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A WEEA Bit Unnecessary?

WASHINGTON, DC — A new report by the Heritage Foundation contends that the Women's Educational Equity Act (WEEA), one of 61 programs contained in the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) now pending before Congress, is unjustified. The report, *Wasting Education Dollars: The Women's Educational Equity Act*, asserts that the rationale for WEEA "has repeatedly been refuted both by statistical evidence and by practical experience."

Enacted 27 years ago and reauthorized by Congress ever since despite a lack of evidence that it is either needed or effective, WEEA's premise is that public education shortchanges females and that this situation must be addressed by the federal government. The Heritage report notes that, while "programs created under WEEA have cost taxpayers roughly \$100 million," a 1994 U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) review of the law's goals and strategies found that there were no evaluations of WEEA projects and thus "little evidence" of their "effectiveness in eliminating sex bias in education." Yet WEEA remains part of the federal education bill, H.R. 1 and S. 1 (still in conference committee as of this writing).

There is evidence, writes Heritage Foundation Senior Education Policy Analyst and the report's author, Krista Kafer, that "the problem WEEA programs were created to address may not even exist."

(See below.) A 2000 U.S. Department of Education study analyzed 44 gender-equity indicators, including academic achievement and behavioral outcomes, and found: "By most of these measures, females are doing at least as well as males." A recent



Academically, girls fare as well as boys.

report called *Differences in the Gender Gap*, by the Educational Testing Service (ETS), also concluded: "Females have made dramatic progress in educational attainment, across all racial/ethnic groups, pulling even with (and in some cases surpassing) males . . ."

Wasting Education Dollars warns that focusing on a non-existent problem such as gender inequity "diverts funds and attention from the real — and critical — problems in America's educational system," such as disparities in achievement among racial and economic groups and an overall decline in academic achievement. The report argues that "incorporating free-market principles into the federal education system would allow educators to target funding to areas they believe will be the most helpful in improving the academic achievement of children in their schools." In other words — promote local control — the solution advocated by supporters of traditional education for years.

Kafer argues that, instead of "scattering funds" among "duplicative, irrelevant and wasteful" programs, we should "channel our education resources where they will be most effective."

Warning: 'Controversial Theory' Presented Here Alabama adopts textbook insert

MONTGOMERY, AL — The Alabama Board of Education voted Nov. 8 to include in all biology textbooks a new insert cautioning students that evolution is "a controversial theory." The wording for this disclaimer (see box, page 3) was taken almost directly from the preface of the *Alabama Course of Study - Science*. Board member Stephanie Bell introduced the motion to adopt the resolution.

"This is a very positive development," says Eunie Smith, president of Alabama Eagle Forum, one of several pro-family groups that strongly supported the disclaimer. "We were pleased and gratified that the insert was adopted and that there was so little opposition."

Textbooks submitted for consideration in Alabama are required to conform to the state-approved course of study. "Regrettably," writes educator and textbook reviewer Norris Anderson, "biology textbooks submitted this year fail to comply with this reasonable directive for the teaching of origins."

In his 17-page analysis, *Education or Indoctrination 2001, An Analysis of Biol-*

ogy Textbooks Submitted for Adoption to the State of Alabama,* Anderson notes that "biology textbooks, knowingly or unknowingly, promote the philosophy of naturalism under the guise of 'science.' The evolutionary interpretations presented in the textbooks rest on the underlying unverifiable, philosophical, religious view of nature that the origin of all life forms, including man, is due to purposeless, random, and materialistic processes. This belief, that matter has the ability to organize itself into higher levels, is presented as factual scientific knowledge."



