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News Flash!

Mother Charged with Neglect Over Immunizations

OWENSBORO, KY — Parents who believe even one hepatitis B shot is too many for young children haven't heard Dratesse Shemwell's story. Last month, the state of Kentucky took the single mother to court on neglect charges after her son, Tevin Washington, was expelled from kindergarten for having an "invalid" hepatitis B immunization.

In 1995, Dr. Donald Neel gave Tevin a second hepatitis B shot 24 hours earlier than state law requires, at 27 days old instead of 28. Kentucky law specifies that an initial hepatitis B shot be given shortly after birth, followed by a second shot 28 or more days later. The doctor admits he made an error, and the public school where the child is enrolled refuses to accept the immunization as valid.

Are computerized vaccine records protecting children?

All vaccinations administered by doctors in Kentucky are entered into a Health Department database. Out-of-state immunizations are recorded when students transfer to Kentucky schools. The computer does not recognize Tevin's hepatitis B vaccine as valid because of the one-day discrepancy in his age at the time of the second shot.

While the situation could be resolved with yet another shot, Shemwell insists her son has already had five hepatitis B vaccinations and refuses to allow any more, fearing possible side effects. "He's already had too many shots," she told the Kentucky *Messenger Inquirer* (10-25-01). "No one knows the side effects . . . Even the judge agreed no one knows."

Shemwell says Dr. Neel gave Tevin a third required hepatitis B shot in 1998, and that the child was also immunized in Frankfort, Kentucky in 1997 and at a grocery store in Evansville in 1999. Neel claims the mother is the problem because she has not provided documentation for the 1997 and 1999 shots. "The school has to go by the law, and there's nothing they can do," he commented.

Tom Skiratko, assistant superintendent of Owensboro public schools, allowed Tevin to return to class after an Oct. 22 hearing, but it may only be temporary. The bottom line, say Kentucky health officials, is that state law is based on the national Centers for Disease Control's "rigid" schedule for immunizations and that, without proper certification, a child cannot attend school.

WEA Caught Using Dues for Politics — Again!

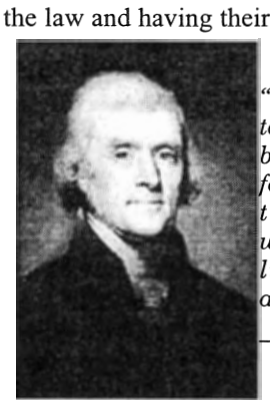
Local watchdog group wants union declared a PAC

OLYMPIA, WA — For the second time in four years, the Washington Education Association (WEA), the state's NEA affiliate and largest teachers union, has been found guilty of spending non-member dues for political purposes. Thurston County Superior Court Judge Gary Tabor fined the union $400,000 on July 31st for intentionally violating a 1992 state campaign finance reform law prohibiting such spending. The ruling is the result of a complaint filed on behalf of non-union teachers with the state Attorney General's office in June 2000 by the Evergreen Freedom Foundation (EFF), a public policy research organization based in Olympia.

The WEA requires that teachers who do not join the union must pay "agency fees" of about $600 per year for collective bargaining and other union benefits. State officials charged that the WEA illegally spent "tens of thousands" of non-member dollars on political action over the past five years after improperly depositing the money into a general fund.

Judge Tabor fined the WEA $200,000, then doubled that amount as a punitive action because the union's violations were proven intentional. He also required that the WEA pay attorneys' fees, investigative costs and court costs. The fine is expected to exceed $500,000, the largest amount ever levied against the WEA.

"WEA officials are used to breaking the law and having their way with teachers' paychecks because they think no one is big enough to stop them," says EFF executive director Lynn Harsh. "Judge Tabor has sent those union officials an expensive reminder that they are not above the law."



"To compel a man to furnish contributions of money for the propagation of opinions which he disbelieves, is sinful and tyrannical."

—Thomas Jefferson

In 1998, the WEA paid $430,000 in fines to settle a lawsuit filed by Washington Attorney General Christine Gregoire for similar violations of state law. It was one of the largest campaign-finance penalties in state history at the time. (See *Education Reporter*, December 1997 and October 1998.)

