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Court Denies Ridgewood Rehearing

RIDGEWOOD, NJ — The Third U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals on January 15 denied a petition by the Ridgewood School District to rehear the court's decision to allow a parents' lawsuit to go forward. The parents filed suit against Ridgewood two years ago, after their children were given a survey asking for personal information without their knowledge or consent.

The lawsuit charges that the "Search Institute, Profiles of Student Life" survey was self-incriminating and that the school district required students to take it, thus violating their First Amendment right not to speak. When a District Court ruled in favor of the school board, the parents appealed. After the Appeals Court announced its decision, the board immediately petitioned the court for a rehearing.

In denying the request, the court stated: "The petition filed by appellees having been submitted to the panel of judges who participated in the decision of this court, and no judge who concurred in the decision having asked for rehearing, the Appellees' Petition for Panel Rehearing is hereby DENIED."

The parent-plaintiffs say they feel vindicated by the panel's decision. "All we want is the right to move forward into 'discovery,'" explained one parent, "which means a full examination of all the evidence and the taking of depositions. If district officials did everything the way they were supposed to — as they claim they have — in administering the survey, why are they so afraid of discovery?"

Ridgewood Parents Wonder if New Law Will Stop Nosy Questionnaires

RIDGEWOOD, NJ — New Jersey has a new law requiring the state's public schools to obtain written parental consent before administering surveys to students asking for personal information. This law expands the federal Pupil and Parents Rights Act (PPRA) by applying the consent requirement to all nosy surveys, not only those paid for with federal dollars. (See *Education Reporter*, January 2002.)

The New Jersey law was drafted two years ago in response to a 1999 Search Institute survey asking for personal information, which was given to 2,100 students in the Ridgewood School District without parental knowledge or consent and using federal Goals 2000 funds. Several parents filed a lawsuit against the district and, in December 2001, the Third Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that the suit could go forward to prove constitutional and legal violations. Also in December, the U.S. Department of Education found the Ridgewood District in violation of the PPRA for administering the survey without prior written permission from parents. (See sidebar, page 2)

The new law should put an end to nosy questionnaires in Ridgewood and all other public school districts in New Jersey, but some parents wonder if and when this will happen. Last April, despite the pending legislation, litigation, and the ongoing Education Department investigation, a teacher at the George Washington Middle School in the Ridgewood District gave 7th and 8th graders another questionnaire seeking personal information. Titled "How Am I," this survey was copied from a health magazine and asked 12- and 13-year-old students 55 personal questions, including:

◆ Have you ever driven a car after drinking alcohol, or ridden with a driver who seemed impaired?

◆ Are there guns in your home or the homes of your friends?

◆ Are you engaging in risky sexual behavior (multiple partners, no protection from STDs or unwanted pregnancy, etc.)?

◆ Has your life changed significantly in the past year (e.g., through illness, your parents' divorce, a death in the family, financial problems, a move to another city)?

◆ Are you continually worrying or anxious about anything?

◆ Do you often think about yourself in negative terms (stupid, worthless, unlovable, etc.)?

◆ Do you feel strong connections to family?

◆ Do you drink beer, wine, or other alcoholic beverages?

◆ If you drink, do you drink intending to get drunk?

◆ Have you used any kind of drugs, including over-the-counter or prescription medications?

◆ Do you hang around with a crowd that smokes, drinks, or uses drugs?

◆ Have you ever made choices while "under the influence" of drugs or alcohol that you later regretted?

◆ Do you have a parent, grandparent, brother, sister, aunt, or uncle who:

Is an alcoholic?

Is significantly overweight?

Developed colon cancer?

◆ Do you have easy access to medical care from a doctor, a school-based clinic, or other source?

Some parents found it hard to believe that, in view of all that was going on in the wake of the Search Institute survey, a Ridgewood teacher not only administered this questionnaire during health class, but told students to put their names on it and, after answering the questions, to graph their responses to indicate their levels of risky behavior. The students received a mark on the questionnaire to be applied to their class grades.

