forcing schools to accept the Gay/Straight Alliances (GSAs) if the state determines they should have one. (GSAs are after-school clubs for gay, lesbian and straight youth that were purportedly established to promote “safe schools” — see *Education Reporter*, April 2000).

The story finally broke in the *Massachusetts News* (May 2000), and a small mention followed in the *Boston Globe* on May 2. The Internet news service *WorldNetDaily* posted a big article in mid May. Local talk radio also picked up the

story, and one talk show host, who received a copy of Wightman’s tape from a concerned mother, was so incensed that she devoted a whole week of programming to the emerging scandal. A physician listening to the program called in to say that the sexual practices discussed at the conference could “cause irreparable damage to the internal organs of the body.”

The Massachusetts Department of Education finally apologized for “the explicit teaching of homosexual sex” that took place at Tufts University. Education commissioner David Driscoll issued the apology, and Deputy Commissioner Alan Safran publicly admitted that, “if the reports are true, it should not have happened.”

Parents groups and others remain alarmed about the homosexual agenda that is being advanced, at taxpayers expense, to both homosexual and heterosexual students in Massachusetts.



EDUCATION BRIEFS

The Washington State Supreme Court ruled that school districts must protect employee paychecks from political withholding, but only if the districts have actual notice that wages are being used for political purposes. The unions collecting the dues are not responsible for actual disbursement of the wages, the court ruled, and cannot be held liable. The Evergreen Freedom Foundation, which brought suit against the Washington Education Association over the issue of paycheck protection, expressed its disappointment that the court placed the burden on school districts and individual teachers. "We hope districts will now move aggressively to protect teachers' paychecks," EFF President Bob Williams said.

Georgia is the first state to eliminate tenure for public school teachers. Governor Roy Barnes signed the state's controversial education reform bill in April, which contains a provision to eliminate teacher tenure. The Governor said the "much criticized" provision would "help the state get rid of bad teachers." The education bill also provides for elementary school class-size reductions and places more social workers and counselors in the schools.

The Modesto City, CA School Board approved a policy not to recognize school credit hours of homeschoolers or any students transferring to a public high school from a non-accredited private school. The board will continue to allow immigrant students to receive evaluations and placement testing, which entitles them to honorary diplomas that reportedly carry the same benefits and privileges as regular high school diplomas.

The South Kitsap School Board in Washington State rejected as "inappropriate" a book laden with graphic sex, violence and profanity. The district's 11th graders were required to read *Snow Falling on Cedars* by David Guterson, which a majority of parents and community members found "highly offensive and disturbing." Teachers praised the book as "beautifully written."

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Sex Questions Sicken Connecticut Parents

NEW MILFORD, CT — A nosy questionnaire that provided the basis for implementing explicit sex education programs in Ohio's public schools has infuriated parents in Connecticut. The 95-question Youth Risk Behavior Survey, described by one parent as "pornographic," was given to 400 6th graders, 400 8th graders and 1,200 high school students in New Milford for the stated purpose of evaluating the health curriculum.

The survey contains descriptions of sex acts and asks students if they are gay or bisexual and if they have ever had oral sex. (See sample questions below.) Many parents believe that, as well as being offensive, these types of questions are likely to give students ideas they may not otherwise have. A *New York Times* article (5-26-00) noted one mother's complaint that her 11-year-old 6th grader was confused by the sex questions. "She didn't know what bisexual meant," the mother explained. Another parent objected to the drug questions: "They have listed every drug known to man. It's almost like they are planting seeds."

New Milford school officials issued an apology, but some parents say that's not enough and are demanding resignations. Administrators claim they complied with federal law (which requires parental consent for federally-funded surveys) by sending a letter home advising parents that they could request in writing that their children be excused. According to the *New York Times*, many parents maintained they never saw the letter, which the newspaper said "broadly described the scope of the survey, but did not warn that some questions would be explicit."

Attempts to justify the proliferation of such surveys focus chiefly on the need to curb school violence. As observers point out, however, these surveys have been around a long time despite repeated parental outcry, and many have been exposed in the *Education Reporter* beginning in 1986.