In his July 31st ruling, Judge Tabor found that Washington's Public Disclosure Commission (PDC), which is charged with upholding the state's campaign finance laws, failed to carry out its policing mission. "The PDC clearly did not move decisively to enforce this statute," he noted. "In fact, the PDC acted only when spurred by citizen complaints." Nonetheless, the judge rejected the WEA's defense claims that the PDC did not spell out "what was expected" of the union. "A person speeding down a roadway does not have the right to speed just because a police officer does not make a traffic stop when the opportunity arises," the judge stated.

On October 16, the EFF argued before the Washington Court of Appeals that the WEA "should be declared a political action committee and required to report as one, due to its extensive involvement in Washington elections."

EFF attorney Steven O'Ban stated: "The [state's] Public Disclosure Act requires full and complete disclosure of campaign contributions and expenditures. The law was intended to protect fair elections by keeping citizens informed about special interests. The WEA is a powerful political force that operates under the radar."

A decision by the Appeals Court is expected in 30 to 90 days.

Pro-Gay Curricula:

Coming Soon to a School Near You

Under the guise of "making schools safe" for "lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) students," pro-gay curricula and lesson plans are proliferating in the nation's schools. "Safe Schools" and "Anti-Violence" initiatives have been implemented in states such as Massachusetts, California and Washington, and pilot projects have been introduced in various other states, including Georgia, Indiana and Kentucky.

Pro-gay initiatives may include lesson plans, books, videos, and student assemblies. A video called *That's a Family* enjoyed a high-profile debut with an official showing at the Clinton White House in December 2000. This video for use in public schools is designed to promote the concept that there are many different types of families, all normal and equally deserving of respect. According to Family Research Council Senior Director of Cultural Studies, Robert Knight, this film "ignores overwhelming evidence that children do best with both a mother and a father."

Misleading Statistics

Observers say the use of cooked numbers to show the supposed decline of the traditional family is one means of gaining support for pro-gay indoctrination. A "Discussion/Teaching Guide" for *That's a Family* claims that "only 28% of homes today consist of a married husband and wife who are raising their biological children."

Census Bureau figures tell a different story. Independent researchers who studied the census data, including David Blankenhorn of the Institute for American Values, found that "the proportion of children living with their married biological parents remained steady at about 62% between 1991 and 1996." (The Census Bureau's own report shows an increase in traditional families from 51% in 1991 to 56% in 1996, but a bureau official later confirmed Blankenthorn's findings.)

In May 2001, columnist John Leo explained that the 2000 census report on families showed a decline in traditional families because it framed statistics "in terms of the total number of households." "Even if the number of nuclear families were rising," Leo stated, "they would likely account for a shrinking percentage of households" because Americans "live longer and marry later," and "they live alone more in youth and old age, creating more households."

(See Curricula, page 2)

Anti-Christian Play Staged at Purdue

FORT WAYNE, IN — In mid-October, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit refused to reconsider its Aug. 7 decision allowing the anti-Christian play, *Corpus Christi*, to be performed at Indiana-Purdue Fort Wayne University (IPFW). The tax-supported state institution had agreed to host six performances of the notorious Terrence McNally play about a homosexual Christ who has sex with his apostles. In the play, Christ dies as "King of the Queers."

On July 5, 32 plaintiffs, including members of Eagle Forum of Indiana and 21 state legislators, filed suit against IPFW and its board of trustees, contending that allowing the play would violate the Establishment Clause of the U.S. Constitution as well as Article I, Section IV of the Indiana Constitution. Letters to the editor of local newspapers by six Indiana state senators also helped stir public sentiment against the play.

