

EDUCATION REPORTER

NUMBER 189

THE NEWSPAPER OF EDUCATION RIGHTS

OCTOBER 2001

Recess Is 'In Recess' As Schools Cut Child's Play

The timeless institution of recess is in jeopardy. A survey by the American Association for the Child's Right to Play shows that about 40% of public schools have already cut, or are planning to cut, at least one recess period from the school day.

Since the birth of the American schoolhouse, children have enjoyed regular breaks from textbooks and classroom routines. Teachers 100 years ago knew what modern research studies prove today: Recess provides the means for fidgety students, especially boys, to expend their energy and refresh their minds. As

Time.com put it: "Multiple studies show that, when recess time is delayed, elementary-school kids grow increasingly inattentive. Goodbye recess, hello Ritalin."

New elementary schools in Atlanta have been built without playgrounds, and recess has been curtailed in other Georgia school districts as well. Schools in Pennsylvania, Illinois, Texas, New Jersey, Florida, and California have all jumped on the eliminate-recess bandwagon. "This is an example of good intentions gone awry," Paul Houston, executive director of the American Association

of School Administrators, told the *Chicago Tribune* (9-27-01). "There's huge pressure these days on superintendents and boards to show that they're serious about achievement, so they do something symbolic — they get rid of recess."



Recess is out for many children.

Filling the void are computer classes, foreign language lessons, creative writing, and even dance lessons. Some educators point out that students no longer sit at desks lined up in rows, but work mostly in groups and are more free to move around. Along with physical classes, this new structure "takes care of physical activity needs," they say. But parents worry that their children are wandering around in groups during class time at the expense of real learning, and fear that academics are being sacrificed along with recess.

Parents, teachers, physical education experts, psychiatrists, psychologists and others who speak out in favor of recess have failed so far to buck the trend. One notable exception is Rebecca Lamphere, a mother in Virginia Beach, Virginia, who waged a two-year battle to reinstate recess at her daughter's elementary

(See *Recess*, page 4)

Failing Teachers Equal Failing Students

Certification: F

CHICAGO, IL — A statewide investigation of teacher competency by the *Chicago Sun-Times* found that 5,243 teachers currently teaching in Illinois public schools have failed at least one certification test. The newspaper analyzed the test scores of 67,000 teachers on both basic skills and subject matter tests taken since Illinois began teacher certification testing in 1988. Test data were available on only half the teachers, since those hired prior to 1988 may never have been required to take a test.

The state's biggest flunker was a teacher of learning-disabled students in Chicago who failed 24 of 25 teacher tests, including 12 of 12 tests on how to teach children with learning disabilities. Another teacher failed 19 of 19 tests, including 13 of 13 basic skills tests. One bilingual teacher flunked five of five basic skills tests and three of three elementary school subject matter tests. This teacher was working on a "transitional" bilingual certificate that waives certification testing in Illinois for up to eight years.

How tough is Illinois' basic skills test? According to some experts, it's so easy that an 8th- or 9th-grader should be able to pass it. Yet one of every 10 public school teachers in Chicago has flunked the test at least once. Most of these failing teachers teach in schools with the highest number of failing students, which supports national research indicating a strong link between weak teachers and failing students.



IL Sen. Dan Cronin will hold hearings.

Studies Show Link
A 1986 Texas study showed a significant correlation between low teacher test scores and low student test scores. A Tennessee study 10 years later found that elementary math students who were taught by low-scoring teachers for several years in a row ended up 50 percentile points behind their peers.