"As soon as the word got out, the school destroyed the paperwork," reports parent Carole Nunn, whose 13-year-old son filled out the questionnaire. "There was no indication in the approved curriculum for the class that a risk-behavior survey would be included.

"This teacher may have taken it upon herself to give the questionnaire," Mrs.

(See *Ridgewood*, page 2)

never teach Christianity like this!"

When ANS asked the school principal, Nancy Castro, about the course's intensity and one-sidedness and the resulting parental complaints, she asserted that it "reflects California (educational) standards that meet state requirements." She claimed that "only three" parents had called to express concerns, and that the course "is not religion, but ancient culture and history." She noted that the textbook, *Across the Centuries*, published by Houghton-Mifflin (Boston, MA), is state approved and used throughout California.

ANS reported that this textbook presents Islam "in a totally positive manner," while mentioning Christianity briefly and negatively. "Events such as the Inquisition, the Salem witch-hunts, etc., are highlighted in bold black type."

Negatives about Islam do not appear in *Across the Centuries*, ANS pointed out. Islam's "wars, massacres, cruelties against Christians and other non-Muslims" are not included. Instead, "the 'miraculous' events leading up to the Koran, the 'holy' book of Islam, and other 'revelations' are presented as factual," while references to the miracles of Christianity are accompanied by disclaimers, "implying an absence of credibility about the stated events."

According to Dan Wooding, founder of ASSIST Ministries, the Byron school became inundated with protests from all over the world after the ANS story broke, but that "Instead of correcting the problem, they hired a public relations person." He added that there have been personal media attacks on the story's author, the Rev. Austin Miles.

Elizabeth Lemings is concerned about the level of outrage directed against the school and its principal. "The state selects the curriculum and I anticipate that many other states are teaching from this same textbook," she said. "Our real anger should be channeled into protesting the manner in which religions are taught to our children."

Lemings believes that heightened awareness of the religious bias in public schools provides parents and other taxpayers with an opportunity to express their outrage to state boards of education and to state legislatures. "All presentations should be unbiased and accurate," she says. "Instead, we've seen an erosion of the truth about the critical role of Christianity in history. . . . Our voices need to protest the duplicity of 'politically-correct' standards that tolerate other religions but not Christianity."

No Wall of Separation for Course in Islamic Religion

BRENTWOOD, CA — Byron Union School District 7th-grade teacher Elizabeth Lemings was shocked when she discovered that her son, a student in another 7th-grade class at the same school, was taking an intensive course in the Islamic religion. He brought home handouts that included a history of Islam and its founder, Mohammed, 25 Islamic terms, 20 proverbs, Islam's "Five Pillars of Faith," and 10 key Islamic prophets and disciples to be studied.

The three-week course, which began September 11, also required students to wear a robe during class, adopt a Muslim

name, and stage their own jihad or "holy war" via a dice game.

In an interview with the Garden Grove, CA-based ASSIST News Service (ANS), Mrs. Lemings stated: "We can't even mention the name of Jesus in the public schools, but students are taught about Islam and how to pray to Allah." She added that many parents protested the course, but that the principal ignored their complaints. One outraged parent exclaimed: "We could



Mosque: Islam's house of worship



EDUCATION BRIEFS

The privacy of more than 60 children and teens was violated when sensitive psychological information was posted on the University of Montana web site in late October. The records primarily came from clinics in Minnesota and Montana, and included names, dates of birth, addresses, and descriptions of patient visits and doctors' diagnoses.

According to latimes.com (11-7-01), the files were posted for eight days, accessible to internet search engines, and were removed only after an article appeared in a local newspaper. University officials said the records were likely posted accidentally and that they were investigating.

While the incident is reportedly unique in the quantity of detailed information that was posted on a public web site, other instances of private psychological and medical information leaking out on the web have occurred. "That's the danger with all of these electronic records," UCLA professor and former president of the American Psychiatric Association (APA), Daniel Borenstein, told latimes.com. A wrong push of a button "can mean immediate distribution of a massive amount of private medical information."

Particularly egregious in the Montana incident was the fact that the psychological records made public were those of children. Details of an 11-year-old boy's therapy sessions were posted, for example, as were the records of an eight-year-old girl suffering from autism and retardation.