Stephanie Bell

Textbook Indoctrination

Examples of controversial statements uncovered by Anderson in the 14 textbooks eligible for adoption in Alabama include:

♦ "Life is a magnificent continuation of the physical and chemical evolution of the universe, of galaxies and stars, and of the planet Earth." *Biology Concepts and Applications*, 4th Ed., 2000, p. 291

♦ "Many people believe that a supernatu-
(See Theory, page 2)

*Read Norris Anderson's complete analysis at <http://www.alabamaeagle.org>

♀ Gender Inequity? Not for Girls! ♂

"Girls do well academically," states the Heritage Foundation's new report, *Wasting Education Dollars: The Women's Educational Equity Act*. "If anything, recent studies should raise concerns about boys." Research shows:

♦ **Girls outscore boys in reading.** The 1999 NAEP long-term trend reading assessment showed girls outperforming boys on average scores in all three age groups tested (9, 13 and 17 years). By age 17, the reading gap favored girls by 14 points. (1999 NAEP test results and 1999 NAEP "Trends in Academic Progress")

♦ **Girls outscore boys in writing.** On the 1998 NAEP "Writing Report Card for the Nation," girls scored higher on average than boys at all three grade levels tested. Twice as many girls scored in the "proficient" and "advanced" categories as boys. By the 12th grade, the average score for girls was 19 points higher than that of boys.

♦ **Girls outscore boys in civics and the arts,** outperforming boys at every grade level. (National Center for Education Statistics, "1998 Civics Report

Card for the Nation")

♦ **Girls hold their own in math.** The 1999 NAEP long-term trend math assessment shows little difference between girls' and boys' scores for all grades tested. The 2000 NAEP mathematics test shows only a slight difference.

♦ **Girls are more likely to graduate from high school and college.** (OERI, *Degrees and Other Awards Conferred by Title IV Eligible, Degree-Granting Institutions: 1996-97*, NCES 2000-174, November 1999)

♦ **Boys are twice as likely to be enrolled in special education programs.** Boys are four times more likely than girls to be diagnosed with learning disabilities. (R.D. Nass, "Sex Differences in Learning Abilities and Disabilities," *Annals of Dyslexia*, Vol. 43, 1993)

♦ **Boys are more likely to experience academic or behavioral problems.** Boys are more likely to repeat a grade, get suspended, or be involved with drugs, alcohol and crime. (OERI, *Trends in Educational Equity*, p. 39-41; Christina Hoff Summers, *The War Against Boys*, 2000)

25% of Students Fail to Graduate

NEW YORK, NY — A groundbreaking new report by the Manhattan Institute and the Black Alliance for Educational Options (BAEO), called *High School Graduation Rates in the United States*, shows that more than one-fourth of all public school students from the class of 1998 failed to graduate from high school. The report was issued Nov. 13 and reveals that nearly half of African-American and Latino students drop out, as do significant numbers of white students in many school districts throughout the country.

The report shows that the national graduation rate for the class of 1998 was 74%. Graduation rates were 78% for whites, 56% for African-Americans and 54% for Latino students. Research on graduation rates for the individual states shows considerable variation in both overall rates and on the rates for each racial/ethnic group.

Researchers obtained sufficient data to calculate graduation percentages for 37 states for 1998. Iowa had the highest overall rate (93%), along with the highest percentage of white graduates (95%). Wisconsin and North Dakota ranked second and third overall with an 87% graduation

rate, but Wisconsin had the worst rate for African-American graduates at 40%. Georgia came in last with an overall graduation rate of 57%, and Georgia also had the lowest graduation rates for white students (61%) and Latino students (32%). Tennessee had the second-lowest rate overall with 59%.

West Virginia had the highest graduation rate for African-American students at 71%, followed by Massachusetts (70%) and Arkansas (67%). Montana had the highest Latino graduation rate (82%), followed by Louisiana and Maryland, each with 70%.

Researchers also studied 1998 graduation rates for the nation's 50 largest school districts. Cleveland, Ohio (38th-largest of the 50 districts evaluated) had the lowest overall rate with only 28% of students receiving a diploma in 1998. Public schools in Albuquerque, New Mexico, ranked highest with an overall graduation rate of 83%, followed by Anne Arundel County Public Schools in Maryland at 71%. Among the nation's largest school districts, New York City had just 54% of students graduating in

(See Graduate, page 4)

EDUCATION BRIEFS

"You can serve your country by tutoring or mentoring a child," was one of President Bush's suggestions during his Nov. 8 address to the nation, when he discussed how Americans can help in the war against terrorism.