Those familiar with the Ohio legislature's refusal of federal grant money to implement explicit sex education programs — identified by the CDC as "Programs That Work" — wonder if the Youth Risk Behavior Survey is a precursor to disseminating the programs in Connecticut's public schools. As Ohio state school board member Diana Fessler explains in her extensive report, *Sex Instruction in the Classroom*: "Before the programming of children to elicit behavior change [can] begin on a large scale, the need to change students' knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors [must] be demonstrated. In other words, students' behaviors have to be shown to be dangerous to their health and future productive lives. To generate the needed data, the Youth Risk Behavior Survey was conducted."

Mrs. Fessler notes that all 50 states and at least 34 national organizations receive federal CDC funds for the purpose of developing and implementing "Comprehensive School Health Education" programs. These programs are currently causing a stir in Illinois (see related story, page 1).

Pro-family educators and researchers believe the best way to circumvent the federal money carrot is through state legislation such as New Jersey bill A-2351. Sponsored by Assemblymen Scott Garrett and Guy Talarico, the bill requires school districts to obtain written parental consent prior to student participation in any and all surveys concerning sexual behavior and attitudes, illegal behavior, psychological problems, or a host of other sensitive topics. (See *Education Reporter*, June 2000, for the bill's text.) The legislation also requires school districts to make advance copies of surveys available to parents at convenient times and places so they can make informed choices.

A-2351 successfully passed the New Jersey Assembly on June 5 by a vote of 55-16 and is now under consideration in the Senate.

Youth Risk Behavior Survey — Spring 2000

(Excerpts of actual questions)

6. Which of the following best describes you?
A. Heterosexual (straight)
B. Gay or lesbian
C. Bisexual
D. Not sure
20. During the past 12 months, were you physically or emotionally injured or abused by someone in your household?
27. Are you under stress because of pressure at home?
31. In the past 12 months, have you ever thought about killing yourself?
32. During the past 12 months, how many times did you actually attempt suicide?
42. Do your parents (or adults in the house) smoke cigarettes around you?
57. If you ever sniffed permanent markers, glue, liquid paper, rush, locker room, other liquids, or breathed the contents of sprays, paints, or any inhalants to get "high," how often did you use them?
60. If you ever used any form of cocaine including powder, crack, or freebase, how often did you use it?
61. If you ever used methamphetamines (also called speed, crystal, crank, or ice) how often did you use them?
62. If you ever used heroin (also called smack, junk, or China white) how often did you use it?
63. Have you ever used any other type of illegal drug such as LSD (acid), PCP (angel dust), ecstasy, Special K, psychedelic mushrooms, peyote, etc.?
70. Have you ever had oral sex, either fellatio (mouth touching penis) or cunnilingus (mouth touching vagina)?
72. If you have had sexual intercourse, how many people have you had sex with in your life?
73. During the past 3 months, with how many people did you have sexual intercourse?
75. The last time, if you had sexual in-
- (See Survey, page 4)

Book of the Month



Restoring the Teenage Soul, Nurturing Sound Hearts and Minds in a Confused Culture, Margaret J. Meeker, M.D., McKinley & Mann, 1999, 187 pps., \$14.95

As a primary-care physician, Dr. Meeker has firsthand insight into the lives of today's young people. Her book shines a revealing light on the serious problems teens face in today's climate of moral decay, yet it carries a message of hope that these problems can be overcome.

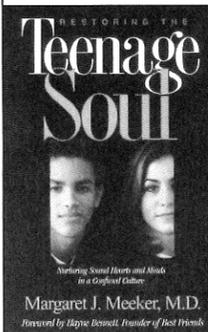
Dr. Meeker offers important support and advice to parents desperate to keep their teenagers on the right track. She urges parents and society in general not to give up on the next generation, but to answer its collective cry for help manifested by sexual promiscuity, pregnancy, violence, suicide, drugs, and drinking. "There has never been a time in history when teens needed adults more than they do right now," Dr. Meeker asserts.

She explains that "some of the deepest damage done to teens in our culture is to their maturing sexuality." She identifies three "toxic" sexual messages that teens receive: (1) "Your sexuality is so powerful that you are not expected to control it," (2) "Your sexuality is larger than other dimensions of who you are," and (3) "Your sexual feelings are unique in their character and abide by different rules."