Other research shows that full certification also makes a difference. A 1997 study by the University of Texas found that students scored higher on state tests when taught by fully-licensed teachers. In 1999, researcher Linda Darling-Hammond of Stanford University, who is the executive director of the National

(See *Teachers*, page 2)

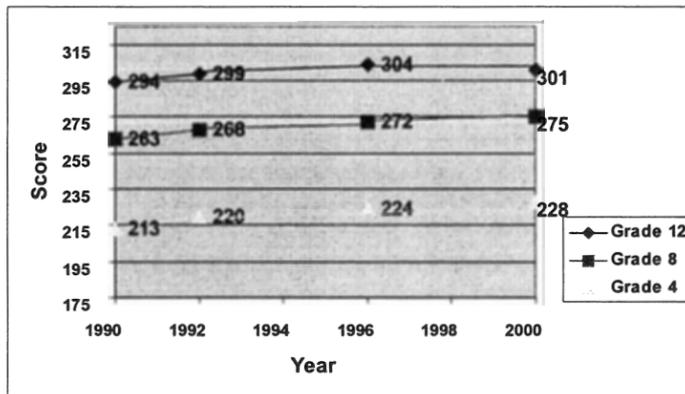
Exclusions Mar 2000 NAEP Math Gains

WASHINGTON, DC — The 2000 NAEP math test scores show increased improvement among U.S. 4th- and 8th-graders during the past decade. A report released in August includes both national and state-level test results. Scores were slightly higher for 4th- and 8th-grade students in 2000 than they were in 1990, '92, or '96. The news was less encouraging for 12th-graders: Their average score increased between 1990 and 1996, but declined between 1996 and 2000. The average score for 12th-graders in 2000, however, was higher than in 1990. (See graph.)

Experts point out that this news is tempered by the fact that a majority of U.S. students are still not proficient in math. Only 23% of 4th-graders, 22% of 8th-graders and 14% of 12th-graders scored at the "proficient" level. Only 3% of 4th-graders, 5% of 8th-graders and 2% of 12th-graders scored at the "advanced" level. The 2000 NAEP results further show that performance gaps among white students and their African-American and Hispanic classmates have not narrowed.

Some experts believe that "score inflation" due to the exclusion of "learning disabled" (LD) students (*i.e.*, students who are excluded from taking the tests altogether or whose scores are not reported because of "learning disabilities")

plays a major role in the state-level 2000 NAEP math results. Revisions to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1997 required that LD students be given special accommodations during testing at all levels, including the NAEP. These accommodations may include hav-



ing test questions read to them, allowing extra time for test-taking, or providing "scribes" to write students' answers for them.

When accommodations are not allowed, LD students cannot participate in testing, and because many of the accommodations currently allowed in some states are incompatible with NAEP procedures, there has been a noticeable upward trend in NAEP exclusions of LD

students in a number of states.

According to education policy researcher and NAEP expert, Richard Innes, the worst case rate of increase for exclusions on the 2000 NAEP math tests were "noticeably larger than on the 1998 NAEP reading tests." This means the integrity

of the reported gains is compromised. For example, North Carolina's increased scores were praised by the state school board and the media. Yet, according to Innes, North Carolina had the largest increase in ex-

clusion ever: 9% more of the state's 8th-graders were excluded in 2000. Nearly one of 10 North Carolina children who could have taken the test in 1996 was excluded in 2000.

Innes maintains that most of North Carolina's 8th-grade score increases between 1996 and 2000 "can be explained solely by the huge number of students excluded from taking the test. The results are largely bogus," he says.

In his own state of Kentucky, Innes estimates that, allowing for exclusions, 4th-grade math scores probably declined about one point, with 8th-graders' scores remaining constant.

Among the states Innes believes may have posted genuine gains are California, Louisiana and Alabama. "California actually reduced 4th-grade LD exclusions by 3% of the raw sample, while posting a 5-point score increase," he explains. "California 8th-graders did not perform well, which might be explained by the fact that the state began a back-to-basics curriculum in the late 1990s. It may have been too late for 8th-graders to overcome their earlier weak instruction."

"Louisiana also mended its ways," Innes adds. "The state had a big increase in exclusions on the 1998 NAEP reading test, but Louisiana's 4th-grade exclusion rate on the NAEP math test was constant between 1996 and 2000. Therefore, Louisiana's 5-point score rise was noteworthy. Louisiana also posted a large score increase among 8th-graders while the exclusion rate hardly varied."

In Alabama, 3% fewer 8th-graders were excluded from the raw sample, but scores averaged five points higher. Innes explains that, for each additional 1% of students excluded from the tests, there is evidence that scores will increase 1-1/2 points if there are no other changes.