Sex ed teachers in Frederick County, Maryland, can't tell students to save sex for marriage. A new curriculum change approved by the school board allows teachers to encourage abstinence as "a healthy, safe and responsible decision for adolescents," but forbids them to advise students to wait until marriage before having sex. One board member said it was "unrealistic" to tell students to abstain and that linking sex to marriage constituted a "religious belief" that should not be taught in the public schools.

New study finds most students have inflated self-esteem. Research by Dr. Jean Twenge of San Diego State University shows that American students' sense of themselves, particularly by college age, often surpasses their abilities and accomplishments. Twenge found that, while high self-esteem may provide more satisfaction with life, it can also set young people up for disappointment. She blames the self-esteem movement in the schools, which places more emphasis on feel-good slogans than actual accomplishment.

A Vermont teacher was fired for showing movies containing graphic sexual scenes and profanity. Green Mountain High School teacher Jay Van Stechelmann was removed by the school board for showing the movies without parental notification or the approval of the principal. Also cited in the firing was his description of the Christian church as "male-dominated" and its physical design as "phallic."

Aztec human sacrifice is part of Hispanic studies classes at California high schools. The *Orange County Register* reported (6/19/01) that one teacher plunged a knife into a jello "heart" to create excitement for the class.

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Theory (Continued from page 1)

ral force or deity created life. That explanation is not within the scope of science." *BCS Biology A Molecular Approach*, 8th Ed., Everyday Learning Corporation, 2001, p. 446

◆ "Your choice of the 'right' answer to the question of the morality of abortion will be just that — your choice." *Biology Concepts and Applications*, p. 666

◆ "Witnesses in a court of law are asked to 'swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.' What are some of the problems inherent in the question? Can you think of a better alternative?" *Ibid.*, p. 18

◆ "Like all other forms of life, humans are products of evolution by natural selection." *Biology Living Systems*, Glencoe, 1998, p. 352

◆ "Although this chapter looks at human evolution in detail, there is no basic difference between our evolution and the evolution of other species." *BCS Biology A Molecular Approach*, p. 519

◆ "To understand the story of human evolution, we must understand both our ancestry and our relationship to our closest living kin." *Modern Biology*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 2002, p. 319

Anderson states that biology textbooks "are written in order to convince students that Darwin was right. They present Darwinian evolution as the most important central, unifying, and productive idea in biological science." Yet the most common examples used to "prove" evolution have been disproven, such as "Darwin's Finches." (See "Ten Questions to Ask Your Biology Teacher. . . ." page 3.)

The Alabama Department of Education's science expert, Robin Long, distributed a list noting erroneous inclusions in new biology textbooks to members of the state textbook committee. His list showed that 11 of the 14 adoptable textbooks contain the notorious "Darwin's Finches" example. Twelve books present the discredited "vertebrate embryos" as evidence of common ancestry, and all but one (*Fearon's Biology*, Globe Fearon, 1998) present at least two disproven "icons" of evolution.

Poll/Scientists Support Insert

The results of a nationwide Zogby

poll conducted this summer provided both overwhelming public support and impressive scientific validation for the Alabama textbook insert. The poll found that 71% of American adults agree with the statement: "Biology teachers should teach Darwin's theory of evolution, but also the scientific evidence against it."

In addition, 100 scientists from across the United States and several other countries, representing the fields of biology, physics, chemistry, mathematics, geology, anthropology, and others, signed the statement: "I am skeptical of the claims for the ability of random mutation and natural selection to account for the complexity of life. Careful examination of the evidence for Darwinian theory should be encouraged."

The signers included professors and researchers from Princeton, MIT, the University of Pennsylvania, Tulane, and the National Laboratories at Livermore, California and Los Alamos, New Mexico.

Among Alabama's scientific community, 83 members supported the adoption of a "meaningful textbook insert," in light of current textbook deficiencies and presentations of discredited information.