Restoring the Teenage Soul will help readers understand that these and many other factors constitute why young people are depressed and suicidal, why so many are getting into trouble, and why eating disorders and desperate searches for love are all too common. Meeker truthfully exposes the dangerous teen behaviors she and other physicians routinely observe and helps parents view adolescence from a young person's perspective. She contends that the fundamental needs of young people for emotional, spiritual and healthy physical (hugging) intimacy with their families are not being met.

Dr. Meeker encourages parents to play an active role in the lives of their children, and describes how to nurture teens psychologically, emotionally and spiritually. She insists that, no matter the problems, all is not lost if adults are willing to "be there for the teens in their lives."

Call toll-free 877/800-7567, or write McKinley-Mann, 940 Pine Ridge Dr., Traverse City, MI 49686. Add \$2.50 s/h.



FOCUS: The NAEP is Losing Credibility



By Richard G. Innes

Until now, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) was often considered the tool of choice for comparing education programs among the states. Events of the past year and a half, however, raise serious questions about this federally-administered testing program. Can NAEP really live up to its self-billing as "The Nation's Report Card"? Or, like many state tests, has NAEP fallen prey to politics and pitfalls involving students with learning disabilities?

Make no mistake, the NAEP is tremendously important. NAEP test results played a central role in California's mid-1990s decision to completely revamp its department of education and its curriculum. NAEP was a major player in the 1998 demise of Kentucky's failed assessment, called the Kentucky Instructional Results Information System (KIRIS), and more recently, President Clinton indicated he wanted the NAEP for his "voluntary" national assessment.

Unfortunately, NAEP has run into a serious problem in at least 14 states, including Louisiana, Kentucky, North and South Carolina, Connecticut, and Maryland. Most state testing programs have a similar weakness — an inability to manage the assessment of learning disabled (LD) students.

The Kentucky Example

Kentucky posted one of the biggest 4th-grade reading score gains of any state participating in the NAEP in both 1994 and 1998, but fully 10% of Kentucky's students were excluded from the 1998 NAEP results because of learning disabilities. Only 4% of Kentucky's students had been excluded from both the 1992 and 1994 assessments — the 1998 exclusions were 2-1/2 times larger. Is it not reasonable to conclude that Kentucky's NAEP score increase could be due to the fact that many more weak students were barred from participation?

The large number of exclusions was due to several factors. First, requirements for inclusion in the state's own high stakes assessment, KIRIS, were extensive. Virtually all 4th graders in Kentucky's public schools had to participate in KIRIS, but the learning disabled were allowed very liberal testing accommodations. For example, all test questions were read aloud to many of these students, and about half of them even had an adult "scribe" to write down their answers.

Schools felt pressured to identify many more students as learning disabled so that the weak students could qualify for one or even more accommodations. The end result was dramatic. Kentucky's learning disabled population soared from 7% of the raw NAEP sample in 1992 to 13% in 1998 — an 86% increase! Testing with the accommodations described above definitely raised the learning disabled students' KIRIS scores, but it is unclear whether this actually meant that the students were better-educated.

The second factor in the large increase in exclusions was a change in the 1997 reauthorization of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This change is currently interpreted to



Richard G. Innes

stipulate that, if a child's individual education plan (IEP) has a requirement for testing accommodations, then those accommodations must be offered on all tests that generate individual scores.

The reauthorized IDEA was less than a year old when instructions for the 1998 NAEP reading assessment had to be finalized. NAEP administrators were anxious to maintain comparability to earlier state NAEP assessments when no accommodations for LD students were allowed. However, administrators were uncertain of the legality of requiring those students to test without the accommodations formally listed in their IEPs. NAEP's 1998 guidelines therefore led schools to exclude students with testing accommodation requirements from the accountability sample.

These unfortunate circumstances resulted in a number of states experiencing a large jump in exclusions from the 1998 NAEP. The 1998 exclusion rates for LD students varied wildly — from a low of just 3% of the raw sample in several states to a high of 13% in Louisiana — a spread of 10 percentage points. In 1992, the spread was only 6 points, and the top exclusion was just 8%. Considering this, one wonders what sort of state-to-state comparisons can be fairly made with the 1998 NAEP results.