EDUCATION BRIEFS

American Library Association's (ALA) annual "Banned Books Week" in September is not about banning books. It's about vilifying parents who raise questions about reading materials assigned in schools or available in school libraries that contain violence, obscenity, or are not age appropriate. The ALA labels as "book banning" almost any challenge to any book, but parental complaints rarely, if ever, result in the removal of a book from classroom or school library shelves. Real book banning is reserved for books written from a conservative perspective, such as those offered by the Spence Publishing Company. Jeff Jacoby of the *Boston Globe* (9/27/01) said Spence's current list includes "serious books by serious authors, presumably of interest to serious bookstores and libraries." However, Spence's books have been banned from libraries and bookstores across the country, reflecting the ALA's hypocrisy and ideological bias.

New York City's summer school program failed to help students. Education expert Diane Ravitch reports that about 72,000 children were required to attend summer school because of poor academic performance. Of the 66,000 who showed up, most failed their end-of-course exams, yet were promoted to the next grade anyway. Nearly 60% did not improve in reading and 2/3 showed little or no improvement in math. Among 8th-graders, average reading scores dropped.

Channel One drops teacher incentive plan. The for-profit company, which shows 12 minutes of "news" and commercials to captive students in thousands of classrooms each day, had offered to pay a \$500 fee to any teacher who successfully marketed the program to another school. Groups opposed to Channel One criticized the offer, calling it a violation of ethics.

There is now one computer for every five students in public schools. According to the U.S. Department of Education, 98% of all schools were hooked up to the internet in 2000, compared to 35% in 1994.

(More Briefs at right)

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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Teachers (Continued from page 1)

Commission on Teaching and America's Future, reviewed teacher quality and student achievement. She found that teacher quality is "more strongly related to student achievement than class size, overall spending levels, [and] teacher salaries . . ." Her research also showed that "the percentage of teachers with full certification and a major in the field is a more powerful predictor of student achievement than teachers' education levels (e.g., master's degrees)."

Hearings Scheduled

After the *Sun-Times* analysis became public last month, state Sen. Daniel Cronin, chairman of the Illinois Senate Education Committee, called the findings "appalling" and announced plans to convene hearings in November to tackle the problem of failing teachers. Members of his committee will consider requiring that teachers be retested with a new, tougher basic skills tests introduced on Sept. 15. Also on the table are plans to give parents more information about teacher certification and to offer financial incentives to good teachers willing to teach in failing schools.

Many of Illinois' flunking teachers eventually passed their certification tests, but hundreds did not. Yet they remain in the classroom under a "Chicago-only loophole" which allows substitute teach-

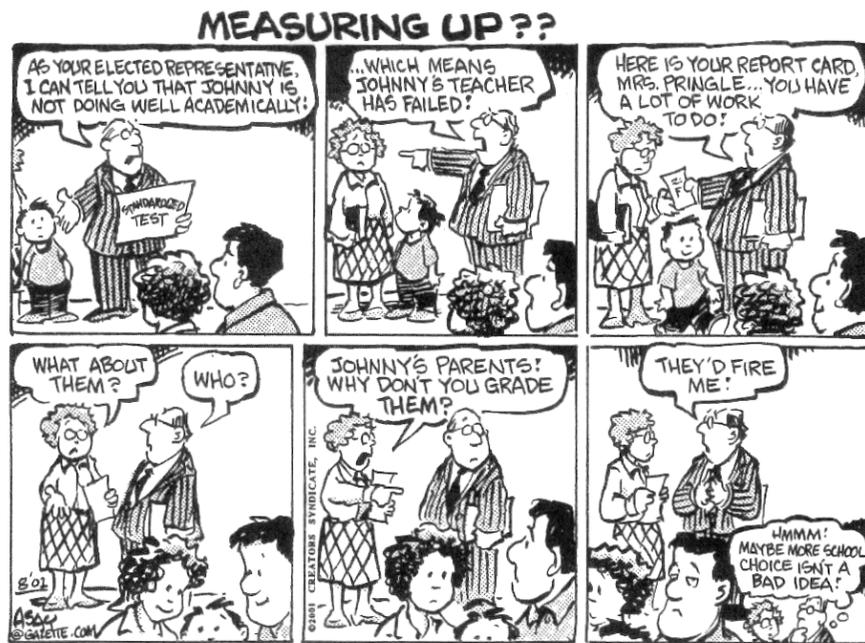
ers to teach indefinitely without passing any certification tests. Although other states call such waivers "emergency" or "temporary" permits, Illinois calls them "certificates."