In filing the suit, Indianapolis attorney, John Price, stated: "This is not a case about academic freedom, as IPFW claims. Academic freedom on today's Politically-Correct campuses is almost dead in any case. . . . We all know that tax funds can't be used by our government to promote a

(See Play, page 2)

EDUCATION BRIEFS

A Cato Institute study shows homeschooled students have better social skills than their public and private school counterparts. According to new research by the Vancouver, Canada-based Fraser Institute, the typical homeschooled student is friendlier, happier, more mature and competent than his peers. These findings refute the education establishment's stereotype of homeschoolers as socially deprived and maladjusted. The Institute's research, which focused on homeschooled students in North America, also reinforces the many previous studies showing that homeschoolers regularly outperform their peers academically.

Teens lack knowledge of American history, survey shows. Commissioned by the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, the survey asked 4th-grade-level questions of 1,000 teenagers aged 13-17. Nearly two of 10 students didn't know there were 13 original colonies or that the Continental Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776. One in 10 didn't know that George Washington was the first President of the United States, and nearly 1/4th didn't know who fought in the Civil War. Nearly a third couldn't name the author of the Star-Spangled Banner.

The American Academy of Pediatrics has issued its first guidelines for treating ADHD. Calling ADHD the most common "neurobehavioral disorder" in children, the guidelines recognize stimulant drugs as the most effective treatment, but also recommend behavioral treatment and disciplinary measures, such as time-outs for impulsive actions. Nearly four million children — mostly boys — have been diagnosed with ADHD.

The U.S. House of Representatives passed a non-binding resolution (404-0) in October urging public schools to display the popular expression "God Bless America." The Rutherford Institute had called on national leaders to support such a resolution, and many other organizations had expressed a similar desire for freedom of religious expression.

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Curricula *(Continued from page 1)*

Leo pointed out that the use of household statistics to make nuclear families appear in decline "is an old story in the 30-year war over the family." An earlier trick to get the percentages down, he noted, "was to count a family as nontraditional if mom had a job at all in the workforce, even just a couple of hours a week. Empty-nesters and newlyweds were not counted as traditional."

The Curricula

Pro-gay curricula use common themes and similar wording to advance an activist agenda. Many have been produced or are influenced by the Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network (GLSEN). Themes include: 1) "Diversity" training is needed to prevent violence and to assure the safety of LGBT youth in public schools; 2) A child's sexual orientation is determined by age six and is unchangeable; 3) Homosexuality must be accepted as normal; 4) References to homosexuality as a "lifestyle" or suggestions that it is a "choice" are evidence of homophobia.

◆ According to the Washington State Safe Schools Anti-Violence Documentation Project's *Curriculum for Preventing Harassment and Fostering a Climate of Respect,* K-5 children should be taught:

♦ There are no "girl colors and boy colors" or "girl games and boy games." Those are stereotypes. . . ."

♦ "Families come in all different shapes and sizes, including, among many others, two-mommie and two-daddy families. . . ."

♦ "A 'Gay' man is someone who loves another man best of all. A 'Lesbian' woman is someone who loves another woman best of all. . . ." "People who have always felt as if they were in the body of the wrong sex are called 'transsexual.' Some transsexual kids grow up and get sex change operations and some don't."

◆ The curriculum, *Preventing Prejudice: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Lesson Plans for Elementary Schools*, produced by pro-gay parents' groups and funded by the Horizons and Vanguard Foundations, consists of 16 K-5 lesson plans offering "key messages," including:

♦ "Gender stereotyping and gender roles limit us and prevent us from being who we feel like being."

♦ "There are many ways to live and love." This message, states the lesson plan, is "a good introduction to the subject of families headed by lesbians and gay men."

♦ "Respect means keeping our minds open. Having open minds means giving people freedom to be who they want to be." This K-1 lesson plan includes a story about a boy who dreams of wearing a beautiful skirt of many colors. His mother helps him make his "dream skirt" by cutting up pieces of her own clothing and sewing them together. The boy insists on wearing the skirt to his daycare center where the other children either show bewilderment or make fun of him. He runs crying to an open-minded adult who gathers the children together and asks them why they are "making fun of Jesse." The narrative demonstrates how the children build consensus through discussion. Ultimately, they decide it is okay for a boy to wear a skirt if it makes him feel good.