Kentucky's 1998 NAEP score was incalculably flawed, which is basically what the Educational Testing Service (ETS) said when it issued the first report on this problem in May 1999. ETS should know, because ETS created the NAEP and its complex scoring system. ETS says we will never know how much error was introduced by the exclusion issue.

The ETS report angered radical reformers who were eager to use Kentucky as proof that their ideas were working. Per their demand, a second report was created on the subject of LD student exclusions, claiming that the Kentucky NAEP results are essentially accurate as originally stated. This report claims that the exclusion factor was almost negligible, a contention that would "rescue" the NAEP from its awkward position.

The Wise Report

To fully grasp what is happening to NAEP, one must understand the content and history of this second report, which was created by Dr. Laress Wise. Dr. Wise has a contract with the Kentucky

Department of Education to conduct research involving Kentucky's assessments and databases. He is also licensed by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) to access the NAEP databases. On the one hand, that made Wise seem like a reasonable choice for a research program involving both of these databases. On the other hand, the Kentucky Department of Education desperately wanted the NAEP scores upheld as originally posted, which certainly placed Dr. Wise in an awkward position.

Dr. Wise's study has several very serious flaws. First, his research essentially compares apples to oranges. He begins with the scores that Kentucky's LD students (who were excluded from the NAEP test) received on the KIRIS test, and converts them to "equivalent" NAEP scores. Even if we disregard the serious technical issues concerning the accuracy of converting

any scores from one test to another, comparing KIRIS "reading" scores to NAEP reading scores is especially inappropriate because evidence shows that Kentucky kids excluded from the NAEP test actually had their KIRIS "reading" tests read to them. There is good evidence that the KIRIS "reading" assessment was read to approximately three out of four Kentucky students with learning disabilities. KIRIS was at best merely a spoken word comprehension test for those students. It is totally inappropriate to convert "spoken word comprehension" scores into equivalent scores for the NAEP, which measures real printed text reading ability.

The Wise report has other serious defects. It actually claims that Kentucky's weakest LD students greatly outscored the state's strongest LD students, which is completely incredible. This clearly im-

possible score inversion is additional evidence that Wise did an apples-to-oranges comparison.

Wise's research has yet another problem: the validity of the KIRIS results themselves. KIRIS was clearly so flawed that the Kentucky state legislature overturned this obviously inaccurate assessment in 1998. The replacement even threw out the trend lines from KIRIS. Thus, aside from all its other problems, the Wise report's entire foundation is a seriously flawed test that was abandoned for cause.

There is no question that Kentucky experienced dramatic growth in the number of students identified as learning disabled. If Kentucky's education program is succeeding, as we have been told it is, why does the state show such a substantial increase in learning problems? Is this the sort of program other states should emulate? If not, of what use is an NAEP assessment that awarded Kentucky one of the largest score increases of any state that participated in 1994 and 1998? What can the public really learn from such scores?

The NCES was specifically warned about Wise's apples-to-oranges comparison long before his report was issued. The other problems are not hard to pinpoint either. Nevertheless, the NCES accepted the Wise report as the final word on the subject. By doing so, the NCES raised serious questions about the NAEP. If reports of the caliber of Dr. Wise's study are accepted as definitive proof of NAEP's accuracy, then what confidence can the public have in the managers of "The Nation's Report Card?" Considering the fact that President Clinton recently nominated Dr. Wise to take over the NCES, what confidence can the public have that this situation will get better in the future?

Richard G. Innes of Villa Hills, Kentucky, has studied education reform since 1970, when he programmed the Air Force's first automated instructional machines for pilots using a form of Outcome-Based Education. He has researched his state's reform efforts since 1994, and publishes a newsletter called KERA Update about the Kentucky Education Reform Act.

EVIDENCE SHOWS THAT KENTUCKY STUDENTS EXCLUDED FROM THE NAEP TEST ACTUALLY HAD THEIR KIRIS "READING" TESTS READ TO THEM.



Phonics (Continued from page 1)

the art and science of teaching know so little about how to do good research," says Richard Innes, an education researcher and expert on Kentucky's education reform initiatives. He adds: "The NRP seems to have done a highly credible job of sifting wheat from chaff in the face of an avalanche of worthless 'research' on how kids are best taught to read. The panel's work appears well done and of great value."