"That's misleading and convoluted and it doesn't accurately reflect what people expect," Sen. Cronin told the *Sun-Times*. "We're learning that a certificate doesn't mean much [in Illinois]."

Root of Problem

Some educators point to the education colleges as the source of the problem of failing teachers. "There has to be something wrong if you go to college and get B's and C's and then can't pass these exams," observed Superintendent Willie Davis of the Ford Heights School District near Chicago. Other critics say teacher training includes "too much theory and not enough practice, mediocre subject-area training and low admissions standards." It's a vicious cycle, they say: "Graduates of weak public high schools go to weak education colleges and then return, poorly prepared, to teach in the public schools."

With a lack of qualified teachers already plaguing California and growing shortages in many other states, parents and educators worry that testing requirements may be relaxed still further or waived altogether.



A Springfield, Pennsylvania teacher assigned a 300-word essay on the topic of armed robbery and murder. "We only meant to rob the store; we didn't want to kill him," was one of two topics given to high school students during a summer-school class. At least one parent called for disciplinary action against the teacher, including a three-day suspension and counseling. "If my son had written something like this on his own," said the father, "that's what would happen to him."

Instructor fired for teaching gay sex is reinstated with back pay. Margot Abels lost her job with the Massachusetts Department of Education last year after a tape of a workshop she conducted at Tufts University became public. The workshop, sponsored by the Education Department, the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education

Network (GLSEN), and the Governor's Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth, was part of a statewide conference on homosexual sex called "Teach-Out." An arbitrator ruled that the department was wrong to fire Abels because her participation "was authorized by her superiors, and her conduct, while controversial, did not violate then-established department guidelines and policies."

Sworn Statement of Ownership

The *Education Reporter* is published monthly at 7800 Bonhomme, St. Louis, MO 63105.

Publisher: Eagle Forum Education & Legal Defense Fund, 7800 Bonhomme, St. Louis, MO 63105. Known bondholders, mortgages, or other security holders: none. Information on circulation not required as no advertising is carried.

Book of the Month



Accelerated Distance Learning, Brad Voeller, Dedicated Publishing, 2001, 192 pps., \$19.99

In *Accelerated Distance Learning*, author Brad Voeller describes the unique path he followed to earn an accredited, four-year college degree in just six months for less than \$5,000. He invites high school students contemplating college, as well as those already enrolled in higher education, to follow his revolutionary lead.

As its name suggests, "Distance Learning" is about taking online computer courses and correspondence courses, both of which are offered by many, if not most, colleges and universities. "Information technology promotes remote collaboration," writes Voeller, "and the implication for education is that classrooms located in expensive campus settings are becoming obsolete. Learners can congregate online."

According to Voeller, there are 450,000 courses available through remote, or distance learning, and "the market for online education is projected to reach \$11.5 billion by 2003."

Distance Learning is also about earning "credit-by-examination" through a variety of programs, the best known of which is the College-Level Examination Program (CLEP). CLEP offers five general-knowledge exams and 29 subject exams. The five general exams are equivalent to the first full year of college. Other credit-by-examination programs include Excelsior College Exams, the Thomas Edison College Examination Program (TECEP) and DANTES Subject Standardized Tests (DSSTs), which were originally designed for the military but are now available to civilians and administered at more than 600 locations worldwide.

Distance Learning embraces independent study programs and encourages students to pursue college credits for real-life learning through the use of portfolio assessments.