◆ The *Inclusive Curriculum: The Silent Minority comes to the Classroom*, by GLSEN-Los Angeles, gives K-5 teachers these suggestions:

♦ "Introduce the vocabulary. At minimum, find some time in your classroom to say the words lesbian, gay and bisexual and make sure the children understand what those words mean. . . . No one is too young to hear or say those words."

♦ "When discussing families, talk about all different kinds of families, whether or not there are those kinds in your classroom."

♦ "When you have a unit that touches on any social justice issue (the civil rights movement, for example) . . . include the lesbian and gay rights movement. If you don't feel comfortable talking about it, invite a speaker who does."

♦ For middle school and high school students, teachers are told to "incorporate gay and lesbian issues throughout the curriculum, not just in health education, but in traditional disciplines such as English, History and Science."

The *Inclusive Curriculum* presents sample lessons that have already been used in the classroom. One exercise for grades 9-12 takes students on a "chronological journey through your mind's eye of what your life might have been if you were gay." Students are guided on a "fantasy" tour through a series of life experiences at different ages, each filled with painful rejection and disappointment. In the end, the fantasy character is beaten to death by violent, anti-gay bigots.

Play *(Continued from page 1)*

religion. This case will decide if the government can use our tax funds to attack a religion on public property. . . ."

On Aug. 3, the Fort Wayne *Journal-Gazette* published a letter to the editor by Indiana Congressman Mark Souder, an IPFW alumnus. Souder wrote: "*Corpus Christi* is a pathetic, poorly written, trashy play that exists solely to upset Christians offended by its blasphemy. IPFW exists because taxpayers are forced to contribute their hard-earned dollars to support the university. . . IPFW's answer to those taxpayers has been to say, 'If you believe we have used your dollars to mock your God, just don't come to the play. Nobody is forcing you to come.' But IPFW did force everyone to pay for this play."

The appeals court ruled that "The contention that the First Amendment forbids a state university to provide a venue for the expression of views antagonistic to conventional Christian beliefs is absurd . . . . The quality or lack thereof of *Corpus Christi* and other postmodernist provocations is a matter for the state university, not for federal judges, to determine . . . ."

One member of the three-judge panel dissented: "Allowing the university to stage the play would open the floodgates for anti-religious speech where any religion could be the target of the vile and hateful speech that is from this date forward sanctioned by the government."

(*Linnemeir v. Board of Trustees of Purdue University*, No. 01-3002.)

Book of the Month

Love & Economics: ***Why the Laissez-Faire Family Doesn't Work*** by Jennifer Roback Morse, Spence Publishing Co., 2001, 234 pps, $27.95

The premise for this pro-family book is that stable, traditional, loving, and self-sacrificing families are essential to a free society. The author terms as "laissez-faire" those families in which each member pursues his own interests, regardless of the needs of the others. Such families, writes Morse, "do not work or make their members very happy."

According to Dr. Morse, "a family held together by a series of contractual understandings, even the most reasonable and elaborate, turns out to be less stable than a family held together by that vague, much misunderstood, intangible quality called love."

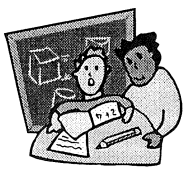
A libertarian economist by profession, Morse admits that, while laissez-faire economics works well for the system of limited government envisioned by our Founding Fathers, a similar philosophy does not work when applied to the family. She writes that basing family life on the feminist notion of individual autonomy rather than self-giving love and commitment results in social and family turmoil. In turn, this turmoil gives rise to the antithesis of a free society: the government-run family. "Raising children collectively is comparable to centrally planning an economy," she notes, which has proven to be a complete failure wherever it has been tried.

Dr. Morse points out that the family performs an irreplaceable social function, that of transforming helpless infants "from self-centered bundles of impulses, desires and emotions to fully socialized adults." She argues that only families can teach the skills necessary to preserve freedom: trust, cooperation, and self restraint. "The government cannot replace the family in this all-important task," she writes, adding that new alternative families are not adequate substitutes either. "Single and divorced parents have difficulty producing the qualities of cooperation and connectedness in their children. Likewise, children raised primarily by paid childcare providers often have social difficulties. The fact that adults voluntarily agree to a living arrangement or childcare plan does not guarantee that the needs of their children will be met."