Important Questions

Although Alabama Eagle Forum, the Alabama Christian Coalition, and many of the state's scientists, parents and citizens are pleased with the textbook insert, they believe a better solution is scientifically-accurate textbooks.

"There are two important questions we need to be asking in this debate," asserts Eunie Smith. "First, why are there no transitional forms between phyla in the fossil record? Secondly, how did all living things come to possess such a complete and complex set of 'instructions' for building a living body? These questions need to be widely presented and thoroughly explored."

In 1996, Alabama became the first and only state to place a disclaimer sticker in public school textbooks warning students of the controversial nature of the evolution theory. However, the issue has been debated in other states as well, including Arizona, Illinois, Kansas, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Texas.



Norris Anderson

Book of the Month



Modern Sex: Liberation and Its Discontents; Edited by Myron Magnet, Ivan R. Dee Publishers, 2001, 210 pps, \$28.50

Modern Sex is not a contemporary "how-to," but a sobering collection of essays on the sexual revolution's tragic consequences. Articles by six respected authors, including Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, Kay S. Hymowitz, and Wendy Shalit, originally published in the Manhattan Institute's prestigious *City Journal*, expose the painful and costly failure of the sexual revolution.

Since its beginning in the 1960s,



the sexual revolution has successfully promoted the fallacy that, if people would only forget their sexual inhibitions, they would be happy and fulfilled.

But as *Modern Sex* demonstrates, the unhappy truth is that sex has become more mechanical and without commitment, the family is weakened, children are sexualized at ever-earlier ages, and relationships between men and women are often shallow and temporary. Instead of the "promised bliss," writes *City Journal* editor Myron Magnet in his introduction, "what you see after all the coupling is a profound sadness."

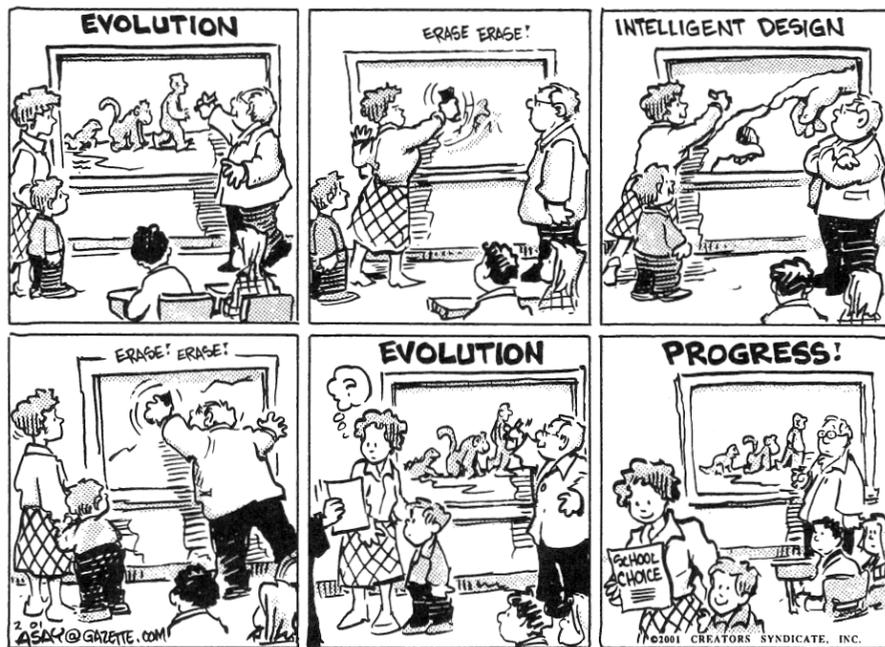
Modern Sex demonstrates that the centuries-old concept of sex in concert with romance, morality and marriage has not been lost by accident. Feminism played a critical role in its destruction, insisting that traditional "gender roles" are imposed upon women by social convention fabricated by and for men. Ironically, as Barbara Whitehead points out, while women have been the sexual liberation movement's "principle ideological advocates," men have been "its principal beneficiaries."