Voeller concedes that his revolutionary method of study will challenge students' "preconceived notions about how to get a college education." He urges readers to "be prepared to accept change and try new things."

Accelerated Distance Learning charts the course for students with enough personal responsibility, drive and boldness to approach higher education in a way that the author believes will become "the wave of the future."

Call 630/353-0955, email info@GlobalLearningStrategies.org or visit www.GlobalLearningStrategies.org.

FOCUS: Are Parents' Rights in Jeopardy?



By Arthur G. Christean, J.D.

In response to what it called "mounting public criticism that government agencies often abuse family sanctity when handling reported child abuse cases," the Utah Office of Legislative Research and General Counsel recently issued a report prepared for the state legislature's child welfare oversight panel. This report concluded that "the best interests of the child trumps all others." Not everyone agrees, and 22 Utah parents, including seven legislators, sent a letter to Governor Mike Leavitt expressing their concern that the right of parents to raise their children as they see fit is routinely being trampled under Utah's child welfare system.

Utah lawmakers reformed the system in 1994 by passing the Child Welfare Reform Act (CWRA). This law was enacted partly to placate child advocacy groups which had challenged the adequacy of the system by filing a lawsuit against the state in the early 1990s. Concerns about the CWRA's potential for abusing parents' rights were raised during debate and summarily dismissed by the bill's proponents as insubstantial. Subsequent events however, have shown that these concerns were indeed well-founded.

The CWRA expanded the criteria for removing "at risk" children from the home and accelerated deadlines for "rehabilitating" parents. It also provided new grounds for terminating the rights of

"non-compliant" parents so that their children, once in state custody, could be freed for adoption more quickly to achieve "permanency" in their lives.

Have these measures gone too far? The expanded legal grounds for removing children from their parents has made it easier for the state to take such action. Anxious to secure the return of their children, parents are under great pressure to accommodate or plea bargain the claims made against them. Once parents plea bargain, however, their children are placed in temporary state custody, and the parents are ordered by the courts to submit to "treatment plans." If the parents fail to comply with these plans within strict time limits — typically six to 12 months — the state may begin proceedings for complete termination of their parental rights.

Should the legal standard for determining whether or not parents will permanently lose their children be their compliance with a state "treatment plan"? Should children be removed from their homes based on the opinions of state officials about parents' *potential* for abuse, or should it be based on whether or not they have done actual harm to their children?

The legal standard established by CWRA influences every aspect of Utah's child welfare policy. In contrast, the state Supreme Court established 20 years ago that the standard must be clear "parental fault"; behavior that could be proven by clear and convincing evidence as "seriously detrimental" to a child. In 1981,

the Court struck down a law which attempted to make "the best interests of the child" the standard for permanent termination of parental rights. This standard,

Appropriate safeguards must be put in place to respect the rights of parents and the sanctity of family life from unwarranted intrusions.

must be put in place to respect the rights of parents and protect the sanctity of family life from unwarranted intrusions. These could include:

- ♦ Careful revision of the law to narrow the specific legal grounds justifying removal of children from their homes. This revision should give state workers guidelines for specific *conduct* or *home conditions* that could justify removal of a child. Broad language that may invite removal based on rumor, suspicion, or disapproval of the attitudes, beliefs or educational preferences of parents should be eliminated.

- ♦ A requirement that *warrants* be obtained prior to the removal of children

the Court pointed out, could shift depending on prevailing opinion and could easily be manipulated for political purposes. The phrase "seriously detrimental" remained part of Utah law until it was removed by the CWRA.

Appropriate safeguards

from the home in non-emergency situations should be added to Utah's child welfare law. Circumstances justifying removal without warrant — cases calling for immediate action in order to protect the lives or safety of children — should be carefully and narrowly defined.

- ♦ State statutes should be amended to insure that *parental fault* and not "the best interests of the child" is the true legal standard for termination of parental rights. Restoring language to state that parents' conduct or condition must be "seriously detrimental" to the welfare of the child would be an important step.

Our instinctive revulsion to the mistreatment of children has made us understandably reluctant to address the growing intrusion of state power into our family life. Nevertheless, the protection of the family unit is inextricably linked with the constitutional right of parents to rear children as they see fit.