Morse believes that, ultimately, "Without loving families, no society can long govern itself."

Call 1/888-SPENPUB, or visit www.spencepublishing.com.

FOCUS: Is This Math Fuzzy?



By Paul Clopton

Fuzzy Math refers to the many newer mathematics programs that reflect current fads in mathematics education and are generally inadequate for effective learning. The word "fuzzy" connotes "warm and fuzzy" or "fuzzy" thinking, and does not refer to advanced topics like fuzzy logic.

Many of these programs promote guessing (rather than knowing) and devote considerable time to this process.

Fuzzy Math programs emphasize process over content and even correct answers, and are deficient in mathematical depth and breadth. Fuzzy Math takes many forms, but here are some of the more common varieties:

♦ **No textbook** — Publishers are selling instructional materials including overheads, software, dice, spinners, and building blocks instead of textbooks, which have clear explanations, worked-out examples, and practice problems.

♦ **MTV** — Characterized by lots of color and pictures that often have no relationship to mathematics and do not contribute to learning, parents are right to worry that students cannot hear the mathematics amid all of the noise.

♦ **PC** — These math programs often include politically correct lessons, such as writing essays about how to save trees or whales. Grades may be based on political correctness, not math skills and knowledge.

♦ **Discover-It-Yourself** — Based on the notion that children learn what they discover on their own, this approach avoids giving direct instruction to students. Learning takes longer this way, so less material is covered, and great demands are placed on teachers and their mathematical knowledge.

♦ **Guesswork** — Many of these programs promote guessing (rather than knowing) and devote considerable time to this process. Students are encouraged to work on problems they have no idea how to solve and are discouraged from practicing methods that lead to mastery.

♦ **Anti-Algorithm** — Textbooks promoting this method may discuss many ways to multiply but fail to cover the traditional method. They often encourage the use of calculators and pay little attention to manual computation.

♦ **Project and Investigation** — Students spend a great deal of time addressing non-mathematical aspects of working on projects. A group of four students may spend a week on a project that actually requires just one student to solve a few simple problems.

♦ **Group Learning and Group Testing** — In groups, the faster students often do the work and the slower ones go along for the ride. Group learning and group testing help to equalize grades and enable failing students to pass their classes anyway.

♦ **Integrated Content** — Some argue that mathematical subjects, such as algebra and geometry, should not be taught in isolation, but should be integrated with other subjects. In practice, the mathematical development becomes so mixed up that it is impossible to determine what children should be learning at any given time. Accountability becomes impractical, and achievement suffers.

♦ **Write About It** — Based on the assumption that students should be able to explain their math, precious time is spent writing essays with very little math content. In some cases, most of the math involves figuring out margins and spacing on the word processor.

If fuzzy math has invaded your world, first determine what your children *should* be learning. See the grade level standards for math in California (http://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/math.html) or visit www.mathematically-correct.com on the internet. Next, look for less fuzzy materials your children can use both at home and at school to meet those goals. Stay involved with your children's math and monitor their progress toward the goal for each grade level. This is no easy task, but it is the only way to ensure real success.

Paul Clopton is a biomedical research statistician with the Department of Veterans Affairs in San Diego. He is a cofounder of Mathematically Correct and has worked on the California mathematics frameworks, statewide tests, and textbook adoptions in California. Reprinted by permission from the August, 2001 issue of Parent Power! Helping you make sense of schooling today, *published by The Center for Education Reform. Web: www.edreform.com. For a free e-mail subscription to* Parent Power!, *log onto www.edreform.com/parent power/signup.html.*

2+2=5: Fuzzy Math Invades Wisconsin Schools

By Leah Vukmir

During nightly homework sessions with her children in the fall of 1997, Kathy Siegmann of McFarland, Wisconsin realized she had come face-to-face with what is commonly referred to as "new-new" or "fuzzy" math. The McFarland School District had recently adopted a new math curriculum called *Investigations in Number, Data and Space*, for grades three through five, which did not include textbooks. (See box at right.) "I could not tell what my children were doing in math, nor could I look in a book to help them," she stated. Feeling frustrated and helpless, Kathy began to question school officials and to conduct her own research.