The unauthorized posting of private documents on the internet carries a penalty only if the victims can prove in court that damages were incurred, such as denial of a job. New federal regulations to safeguard the privacy of medical records will not take effect until 2003.

Beauty queens promoted abstinence at the Power of Abstinence celebration in Chicago. Fifteen pageant titleholders from 13 states and the District of Columbia, who have competed in pageants including Miss America and Miss Black USA, came together in January for this celebration after advocating abstinence for their platforms for the pageants.

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Ridgewood (Continued from page 1)

Nunn explained, "but Ridgewood officials and some members of the school board defended her action. Had our son not told us about it, it would have been the school's little secret."

At a subsequent school board meeting, parents expressed their shock and dismay over the incident, while school board members quibbled over what constitutes a "survey." Ridgewood Superintendent Frederick Stokley issued a statement that read in part: "The purpose of the personal inventory as stated was 'to answer the health and lifestyle related questions to find out where you (the student) stand in each category and whether you may need to develop strategies and choices to improve your health and well being' . . . This teacher, working with her students in the classroom has, over the years, and with the many classes she has instructed, been able to develop a high level of trust and mutual respect with her students. . . . The results of this

personal inventory were known and used by each student. They were not aggregated or collected to compose a class profile."

But some parents, including Carole Nunn, question whether such self-diagnoses are of any real value. "My son, and other students as well, I'm sure, marked whatever answers he pleased, without really reading or considering the questions. I was appalled to discover, for example, that he had circled 'no' in response to whether he has access to regular medical care. This was very misleading, since he gets a checkup every year and sees a doctor when necessary. So it's questionable whether these personal intrusions yield much factual information."

Parent Frances Edwards agrees. In a letter to the editor of the *Washington Times*, she stated: "The data gatherers' need for this information does not equal my right to privacy or my children's right to remain silent."

Education Department Wants Assurances from School District

In the wake of the intrusive Search Institute survey given to 2,100 middle and high school students in the Ridgewood School District in 1999, seven parents filed complaints with the U.S. Department of Education's Family Policy Compliance Office (FPCO) charging that the school district violated the Parent and Pupil Rights Act (PPRA).

Although three of the seven parents were dropped from the investigation after filing a lawsuit against the district in federal court, the FPCO continued its investigation on behalf of the four remaining parents and issued its findings to Ridgewood School District Superintendent Frederick J. Stokley by letter on Dec. 18, 2001. (See *Education Reporter*, January 2002.)

"This Office finds that the District violated PPRA when it administered the Search Institute Profiles of Student Life Attitudes and Behavior Survey without the prior written consent of the Com-

plainants," the letter stated.

The FPCO did not impose any penalties for this violation, but it did require that the superintendent's office inform "all appropriate officials of the District of the requirements of the PPRA" and provide "written assurance" of having done so. "Specifically," the letter stated, "all appropriate officials need to be informed of the requirement that written consent be obtained from parents prior to administering a survey that is subject to PPRA." The "date and the manner" in which school district officials were informed of these requirements were to be reported to the FPCO, as were "any memorandum or other written document used to provide such guidance."

The letter to Stokley further directed that, in order to close the Department of Education's investigation, the FPCO must receive "the above requested assurances within four weeks of your receipt of this letter."

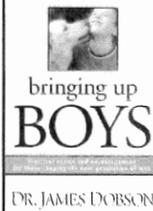


Book of the Month



Bringing up Boys, Dr. James Dobson, Tyndale House Publishers, 2001, 257 pps., \$22.99

Every parent who is navigating the hostile waters of mistaken feminist notions about raising boys needs to read James Dobson's practical new book. Written in a warm, conversational style, *Bringing Up Boys* is Dobson's road map for shaping boys into decent, responsible, God-honoring men.



His book exposes the folly and even danger of so-called "non-sexist" child rearing, which became popular at the height of the feminist movement in

the mid-1970s. "Most of [the early feminists] were never married, didn't like children, and deeply resented men, yet they advised millions of women about how to raise their children," Dobson writes, "and, especially, how to produce healthy boys." He laments that "these women were allowed to twist and warp the attitudes of a generation of kids."