As with the rights of those accused of crimes, we must protect parental rights, not because we condone abusive or neglectful behavior by parents, but because of the higher principles upon which this nation was founded. The Office of the Legislative Counsel's questionable conclusion that "the best interests of the child trumps all" suggests that this important matter should again command the attention of Utah lawmakers.

Arthur G. Christean, J.D., B.A., M.S.W., is a senior judge for the Utah Juvenile Court system and a member of the Board of Scholars of the Sutherland Institute, a Utah-based public policy research institute.



From the Education Reporter Mailbag:

Math Teacher's Lament

I am a high school math teacher with 22 years experience. In addition to two bachelor degrees in math and education, I have earned two master's degrees in the same subject and I am two chapters of a dissertation and a defense short of a doctorate.

Recently, I left one district where I taught Algebra I & II for 12 years to teach math in the public schools of a city in Ohio. I am shocked by what is accepted as high school math curriculum in this urban district. The school district has replaced the standard college preparatory track of Algebra I & II, Geometry, and Pre-Calculus with a program called the Core Plus Mathematics Project by Everyday Learning Corporation.

This program is grossly flawed in two ways. First, it is extremely dumbed-down and comes nowhere near preparing students for the SAT or college preparatory mathematics. I taught the freshmen course last year and found that they barely touched linear and quadratic equations. Instead, the students spend most of the

year working in groups using technological tools that do the math work for them. They finished the year with little or no concept of how to solve a standard equation.

What's worse is the content of the curriculum. The textbooks are geared to emphasize reading, and the students are reading about evolution, industrial pollution and the environment, the exponentially-rising costs of health care, and population control. The text actually asks students to write a policy for the Communist Chinese government advising how many babies a family should be allowed to have so that China does not become overpopulated. Also, with healthcare costs rising so much, students are nudged into thinking that government control of health care is better than health care as a business. This is a text that does not teach mathematics but, disguised as a math program, advances a far leftwing agenda.

Have you come across this program before? If not, you seriously need to look into it.

— Respectfully,
(Name and school district withheld by request.)

Mission Impossible

My oldest son has chosen to teach in the Hartford Public Schools as part of a mission until he sets up his chiropractic office. He tells me that his 7th-and 8th-students can't read; four or five in every class read at a 3rd grade level and the rest aren't reading at all. He is keeping notes, and will write and expose this system someday.

He says these kids don't have a chance. There are no books in the classroom, or any windows. The courtyards, which should have flowers and plants, are used for storage and garbage. Do the leaders of this nation really know how our inner city schools are run? Do they care?

We have thrown away so many children in this country. They are defeated before they begin. How sad.

— C.D. Zelotes, Connecticut

Lunatics Running Asylum?

Yesterday was opening day for our phonics-based after-school reading program. A mom who had signed her child up rushed in and, obviously flustered, asked me if the program placed heavy em-

phasis on phonics. I said that, yes, indeed it did, and asked why she was concerned.

She said she had just told her son's "reading specialist" (the child has an Individualized Education Plan) that she was bringing him to our classes. The specialist said we are "too phonics-oriented" and "fail to take into account children's individual learning styles." She also said that, in her opinion, the boy's learning style was "much more inclined toward memorizing words rather than phonics and that our program would undoubtedly harm him." (This is a child whom the school could barely manage to teach at all.)

I explained to the mother that research supports phonics teaching methods and that I knew of no research supporting the notion that some children learn to read better using word memorization. I explained the disadvantages of word memorization. When she appeared calmer, I suggested that she ask the "reading specialist" exactly what reliable, objective test was used to determine that this boy would learn to read better through the exclusive use of sight words. We were lucky. The mother left her son in our class.

This isn't a profession. It's an asylum. The guards are in the cells, and the lunatics are running the place. I just wanna scream!