Fortunately, several other McFarland moms had also researched math programs and decided to pull their children out of school during math class and homeschool them for that hour using a more traditional math program. The parents informed the principal and teachers of their decision and, in December 1998, proceeded with their plan. Two more children subsequently joined the exodus, along with Kathy's 5th-grade son.

The children thrived under their parent's tutelage, scoring at the "advanced proficiency" level on the Wisconsin Student Assessment System (WSAS) math test. By the following school year, a total of eight families were involved in this endeavor. They did not pressure the school district to discontinue the new curriculum, but instead urged officials to consider offering a more traditional alternative that they felt would better serve all the children.

In January 2000, these parents received a letter from the school district informing them that their children would be in violation of school truancy laws if they continued to remove them from the school's math classes. The parents were allowed to finish the school year, but they faced uncertainty about the future.

'New-New' or 'Fuzzy' Math

"New-new" math is based on the notion that children understand and learn only those concepts that they "construct" or discover on their own. In small "cooperative learning" groups, children use blocks, beads, sticks and other "manipulative" objects to solve mathematical problems. Students are expected to discover or "reconstruct" the ancient rules of mathematics using these objects with the guidance of peers who are equally in the dark. This practice often extends beyond the early grades and is even found in high school algebra classes.

Rote memorization of math facts, *e.g.* multiplication tables, is considered taboo and textbooks are virtually non-existent in these bold new classrooms. Correct answers are less important than the thinking processes exhibited by the students. Students write about math instead of practicing the fundamental rules of math. Calculators and "guesswork" are encouraged even in the early grades and the fundamental operations of math, known as algorithms, are left for the child to "discover."

Parental outrage and concern over fuzzy math is certainly not confined to McFarland. According to "Parents Raising Educational Standards in Schools," a Wisconsin-based grassroots organization, math education has become the number-one concern of parents who call for information and assistance. During the past two years, concern about math education has supplanted the "Reading Wars" and is causing parents across Wisconsin and the nation to organize and rebel.

Excerpts from *Investigations In Numbers, Data and Space*

3rd Grade Worksheet

1. Suppose you can hold 150 beans in your right hand and 217 beans in your left hand. How many more beans are in your left hand? Write down how you figured this out.

2. Solve this problem three different ways. Using a calculator can be one way. Make notes about how you solved the problem. Be sure that others can understand what you did: **42+36+18=**

First way:

Second way:

Third way:

From 3rd Grade Manual (Addition)

Birthday: Pantomime holding a newborn baby in your arms. Tell students that the baby was just born, and write today's date on the board. Explain that this is the baby's birthday. Sing "Happy Birthday," and encourage students to sing with you. Ask for volunteers to sing the song in their native languages.

Students might also make a poster with the words "Happy Birthday" in all the languages spoken in the class. Have each student point to his or her birthday on the calendar. This is a good opportunity to make a graph of the months of students' birthdays.

Fuzzy Math's NCTM Origins

In 1989, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) published *Principles and Standards for School Mathematics*, a set of math standards viewed by many as the basis of today's "fuzzy" or "new-new" math curricula.

Embraced by teachers colleges long before its publication, *Principles and Standards* in essence became the bible for a progressive education theory known as "constructivism." According to critics, the document put a stamp of legitimacy on an approach to math education that had already invaded schools nationwide.

The California Experiment

Armed with this new math education manifesto, teachers across the country pushed forward with a new sense of purpose and eagerly unleashed constructivist ideology in their classrooms. California bought into "new-new" math in the early 1990s and, by 1992, had released the *California Mathematics Framework* — a document based largely on the NCTM Standards.