He urges parents to protect both sons and daughters from the "post-modern" views of today's radical feminists and from those "who would seek to confuse their sexuality." "Protect the masculinity of your boys," he warns, "who will be under increasing political pressure in years to come. Buffer them from the perception that most adult males are sexual predators who are violent and disrespectful to women."

Bringing Up Boys examines the gender differences between males and females, as well as the effects of early experiences at the hands of parents and caregivers. "The disengagement of parents in our fast-paced and dizzying world [through divorce and career demands] will show up repeatedly in our discussion of boys," Dobson writes. "It is the underlying problem plaguing children today."

Dobson states that boys "typically suffer more" from parental neglect and mistreatment than girls "because boys are more likely to get off course when they are not guided and supervised carefully." He devotes whole chapters to the importance of healthy father-son and mother-son relationships, the special challenges facing single mothers, and the value of good relationships between children and grandparents.

Bringing Up Boys is the culmination of four years of painstaking research by Dr. Dobson. Written in his frank and authoritative manner, it is an advice-packed and sobering, yet encouraging, delight.

Now available in bookstores at an introductory price of \$19.97 through 2-28-02. (ISBN 0-8423-5266-X)

FOCUS: Virtue of Hope Illuminates *Lord of the Rings*



By Katherine Kersten

Americans are flocking to the new film of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*. Enthusiastic movie fans are discovering what readers of Tolkien's trilogy — published in the mid-1950s — have known for decades: *The Lord of the Rings* is a truly monumental work. Indeed, in a 1996 survey, British readers voted its three volumes the best book of the 20th century.

What accounts for the extraordinary appeal of *The Lord of the Rings*? Its creator hardly fits the stereotype of a best-selling author. Tolkien was a mild-mannered professor of Anglo-Saxon and English literature at Oxford University. Moreover, the trilogy's plot seems unlikely to appeal to a broad audience. It is a fantasy — what Tolkien called a "fairy story" for adults — set in an imaginary land called Middle Earth. The book tells the story of Frodo Baggins, a hobbit (a short, comfort-loving human-like creature) who must battle the forces of evil in a quest to destroy a "ring of power," and thereby save the world.

Some might attribute the trilogy's appeal to its action-packed story line. It's true that readers are fascinated by the struggle of the books' feeble protagonists against terrifying and almost unimaginably powerful evil. But as Tolkien himself pointed out, to truly succeed with thoughtful adults — to please, excite and move — a tale must be about much more than mere danger and escape. It must reflect a transcendent truth about the human condition.

I first read *The Lord of the Rings* at

19. Though I loved *The Fellowship of the Ring*, *The Two Towers* and *The Return of the King*, I didn't grasp the trilogy's true profundity until I reread it as an adult. I saw then that, among many other things, the story is a beautiful and extended reflection on the virtue of hope. It is hope — that is, a patient expectation that good will ultimately prevail — that inspires a small fellowship of hobbits, men, elves and dwarves to endure extraordinary suffering and fear as they journey to the heart of darkness in an effort to destroy the power of Sauron, the Dark Lord.

The fellowship's refusal to succumb to despair defies all logic. Inspired by their regard for each other and their faith in the holiness of their quest, they plod on over mountains and through blizzards, always fleeing armies of terrifying Orcs, toward the fire-belching crack of Mount Doom. Gandalf the Wizard explains the irony of their predicament: "That way lies our hope, where sits our greatest fear. Doom hangs still on a thread. Yet hope there is still, if we can but stand unconquered for a little while."

Tolkien wanted *The Lord of the Rings* to be a gripping tale. On a deeper level, however, he wrote it to explore how human beings respond to extraordinary moral demands. Consequently, he placed his characters in a "sacrificial situation," in which the common good depends on the behavior of a few individuals in circumstances that demand suffering and endurance far beyond their capacities. Human beings seem doomed to fail such a test. Their inherent weakness seems to guarantee that they will either fall to temptation, or be broken in spirit against their will. (In 1936, when Tolkien conceived

his plot, he did not foresee that the Nazis would soon put millions to just such a test, warping or breaking many in the process.)