Whitehead notes that there was one area in which the feminists were unsuccessful; they failed to realize the natural desire of most women to have babies. "If single women had the right to abortion, they also had the right to have and keep their babies. Thus the right not to have a baby became the right to have a baby."

Another sad result of the sexual revolution is the corruption of children through sex education. In her essay, "Sex Ed's Dead End," Wendy Shalit notes that the desensitization begins in kindergarten, with condom lessons by 9th grade. In "Tweens: Ten Going on Sixteen," Kay Hymowitz writes of "pregnant 6th graders" and oral sex among 7th and 8th graders.

Author/ philosopher Roger Scruton offers this remedy for our woeful situation: "bring back shame and stigma."

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FOCUS: NAEP Secure From Parents Only



By Julie M. Quist

Editor's Note: The following article is the Maple River Education Coalition's (MREdCo) response to criticism of its decision to post excerpts of the 1996 NAEP reading and writing long-term trend test on its web site (<http://www.mredco.com>). Federal officials called the posting "the first significant security breach in the 32 years of the NAEP."

The National Assessment Governing Board calls MREdCo's posting of the 1996 NAEP questions a "security breach." The truth is that the supposed "security" of the NAEP extends only to parents. Everyone else seems to have access! Any branch of government and many corporations have total access to NAEP questions and to the detailed data gathering NAEP conducts on students, schools, teachers, private homes, and communities. The RAND Corporation, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the engineering firm MPR Associates, Stanford University, and the National Goals Panel are just a few known examples of groups with access to the NAEP questions and databases.

So why are parents denied access to the NAEP questions? Could it be because two-thirds of these test questions concern personal information and family habits? Of the remaining third, many questions are designed to measure students' personal opinions and assess viewpoints. Many parents would disagree with the questions or find the content objectionable, *i.e.*, radical environmentalism, spiri-

tuality (earth-worship), promotion of native mythology and denigration of Christianity, radical feminism, and the humanistic value system, all of which are woven throughout the curriculum. Also included is the assumption that personal worth is measured by employment.

All of this is part of the new national curriculum, and the NAEP is becoming the primary measuring stick for how well it is being taught.

Furthermore, with Congress about to pass new federal legislation (H.R. 1, S. 1), the NAEP will instantly be transformed from the "Nation's Report Card" to the national dictator of curriculum in all schools throughout the country. Tests always drive the curriculum, and a national test will force a national curriculum.

The new national core curriculum as defined by the NAEP test consists of:

- ◆ Diversity — All cultures are equal, except for American culture, which is inferior;
- ◆ New Age religion: all religions are equal, except biblical Christianity, which is inferior;
- ◆ Radical environmentalism — we are not the stewards of the Earth; the Earth is the steward of us;
- ◆ A broad range of humanistic values, including feminism; and
- ◆ All education is vocational.

You will find this core curriculum established and measured by the NAEP test, which will be used under H.R. 1 to evaluate and set the guidelines for the states' own assessment systems. The NAEP also sets the guidelines for *all* nationally norm-referenced tests.

Over the past several years, a transformation of the national norm-referenced tests has taken place. All of them have become aligned with the same national core curriculum. This transformation was predicted and described by Marc Tucker, the premier architect of the new federal education system, and Executive Director of the National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE - [ww.ncee.org](http://www.ncee.org)).

In his book, *Thinking For A Living*, Tucker describes the transformation this way: "The object is to create a national examination system in which states, districts, and even schools can select from many examinations, but with the passing level in all of these examinations set to the same standard . . . In this way, the nation could have a unified examination system without requiring everyone to use the same test." (p.147)

In short, the national norm-referenced tests are all being aligned with the national curriculum, just as in Tucker's design. Even private school students and most homeschooled children will be measured by their compliance with the new national core curriculum.

States will be subject to rewards and sanctions based on their conformity with the NAEP, which begs the question: What business does the federal government have dictating the attitudes and values our local schools must teach?