This unorthodox approach to teaching math was assailed by a group of California parents working largely in the mathematical and scientific fields. These parents believed their children would never be able to follow in their footsteps, given the weak skills they were developing in new-new math classrooms. Calling themselves "Mathematically Correct," these

(See Fuzzy Math, page 4)

Fuzzy Math (Continued from page 3)

parents organized through the internet and mounted a fierce opposition to California's NCTM-modeled math standards. Their Mathematically Correct web site documents the history of the "Math Wars," critiques NCTM standards, analyzes a variety of math texts and programs, and provides parents with a multitude of resources to fight "fuzzy" math in their communities.

The mathematicians and scientists who run the site warn parents that the combination of new methods and "low content levels" found in elementary schools are present in many high schools and even in college calculus. Incoming college freshmen show a decline in math achievement, causing concern about the quality of future teachers.

The Mathematically Correct parents faced an arduous task when they decided to take on California's education establishment. Nevertheless, they were buoyed by an undisputed fact: California kids scored among the lowest in the nation on the 1996 National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) math test. More than half of California's 4th-graders scored below the basic proficiency level and 49% of the state's 8th -graders had "below basic" math understanding.[1]

The combined forces of parents and mathematicians ultimately led to the development of a revised set of state math standards adopted by the California Board of Education in December 1997. The new blueprint, "California Mathematics Academic Content Standards," delineated benchmark standards for each grade level. Gone were the prescriptions for constructivist teaching methods. Finally, a set of standards that emphasized the development of basic math skills!

Mathematically Correct maintains vigilance over California's math instruction and textbook adoption. The group also serves as a resource to parents in other states who are experiencing the invasion of "new-new" math.

Wisconsin Discovers Fuzzy Math

McFarland is but one of many sleepy Wisconsin towns choosing to adopt fuzzy math. But how did a West Coast math craze make its way into America's heartland? Does the NCTM wield that much power over local decision-making processes? What factors are responsible for the invasion of "new-new" math in Wisconsin and how entrenched is this ideology in our schools?

To answer these questions we must look to three sources: Federal math program recommendations, the Wisconsin Model Academic Math Standards, and the Wisconsin Academy Staff Development Initiative.

In October 1999, a U.S. Education Department "panel" released a controversial list of 10 "exemplary" or "promising" mathematics programs. These programs reflected the pedagogical approaches to math outlined in the NCTM standards. With this list, federal education "experts" gave educators their blessing to proceed down the road to "fuzzy" math.

Fearing the effects of such an endorsement, a group of 200 highly respected university mathematicians and scholars, including several Nobel Laureates, sent an open letter to Education Secretary Richard Riley urging him to withdraw the recommendations. (See *Education Reporter*, March 2000) Warning that the programs had "serious shortcomings," they urged local districts to "exercise caution. . ."

Leah Vukmir

The education establishment has largely ignored these warnings. Many Wisconsin school districts continue to cite federal recommendations in their push to embrace the new math curricula.

Wisconsin Math Standards

A second contributing factor is the Wisconsin Model Academic Math Standards adopted in 1997. One need not dig too deep to find the NCTM influence on these standards. The introductory paragraph cites the NCTM *Curriculum and Evaluation Standards for School Mathematics* as a resource document used during standards deliberations.

Under the heading "Goals and Instructional Practice," the introduction states: "Classroom practice geared to the attainment of the Wisconsin Standards should be aimed at creating a community of learners and scholars, a place where the teachers and students actively investigate and discuss mathematical ideas, using a wide variety of tools, materials, and technology. Classes should engage students in more high-level mathematical thought and emphasize conceptual understanding, more so than in the past."[2]

Similar strains of "constructivism" echo throughout the document.

WASDI

Perhaps the most powerful influence on Wisconsin's move toward "fuzzy" math is the Wisconsin Academy Staff Development Initiative (WASDI). Most Wisconsin citizens are likely unaware of this $6-million dollar project funded by a National Science Foundation grant. However, WASDI is a very familiar resource for Wisconsin math and science teachers. The goal of WASDI is "To totally transform the way technology education, mathematics and science are taught. It's not just reading the chapter and memorizing terms and filling in the blanks at the end of the chapter. It's hands-on learning."[3]

To that end, WASDI sponsors a series of one-week summer "academies" throughout Wisconsin where participants can earn graduate credits for learning new approaches to math, science and technology instruction. Over 2000 teachers participate in these workshops each year at 11 sites across the state.