In *The Lord of the Rings*, the fellowship confronts its trials with hope, not despair. This is why its quest ultimately succeeds. Despair paralyzes man's powers, sapping his energy and creativity, while hope inspires strength and resolve. Likewise, hope liberates human beings from the otherwise overwhelming distractions of fear and uncertainty. It gives them courage to pursue a great goal, and to strive to become worthy of it. Hope is a virtue because it directs man to his "ultimum potentiae," enabling him to be the most that he can be. Tolkien signals this when, in an early draft of the book, he has the wizard Gandalf propose new, heroic names for the two central characters, Frodo and Sam: "Endurance beyond Hope" and "Hope Unquenchable."

So hope gives life and strength to hu-



Katherine Kersten

man beings. But in the real world, filled with suffering and injustice, is there actually reason to hope? Tolkien thought so. Few reviews of the new movie point out that Tolkien was a devout Christian, who believed that God, the Ultimate Good, orders the universe. In Tolkien's view, human beings are children of God. Their hope lies in salvation, a beatific vision of joy that follows and banishes suffering. Salvation is possible even — perhaps especially — for the humble.

In the darkness of the human condition, hope often seems illogical. But Tolkien believed that man, by nature, turns toward the hope and joy of God. In *The Return of the King*, the character Faramir expresses the vision this way: "The reason of my waking mind tells me that great evil has befallen and we stand at the end of days. But my heart says nay; and all my limbs are light, and a hope and joy are come to me that no reason can deny. In this hour I do not believe that any darkness will endure!"

Katherine Kersten is a senior fellow of the Center of the American Experiment in Minneapolis. This article originally appeared in the Minnesota Star Tribune 1-9-02.

fabricating her research, and asked the *Journal* to retract her article. Editor Chester Insko said a full retraction was rare in a scientific journal and that he was unaware "of a retraction like this ever having been printed."

Not only was Ruggiero forced to resign her new position at the University of Texas, she has also been sanctioned by the federal government for falsifying data, since her Harvard studies were partially funded by federal grants. She is barred from working on federally-funded projects for five years.

Bogus Gun Data

Michael Bellesiles claimed to have scoured 11,000 probate court records for his book on gun ownership in early America. Gun-control advocates were quick to praise *Arming America*, but supporters of the Second Amendment condemned the author's anti-gun bias and questioned his data. Both sides asked Ohio State University Professor Randolph Roth to check Bellesiles' research. After examining old court records in Vermont, Roth told the *New York Times* (12-08-01): "I came to the conclusion that the number and scope of his errors were extraordinary."

Sources as diverse as the *National Review* and the *Boston Globe* published articles discrediting Bellesiles' work. Bellesiles' claimed that he used an archive of San Francisco County's probate inventories located at the San Francisco superior court. When it was discovered that those records were destroyed in the 1906 earthquake, he changed his story. "I'm working off a dim memory," *National Review* reporter Melissa Seckora quotes Bellesiles as saying. He referred her to the Mormon Church's Family Research Library and the Sutro Library, neither of

which has the archives, Seckora asserts.

The most devastating blow to Bellesiles' book comes from a 60-page paper titled "Counting Guns in Early America," by Northwestern University Law Professor James Lindgren and Justin Lee Heather. After examining five different databases of probate records dated 1679-1810 from Rhode Island to Virginia, Lindgren and Heather report that guns were listed in 50-73% of the male estates in each of the databases. Gun ownership was particularly high compared to other common items. For example, in 813 itemized male inventories from the 1774 Alice Hanson Jones database, guns are listed in 54% of the estates, compared with cash - 30%, swords or knives - 14%, Bibles - 25%, and clothing - 79%. Lindgren and Heather caution that the records do not scrupulously list "every item in an estate."