Does anyone really think that a test with this much power should *not* be reviewed and critiqued by the public? Other nationally norm-referenced tests, such as the Iowa Basics tests, are available for viewing. Why not the NAEP?

The NAEP has been marketed to the public for over three decades as an academic achievement assessment. If the NAEP were available to the public, parents would demand that it be rewritten to focus on basic academic knowledge. They would further demand that the offensive, intrusive propaganda, and the questions calculated to measure the worldview of America's families be eliminated.

Julie Quist is vice president of MREdCo, a nonprofit, Minnesota-based organization that "carefully and thoroughly researches the new federal education and workforce system."

Ten Questions

To Ask Your Biology Teacher About Evolution

1. **Origin of Life.** Why do textbooks claim that the 1953 Miller-Urey experiment shows how life's building blocks may have formed on the early Earth — when conditions on the early Earth were probably nothing like those used in the experiment, and the origin of life remains a mystery?
2. **Darwin's Tree of Life.** Why don't textbooks discuss the "Cambrian explosion," in which all major animal groups appear together in the fossil record fully formed instead of branching from a common ancestor — thus contradicting the evolutionary tree of life?
3. **Homology.** Why do textbooks define homology as similarity due to common ancestry, then claim that it is evidence for common ancestry — a circular argument masquerading as scientific evidence?
4. **Vertebrate Embryos.** Why do textbooks use drawings of similarities in vertebrate embryos as evidence for their common ancestry — even though biologists have known for over a century that vertebrate embryos are not most similar in their early stages, and the drawings are faked?
5. **Archaeopteryx.** Why do textbooks portray this fossil as the missing link between dinosaurs and modern birds — even though modern birds are probably not descended from it, and its supposed ancestors do not appear until millions of years after it?
6. **Peppered Moths.** Why do textbooks use pictures of peppered moths camouflaged on tree trunks as evidence for natural selection — when biologists have known since the 1980s that the moths don't normally rest on tree trunks, and all the pictures have been staged?
7. **Darwin's Finches.** Why do textbooks claim that beak changes in Galapagos finches during a severe drought can explain the origin of species by natural selection — even though the changes were reversed after the drought ended, and no net evolution occurred?
8. **Mutant Fruit Flies.** Why do textbooks use fruit flies with an extra pair of wings as evidence that DNA mutations can supply raw materials for evolution — even though the extra wings have no muscles and these disabled mutants cannot survive outside the laboratory?
9. **Human Origins.** Why are artists' drawings of ape-like humans used to justify materialistic claims that we are just animals and our existence is a mere accident — when fossil experts cannot even agree on who our supposed ancestors were or what they looked like?
10. **Evolution a Fact?** Why are we told that Darwin's theory of evolution is a scientific fact — even though many of its claims are based on misrepresentations of the facts?

Alabama Biology Textbook Insert



Adopted 2001



The word "theory" has many meanings. Theories are defined as systematically organized knowledge, abstract reasoning, a speculative idea or plan, or a systematic statement of principles. Scientific theories are based on both observations of the natural world and assumptions about the natural world. They are always subject to change in view of new and confirmed observations.

Many scientific theories have been developed over time. The value of scientific work is not only the development of theories but also what is learned from the development process. The *Alabama Course of Study: Science* includes many theories and studies of scientists' work. The work of Copernicus, Newton, and Einstein, to name a few, has provided a basis of our knowledge of the world today.

The theory of evolution by natural selection is a controversial theory that is included in this textbook. It is controversial because it states that natural selection provides the basis for the modern scientific explanation for the diversity of living things.

Since natural selection has been observed to play a role in influencing small changes in a population, it is assumed that it produces large changes, even though this has not been directly observed. Because of its importance and implications, students should understand the nature of evolutionary theories. They should learn to make distinctions between the multiple meanings of evolution, to distinguish between observations and assumptions used to draw conclusions, and to wrestle with the unanswered questions and unresolved problems still faced by evolutionary theory.