— Dave Ziffer, Illinois

Recess (Continued from page 1)

school. Dubbed "the Erin Brockovich of the swingset" (after the academy-award winning film *Erin Brockovich* starring Julia Roberts), Lamphere mounted her campaign in 1998 when her daughter entered first grade. She circulated petitions and solicited input from pro-recess experts. When the school board told her she was "just a parent, not an expert," she enrolled in early-childhood education classes at Tidewater Community College and took a public-speaking course. She became a regular at school board meetings and butted heads with teachers.

Lamphere's crusade received considerable media attention and resulted in the Virginia Beach public schools mandating "daily, unstructured recess" in April 2000. When news of her victory spread, the state of Virginia followed suit four months later, mandating recess for all public elementary school students. "A childhood without recess is missing something," Lamphere says.

Many adults agree. Alvin Rosenfeld, co-author of *The Over-Scheduled Child: Avoiding the Hyper-Parenting Trap*, calls child's play "joyful and emotionally nourishing," and says it "may even make

children smarter."

The National Association for Sport and Physical Education recommends that elementary school children get at least one hour of exercise per day, preferably in 15-minute bursts. Association Director Judy Young advocates recess as "a time to socialize and exercise, without the structure of a physical education class."

Florida Department of Education physical education curriculum specialist Brandy Bartol told the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune* (2-12-01): "Especially today, with more kids on Ritalin, more TV watching and video games, if exercise isn't encouraged at a young age, kids will be missing a core component of a healthy life."

As recently as 1981, the University of Michigan published research showing that, after school work, sleeping, eating, and participating in organized activities, 40% of the average school-age child's day was free for play. By 1997, this figure was down to 25%. There is no evidence that all this structuring has improved student performance. Despite the national push to "raise standards and achievement," test scores have remained flat.

NEA State Affiliate Staff Salaries Soar

SACRAMENTO, CA — How much do National Education Association (NEA) state affiliate employees earn each year in pursuit of union goals? These are the people who work for the unions, not the schools. The Education Intelligence Agency (EIA) has released figures from the most recent NEA state-by-state survey of comprehensive staff compensation data. These data include salary and benefits figures for both professional and support staff employees.

The highest average professional staff salaries are paid by the New Jersey Education Association at \$100,018. Professional staffers earn \$93,115 in Connecticut, \$92,010 in California, and \$90,253 in Alaska.

Professional staffers in California rank

number one in total compensation, with salary and benefits averaging \$135,434 per year. New Jersey is second with \$132,413, and Connecticut is third with \$131,697. Alaska employees average \$124,399 and New York staffers average \$123,160 in total compensation. Eighteen state affiliates pay their professional staff total compensation in excess of six figures.

Salaries for support staff range from a low of \$24,707 in Mississippi to a high of \$50,764 in Alaska. The best-compensated support staff overall are Alaska Education Association employees, who average \$113,880 per year in salary and benefits. Alaska is the only state affiliate that pays its support staff more than six figures in total compensation.

School Superintendents Earn CEO Salaries

CHICAGO, IL — Six-figure salaries are now commonplace among school superintendents, especially in big cities. In the Chicago area, 16 superintendents earned more than \$200,000 in salaries and bonuses last school year, according to the *Chicago Tribune* (10/3/01). The state's highest-paid chief, Superintendent Robert Lopatka (now retired) of Dupage High School District 88, earned \$321,184, including retirement incentives, vacation pay and contributions to the teacher retirement fund. More than 850 Illinois superintendents averaged \$108,000 last school year, up \$6,600 from the previous year.

Illinois superintendents aren't the only ones making big bucks. The Montgomery County, Maryland, school board hired superintendent Jerry Weast in the fall of 1999 for \$237,000 a year plus benefits. According to the *Washington Times*

(4/3/00), Weast isn't the only metro Washington, D.C. chief earning in excess of \$200,000.

In Dallas, Texas, school superintendent Bill Rojas makes at least \$260,000 plus benefits (*Education Week* 11/3/99). The Denver, Colorado school superintendent earns \$142,000 plus insurance, a car allowance, and a 4% bonus if district goals are met. In Philadelphia, the school district's top administrator earns about \$170,000 per year.