"The picture of gun ownership that emerges from these analyses directly contradicts the assertions of Michael Bellesiles," the authors state. "Contrary to his claims, there were high numbers of guns . . . women in 1774 owned guns at rates 18% higher than Bellesiles claimed men did in 1765-90 (14.7%)."

As the evidence against him mounts, some Second Amendment supporters have dubbed Bellesiles "the nutty professor." The *Chicago Tribune* described his career as "on life support."

The controversy surrounding Ruggiero and Bellesiles has prompted reporters, academics and many others to question why two professors with potentially skyrocketing careers resorted to publishing fraudulent data. One conclusion is that they allowed political correctness to override objectivity and common sense. ☛

Professors Found Faking Research

The promising careers of two university professors crashed and burned recently when their research was exposed as fraudulent. University of Texas Psychology Professor Karen Ruggiero's career had taken off as a result of research she conducted at Harvard, which appeared to show that minority women and women of lower socio-economic status are more likely to blame themselves for failure than attribute it to discrimination, as women of higher status do.

Emory University History Professor Michael Bellesiles stands accused of inventing data for his 2000 book *Arming America: The Origins of a National Gun Culture*. This pro-gun-control tome advances the notion that our forefathers were not the rifle-toting settlers we have always believed and that, in fact, gun ownership was rare in early America.

Faulty Findings

In her 1999 research paper, "Less Pain and More to Gain: Why High-Status Group Members Blame Their Failure on Discrimination," published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*,

Ruggiero claimed to have conducted tests on 600 women. One creativity test purported to show that, even when told they would be graded by men who might not be objective, "those women who got low grades were quicker to blame themselves than to attribute them to prejudice on the part of their judges." (*Chicago Tribune* 1-23-02)

Ruggiero stated that, because men and high-status women enjoy the psychological advantage of belonging to a "high-status" group, they are more likely to blame failure on discrimination. "On the other hand, because the psychological consequences are so much more costly for low-status group members, they may not acknowledge discrimination even when it confronts them," she wrote.

Ruggiero's research came into question when she abandoned professional courtesy and refused to share her data with a former associate. Other psychologists found that, when they followed a basic procedure in scientific research by trying to replicate her work, they were unable to do so. Eventually, Ruggiero admitted



The Few, the Proud, the *Violent?* Research shatters low self-esteem myth

A common assumption in counseling, social work and education has long held that low self-esteem in young people causes violence. If something could be done to raise young people's self-esteem, professionals reason, violent actions would be curbed and students would improve socially and academically. Recent research, however, shows that exactly the opposite is true.

Writing in *Scientific American* magazine (April 2001), research psychologist Roy F. Baumeister, Ph.D., of Case Western Reserve University, described how his and other studies show that "people with high but unstable self-esteem" exhibit the greatest hostility.

Baumeister recalled the dilemma faced by a youth counselor who was dealing with violent young men. The counselor's experiences did not match what he'd been taught. While these violent youths were "egotists with a grandiose sense of personal superiority and entitlement," the counselor's training had taught him that they were actually suffering from low self-esteem. Throwing caution to the

winds, he and his staff "tried their best to boost the young men's opinions of themselves, even though this produced no discernible reduction in their antisocial tendencies."

Both Baumeister's work and that of British social psychologist, Nicholas Emler, reveal that people with low self-esteem turn inward, not outward, when faced with trials and failure. "People with a high opinion of themselves could pose a far greater threat to others than those with a low sense of self-worth," Emler found. "People with low self-esteem tend to injure themselves rather than other people." He told Reuters news service (11-27-01) that "those with high self-esteem tend to damage other people, either because they are reckless and dangerous or because they're unpleasant."

Dr. Baumeister acknowledges that a variety of factors shape human behavior, and that "plenty of aggression has little or nothing to do with how people evaluate themselves." He adds, however, that "if our hypothesis is right, inflated self-

esteem increases the odds of aggression substantially."

Studies also expose the fallacy that, "deep down," those who appear to have high self-esteem are really suffering from low self-esteem. This argument is logically flawed, Baumeister contends, "because we know from ample research that people with overt low self-esteem are not aggressive." Why, he asks, should low self-esteem only cause violent behavior when it is hidden?"