There are many unanswered questions about the origin of life. With the explosion of new scientific knowledge in biochemical and molecular biology and exciting new fossil discoveries, Alabama students may be among those who use their understanding and skills to contribute to knowledge and to answer many unanswered questions. Instructional materials associated with controversy should be approached with an open mind, studied carefully, and critically considered.

'Kidstuff' Brings the Nanny State to Alabama

MONTGOMERY, AL — The national push to install a "cradle to grave" monitoring and tracking system for every American child has come to Alabama under the guise of an early childhood education program called Kidstuff. Alabama Governor Don Siegelman launched the program last January with Executive Order No. 42, which created the Governor's Commission on Early Learning. At the end of July, Siegelman unveiled the commission's 80-page report detailing a "45-step strategy designed to improve early learning for all of Alabama's children." The Governor has appointed the state's first "children's commissioner," and Kidstuff early learning centers are being expanded from eight sites to 43.

When fully implemented, the Kidstuff strategies advocated in the commission's report are projected to cost in excess of \$300 million. This staggering sum is justified, proponents say, because "quality early-learning programs" improve school performance, increase the likelihood of high school graduation, enhance job opportunities, and reduce crime, particularly among low-income children, thus saving the state millions in welfare and other societal costs. Advocates claim that 2/3 of Alabama's children are in some form of child care environment anyway, and that Kidstuff will ultimately "save \$7 for every one dollar spent."

Many researchers, pro-family groups, parents and citizens, however, are concerned that these savings projections are inflated, and that the program's costs will ultimately become a cumbersome burden for taxpayers. They also fear that the real purpose of Kidstuff is to increase state intrusion into family life.

The Perry Project

Critics charge that the Early Learning Commission report is based on the unproven assumption that all children benefit from programs such as Kidstuff, and that early intervention makes a critical difference in many children's lives. An experiment known as the Perry Preschool Project is frequently cited in the report as

proof of this assumption, and Perry's favorable results are popular with many proponents of universal preschool. But the Alabama Policy Institute points out in its recently-released analysis of early learning programs, *From Cradle to Kindergarten*, that the 27-year Perry Project "was a specialized program directed at a very particular and unrepresentative group of 58 borderline-educable, mentally retarded minority children."

"Even if Perry did produce enormous results for this very small and very disadvantaged group of children," notes the analysis, "it is inaccurate to suggest that a random early intervention program directed at any segment of the population would produce the same results."

Nevertheless, advocates of preschool programs including Kidstuff persist in claiming that programs not directed at disadvantaged children will produce the same savings to society as the Perry Project.

An Expert Speaks

In an August interview on Alabama's public television program, *For the Record*, Professor Alfred Baumeister, Ph.D., former director of the Kennedy Center for Research and Human Development at Vanderbilt University, refuted some of the Early Learning Commission report's claims. Baumeister stated that the overarching problem with the report is that it is "based on a shaky scientific foundation." He argued that it "misappropriates, misinterprets and selectively uses" science.

Responding to proponents' insistence that placing children in "quality" child-care centers is essential to their later academic and social success, Baumeister stated: "The ordinary range of environments American children encounter are sufficient for them to develop normally. The idea that parents must do this or that during a critical period, from ages one to

three, for example, is a fallacious argument."

"Even under what we might consider deprived conditions," he continued, "excluding severe deprivations, children develop quite adequately."

Of particular concern to Baumeister and others is the commission's statement that "The old 'nature vs. nurture' debate is over," which assumes as fact that "it is the child's surroundings — particularly the child's relationship with significant others — that make a child's potential possible." Baumeister maintains that this assumption "is wrong," and that an enormous amount of a child's capacity to develop is genetic.

According to Baumeister, vast amounts of research show that pre-kindergarten programs make no difference in a child's development, and that they may even have harmful effects. "The money that will be spent on Kidstuff," he advised, "would be much better spent on K-12 education programs."