Reasons for these soaring superintendent salaries range from a purported shortage of candidates to the fact that school chiefs must deal with school violence, hostile parents and teacher strikes. Apologists point out that, although superintendents do not receive stock options or other company perks, they must — like CEOs — shoulder the blame for mistakes, tragedies and failed policies.

Errors, Politics in Science Textbooks

AUSTIN, TX — Texas parents who reviewed new science textbooks testified last month before the Texas State Board of Education that the books are filled with "errors of omission" and contain "overt bias" intended to persuade students to get involved in political action for liberal causes.

While reviewers often criticize textbook content because of typographical or factual errors, the political overtones of the new science textbooks angered some parents. These parents asserted that portions of the books are completely lacking in sound science and promote an environmental or political agenda. The amount of rain forest that is allegedly being destroyed, for example, differs drastically from one textbook to another. At least one textbook encourages students to write letters to environmental groups about topics such as "saving the whales" and to public officials in favor of various liberal goals.

Parent-reviewers for Texas Citizens for a Sound Economy reported that many of the middle-school science textbooks are biased in favor of the liberal line on global warming, endangered species and

land management by government. This group complained that one 8th-grade textbook frightens students to galvanize them into political action.

A spokesman for the Association of American Publishers denies that science textbooks have political agendas, but the Tucson, Arizona-based Center for Environmental Education Research (CEER), which has evaluated more than 200 textbooks over the years, disagrees. CEER states that "two generations of American children have been taught that we are running out of everything — energy, water, minerals — and that humans are 'killing the earth.' Young people today are largely ignorant of the role that human ingenuity, creativity, technology and the free market play in solving the planet's environmental problems."

CEER believes that most textbooks present radical environmental claims, including overpopulation, as scientific fact, yet offer little supporting proof. "Instead of inspiring our children to become scientists, inventors and engineers who confront and solve environmental problems, our schools are busy teaching them to become politicians, bureaucrats, lobbyists and regulators."



Tennessee Parents Aid Textbook Review

GERMANTOWN, TN — A new program initiated by Tennessee State School Board member, Cherrie Holden, allows parents to review textbooks selected by the state Textbook Commission for use in the public schools. The new textbooks are displayed at the Shelby County Library in Holden's district for a six-week period — the same length of time the commission allows for review by state school board members before officially adopting the books.

Holden devised a checklist for parent evaluations, including practical considerations such as how much a book weighs and how easy it is for students to use. In reviewing content, Holden reports that some parents have complained about Political Correctness in reading and history books. Holden herself found fault with one middle-school history book because it "was written at a 3rd- to 4th-grade level."

So far, textbooks getting a "thumbs down" from Holden and other parent-reviewers have not been eliminated from the state Textbook Commission's list. "But we're new at this," she points out, "and some parents' recommendations have made a difference at the local level,

where input to local textbook commissions can influence the selections for local school districts based on the state commission's list."

The Tennessee state Textbook Commission adopts an official list of new textbooks by subject every six years. The state school board may review these books and make recommendations. In reality, notes Holden, due to the limited time allowed for review and the volume of books to be evaluated, the school board has done little more than rubber-stamp the commission's lists. "I decided that the school board really should be looking at the books and tried to review all of them myself," she explains. "I quickly realized this wasn't possible, and I decided to get parents involved."

The Shelby County library is currently the only place where parents can review new textbooks, but Holden says she "would love to see other board members do this in their districts." She is excited that input from Shelby County parents is being heard at the state level by both the school board and the Textbook Commission.



Cherrie Holden

Board Backs Off Pledge Ban

MADISON, WI — On Oct. 16, the Madison school board reversed a decision it made the previous week to ban the pledge of allegiance and the singing of the national anthem in the district's public schools. Supporters of the ban claimed the lyrics to the Star Spangled Banner were "too militaristic" and that the words

"one nation, under God," in the pledge do not belong in public schools.

The school district was bombarded with telephone calls and email messages, most of them critical of the policy.

Under the new policy, schools reciting the pledge or singing the national anthem will be required to remind students that participation is voluntary.