Though many experts are lauding the study, it has already come under attack from the teachers colleges. According to *USA Today* (5-17-00): "Wed to the child-centered education theories of the 1980s, these deans and professors believe teaching is more art than science, and they view phonics as something to be taught only superficially, if at all." The article notes that "these professors continue to support 'whole language' instruction, in which children are expected to pick up literacy skills naturally through reading."

Brenda Overturf, a reading specialist in Jefferson County, Kentucky, told the *Louisville Courier Journal* that, while the NRP's report is important, it comes up short because it doesn't reflect the impact of sociological issues, such as whether a child's parents are literate and

read to the child and whether there are books available at home. "We have studies that show that the number of books a child has access to has a direct correlation to reading achievement."

Overturf sent a copy of the NRP's report to all elementary school principals in her district, noting that it also "failed to address the benefits of teaching reading and writing as interrelated tasks; the impact of teaching reading through signs, directions, newspapers and other texts that people read every day; and the role of discussion and group work."

"When children interact together, it brings out ideas that they haven't thought of before," Overturf said.

Phonics proponents counter that the availability of books and the fostering of student interaction do little good if children can't decode and comprehend written words.

Apparently, the NICHD anticipated the mixed reaction to the NRP report. In a press release dated April 13, NICHD vowed to "undertake an aggressive effort to distribute the report and its findings to policymakers, educators and parents." *School Reform News* (June 2000) quoted NICHD Director Dr. Duane Alexander as including "administrators" and "schools of education" in the target group. 🍌

Survey (Continued from page 2)

tercourse, what one method did you or your partner use to prevent pregnancy? (Select only one.)

- A. I never had sexual intercourse.
- B. No method was used.
- C. Withdrawal (or pulling out "in time")
- D. Condoms
- E. Birth control pills
- F. Spermicide (like Depo-Provera foam)
- G. Some other method (diaphragm, etc.)
- H. Not sure what method was used.

76. How many times have you been pregnant or gotten someone pregnant?

77. Have you ever used alcohol or another drug before you had sexual intercourse?

78. Have you ever been tested for HIV infection or any other sexually transmitted infections (STI's) such as genital warts, genital herpes, chlamydia, gonorrhea, syphilis, etc.?

95. How many of the survey questions (which you did not skip) did you answer truthfully to the best of your knowledge?

- A. All of them
- B. Most of them
- C. Some of them
- D. A few
- E. None

Friend of Traditional Education Dies

SCRANTON, PA — When former Pennsylvania Governor Robert P. Casey died on May 30, proponents of traditional education lost a powerful friend.

In December 1987, the *Education Reporter* chronicled his opposition to the *Pennsylvania Health Curriculum Guide*, a series of explicit sex education lesson plans that parents and other concerned citizens found objectionable. Governor Casey called the controversial curriculum "as offensive a thing as I have ever seen." An illustration in the K-3 curriculum, for example, included a series of color caricatures of nude adults in a bathtub, holding hands, and having sexual intercourse.

After hundreds of outraged parents publicly protested the curriculum at the state capitol in Harrisburg in November 1987, Governor Casey ordered the Pennsylvania Department of Education to remove it. "I wouldn't want my kids exposed to that stuff," he said. He directed

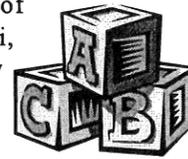
that it "be pulled back, thrown in the wastebasket, never to be sent out again."

In 1993, Governor Casey again responded to public opposition to education reform initiatives. (See *Education Reporter*, Jan. 1993.) The Pennsylvania Board of Education was preparing to adopt a then-new system known as Outcome Based Education. Many citizens were already aware of the pitfalls of OBE thanks to the work of the Pennsylvania Parents Commission headed by pro-family leader Peg Luksik. The board's decision to implement OBE prompted a massive public outcry.