WASDI also takes an active role in developing teachers as future leaders through its "Lead Teacher Institute." According to the web site, teachers completing this eight-week "Institute" serve as local, state, and regional state resources to their schools, other districts and state associations. They present a core curriculum at the summer academies, specifically one that "uses a constructivist approach to teaching,"and network with other "Lead" teachers throughout the state.

At the helm of this ambitious "new-new" math project is Dr. Billie Earl Sparks, co-project director of WASDI. A math professor at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, Sparks also teaches math "content" to the university's education students.

According to Sparks, WASDI has trained 337 "Lead" teachers over the past six years. He explained that the National Science Foundation (NSF) has been a leader in advancing new math approaches across the country by providing grants to groups willing to write math curricula that match the NCTM Standards. Currently, 13 NSF-sponsored curricula are available to local districts.[4]

Dr. Sparks can best be described as a standard bearer for "constructivist" math in Wisconsin, and his fervor for the cause is evident. In September 2000, he gave an impassioned presentation entitled "Mathematics Education: Past, Present, and Future," at a public forum at McFarland School. He described the philosophy behind the district's recent adoption of *Investigations in Numbers, Data and Space*, (see box, page 3), a controversial NCTM-based math program that spurred Kathy Siegmann and the McFarland parents into action.

During his talk, Sparks emphatically asserted that math skills should not be taught in isolation. In classrooms today, students are expected to "explore" with their classmates until they find the skill that will solve the problem. As they explore, teachers intervene and teach skills as they arise. This is how math becomes meaningful, Sparks believes, and how children will more likely remember the skill.[5]

According to Harvard University Math Professor, Dr. Wilfried Schmid, there is some value in the practices Sparks describes. "They are used by good teachers all over the world. The problem arises when these ideas are pushed to the point of becoming an ideology — as they are in the *Investigations in Numbers, Data and Space* math program."

Dr. Schmid ought to know. Last year, his 2nd -grade daughter, Sabina, was enrolled in this program. He said she was not allowed to add two-digit numbers by carrying tens, despite the fact that she knew perfectly well how to do so. Instead, her teacher insisted that she demonstrate her work with blocks or by counting on her fingers.[6] Today, Dr. Schmid is a vocal critic of constructivist math programs.

As fuzzy math gradually encroaches into more and more Wisconsin school districts and the debate rages on, Wisconsin parents are not waiting idly for the experts to reach a consensus of opinion. Time does not stand still for young children at critical ages when fundamental math principles must be learned. Parents are finding their own ways to deal with the flaws they see in the new curricula.

In McFarland, some parents have enrolled their children in private schools. Others have left the district or hired private tutors. Still other parents have been forced to put their children back into the very math classes that started the controversy. These parents hope to counter the negative effects of "fuzzy" math by tutoring their children at home.

For Kathy Siegmann, the "new-new" math curricula has become more than a personal issue. She is concerned about its long-term effects on the entire community and has decided to stand up for her beliefs, even if it means being "a lone voice on the school board." Only three families from the original group of parents continue to fight in McFarland. Sadly, it appears that their children's fate may ultimately lie in the hands of a court rather than in the hands of parents.

Notes

1. NAEP scores can be found at the National Center for Educational Statistics web site: www.nces.ed.gov/index.html.
2. Wisconsin Model Academic Standards Home Page: 7. www.dpi.state.wi.us/standards/index.html.
3. www.wasdi.org.
4. Information obtained in a phone conversation with Dr. Sparks, December 2000.
5. Taped presentation, McFarland School District, September 2000.
6. Anemona Hartocollis, "The New, Flexible Math Meets Parental Rebellion," *New York Times*, April 27, 2000.

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