Commission Report Excerpts

The Early Learning report bemoans the fact that "Alabama has no comprehensive system for the identification of families and children in need of special services," and that "no comprehensive database exists concerning number, location, and pertinent information [on] children, childcare facilities, and services for children and families." The following are excerpts of some of the remedies the Early Learning commission recommends:

- ◆ Expand and utilize a database of services and providers both at the state and local levels.
- ◆ Develop a universal form for the evaluation of needs and delivery of services for every child born in Alabama.
- ◆ Utilize a database of all children to evaluate, communicate, and assess the needs of children and families. . . .
- ◆ Consolidate services for families and children into one comprehensive system to provide better services with fewer instances of duplication.
- ◆ Develop a secure and confidential information network that combines data from many state agencies and care providers concerning children from birth to age five. To achieve that goal: 1) Electronically enroll each newborn in all Alabama hospitals in an information network

Other research demonstrates that students are entering high school ill-prepared to do the work. A Philadelphia study in 1999-2000 found that 20% of the city's 9th-graders "received F's in core courses," with 40% passing only half their courses. The report suggested that students with such difficulties are candidates for dropping out. A study of nearly 3,000 Philadelphia 9th-graders beginning in 1996 showed that only 46% of them graduated four years later, and that 2/3 of the dropouts had failed in the 9th grade.

The BAO believes "it is unaccept-

able that Black America's long-held goal of racial and ethnic diversity among our nation's economic and political leadership is undermined by the massive failure of our young people to graduate from high school."

The 'Smart Start' Model

Kidstuff is modeled after the Smart Start program in North Carolina, which was instituted by former Governor Jim Hunt in 1993. Smart Start was touted as a "public-private partnership" providing quality child care, health care, and other family support services. Smart Start has received favorable reviews in the media, but has it made a real difference?

According to North Carolina's John Locke Foundation, four studies on Smart Start released between early 1998 and the fall of 1999 show that the program has "little benefit for most children once they reach school."

The Alabama Policy Institute's *From Cradle to Kindergarten* describes the "Six-County Study of the Effects of Smart Start Child Care on Kindergarten Entry Skills," conducted by the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. The study compared children who attended a Smart Start center for at least eight months to children in other care settings, and found that "children who attended Smart Start child care centers had skills similar to children in the comparison group."

The authors of the study "found a difference only when they broke the Smart Start children into two groups: 1) Smart Start children who attended centers participating in activities directly related to improving child care quality; and 2) Smart Start children who attended centers that did not participate in activities directly related to improving child care quality." In other words, the children improved when intensive and extraordinary means were employed, but "the vast majority of Smart Start expenditures had no statistically significant effect on participants' readiness to learn in kindergarten."

The question many Alabama citizens are asking is, "Will the results of Kidstuff be any better?" Many predict that the answer will be "no."

"Kidstuff and other similar programs are the result of Goals 2000's Goal #1, that 'All children will start school ready to learn,'" notes Alabama Eagle Forum's Betty Peters. "Proponents of Kidstuff insist that 'quality,' is the critical word in child care, but many people believe that the truly critical word is 'control' — meaning government control over our families and our lives."

Graduate (Continued from page 1)

1998, while Los Angeles had 56% and the Chicago School District had a 47% graduation rate.

The BAO commissioned the Manhattan Institute study when it was unable to obtain accurate information on dropout rates for black students. In the report's foreword, BAO President and CEO Kaleem Caire writes that U.S. Department of Education officials admitted using inflated figures for black students earning high school diplomas because, "in addition to students who actually graduated, their data included recipients of so-called high school 'equivalency' diplomas." Department officials also explained that "the federal government stopped reporting on the number of 9th-graders that completed high school in four years because it painted 'too bad a picture of produc-

tivity of the nation's public schools.'"

According to *Education Week* (1-24-01), a series of research reports issued last year indicate that "federal and state dropout data underestimate the number of students who drop out and overestimate the number who earn high school diplomas each year, especially minority students." These reports were commissioned by the Civil Rights Project at Harvard, and Achieve Inc., a non-profit group based in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

When the results came in, a spokesman for the Civil Rights Project described many urban schools as "dropout factories." The findings showed that the dropout problem is "most desperate" in 200 to 300 schools in 35 of the nation's larger cities.