Governor Casey added his own objections to OBE and recommended that the board delete some of the proposed outcomes. Despite the advice of the state's highest elected official and the opposition of many of its citizens, the board approved the OBE revisions to Pennsylvania's education code in their entirety. 🍌

How to Spell Achievement: H-O-M-E-S-C-H-O-O-L

WASHINGTON, DC — The top three finishers in the 73rd annual Scripps Howard National Spelling Bee held May 31-June 1 are educated at home. Twelve-year-old George Thampy of Maryland Heights, Missouri, captured the first-place trophy by correctly spelling "demarche," meaning "a line of action, move or counter-move, or maneuver." Twenty-seven of 248 competitors (nearly 11%) were homeschooled, setting a record for this year's event.



The nation's top speller credited God with his victory. In an interview with the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (6-2-00), he admitted struggling with an earlier word, "emmetropia," the condition of normal refraction of light in the eye, and asked God for inspiration.

George is one of seven children of biochemist and physician Dr. K. George Thampy and his wife Bina, both of whom immigrated to the United States from India. The Thampys are homeschooling all their children, stressing basic skills, hard work, good study habits, and respect for authority. Dr. Thampy told the *Post-Dispatch* that his son "obeys his parents" and "honors God. At the same time, he is a typical boy."

George received \$10,000 for his achievement, which he says will go to his parents. A week earlier, on May 24, he finished second in the National Geography Bee, which netted him a \$15,000 college scholarship. Last year, he finished 3rd in the spelling bee, and came in 4th in 1998, the first year he competed.

The 2nd - and 3rd -place finishers in the spelling contest are also homeschooled. Sean Conley, 12, of Newark, California, earned the \$5,000 second prize. Fourteen-year-old Alison Miller, from Niskayuna, New York, won \$3,000 for her 3rd-place finish. Sean stumbled on the word "apotropaic," which means safeguarding against evil, and Alison missed "venire" — a list of potential jurors.

Home School Legal Defense Association President Michael Farris says the reason homeschooled youth tend to be disproportionately represented in national contests that test academic skills is simple. "Homeschool parents emphasize traditional learning rather than feel-good, self-esteem methods that leave children puffed up but devoid of the knowledge they need to sustain themselves in real life," he told the *Washington Times* (5-31-00).

Former Family Research Council chief Gary Bauer agrees. "Government bureaucrats at the state and federal levels always want more regulation of home schools and there is still a widespread perception that these students lag behind their public school peers," Bauer says. "In fact, they usually test one to two years ahead of their grade level."

Nationally-syndicated columnist Cal Thomas in his June 7 column chided President Clinton for wanting homeschoolers to "prove they are learning on a regular basis" or be forced to attend government schools. "This is surprising," Thomas wrote, "given that homeschooled children consistently score higher on standardized tests than their government-school counterparts."

Thomas urged his readers to "contrast the pursuit of excellence and unique personal attention that are the norm among homeschoolers with what occurs in government schools, where the curriculum is often dumbed-down and non-academic subjects take time away from acquiring real knowledge and the endangered species known as wisdom."

Thomas also attacked the myth that homeschooled students lack socialization. "An ABC News reporter recently asked one [student] how he feels about that," Thomas wrote. "[The student] indicated he is happy to avoid school shootings and competition over clothes and cliques. Homeschooled children have plenty of time to socialize, but in a different environment." 🍌



Examples of Outrageous Classroom Assignments

My daughter came home from school on May 22 with a note about a play that was to be shown to students in grades one through six entitled "Bang Bang, You're Dead." The note stated that the play was about a school shooting and advised: "This is not a play you can watch and walk away from easily. . . ."

"Bang Bang, You're Dead" is about a young man named Josh who kills five of his friends and his parents. The story takes place the day after the shooting, in the jail cell and in the mind of Josh. Through the characters, the audience views the chain of events leading up to the murders.

There are no guns in the play; however, the audience does get a sense of the

violence that takes place.

My wife and I decided to talk with the principal, and urged him not to allow the presentation. He admitted that he had reservations about it, as did the teaching staff. He then called the principal of another local school and was informed that only the 6th-grade would see the play at that school. He advised me that he was going to call the superintendent and ask if he could cancel the performance, and that he would do so if permitted. As it turned out, he allowed the performance for the 6th grade only.

My question is, with the media-created awareness of violence today, do we need to bring such a play into our schools?

— Lew Griffith