Baumeister points out that researchers have failed to find "any sign of a soft inner core among violent people." He cited research by Martin Sanchez-Jankowski, who spent 10 years living among gang members and wrote a comprehensive analysis of youth gang life. Among Sanchez-Jankowski's conclusions: "There have been some studies of gangs that suggest that many gang members have tough exteriors but are insecure on the inside. This is a mistaken observation."

Researcher Dan Olweus of the University of Bergen in Norway, who has devoted his career to studying young bullies, agrees: "In contrast to a fairly common assumption among psychologists and psychiatrists, we have found no indicators that the aggressive bullies (boys) are anxious and insecure under a tough

surface."

Recently, the *New York Times* (2-3-02) reported on the findings of Baumeister and Emler, as well as that of other researchers. "Last year alone there were three withering studies of self-esteem released in the United States," the *Times* stated, "all of which had the same central message: people with high self-esteem pose a greater threat to those around them than people with low self-esteem, and feeling bad about yourself is not the cause of our country's biggest, most expensive social problems."

All this research raises concerns about the feel-good exercises now commonplace in schools and youth-focused organizations. "A favorable opinion of self can put a person on a hair trigger," writes Dr. Baumeister, "especially when this favorable opinion is unwarranted. Praise should be tied to performance rather than dispensed freely as if everyone had a right to it simply for being oneself."

Baumeister warns us to "beware of people who regard themselves as superior to others, especially when those beliefs are inflated, weakly grounded in reality or heavily dependent on having others confirm them frequently. Conceited, self-important individuals turn nasty toward those who puncture their bubbles of self-love."

A 'S-Wanton' Disregard for Common Sense Zero tolerance continues to plague students, parents

EAST HANOVER, NJ — In today's climate of zero tolerance, playing with soy sauce can spell big trouble for creative nine-year-olds like Jason Anagnos. Last year, the youngster used leftover condiments from his family's Chinese dinner to make what he called a "Swanton Bomb," named after a World Wrestling Federation move. Jason clumped several soy and duck sauce packets together, wrapped them in tissue paper, and taped the three-inch square bundle with clear tape. He wrote "Danger Warning Swanton Bomb" across the top and showed it to a friend during a school field trip. Jason's teacher overheard the boys' exchange and confiscated Jason's "bomb."

The next morning, the child was summoned to the principal's office at East Hanover Central School where his parents, the principal and a policeman awaited him. Jason was suspended for a week for "constructing a fake bomb" in violation of New Jersey's education code, and ordered to see a psychiatrist (at taxpayers' expense). The psychiatrist confirmed that Jason posed no threat to anyone.

The policeman who interrogated Jason filed a delinquency complaint with the state superior court, accusing the boy of violating New Jersey's "false public alarms" statute. This law defines guilt as making a bomb threat that is likely to cause "evacuation of a building. . . or to cause public inconveniences or alarm."

According to the *Wall Street Journal* (8-27-01), Jason "was only playing and had no intention of alarming anyone. There was in fact no evacuation, public inconvenience or alarm." The article

noted that Jason "has the dubious distinction of being the youngest American, and perhaps the only one, ever to be convicted of a crime for making a pun."

Jason Anagnos's brush with the law is hardly unique. Bizarre tales of zero tolerance continue to pour in from all over the country.

In North Carolina, the Kids Gym Schoolhouse pre-school recently had five points deducted from its high rating because plastic soldiers were found in the play area. A state evaluator wrote that the figures "reflect stereotyping and violence, therefore credit cannot be given." A supervisor for the North Carolina Division of Child Development's Policy and Program Unit agreed that the toy soldiers were "inappropriate" because they represent a violent theme, and "don't enrich the environment and can be potentially dangerous if children use them to act out violent themes."

Kids Gym owner Laura Johnson considers the evaluation "absurd." "It doesn't make any sense at all," she told the *Wilmington Star* (11-15-01).

Some parents agreed that the state is sending the wrong message. "We've taught Jesse that police officers and the military work for our country," said the grandfather of a five-year old who attends Kids Gym. "I don't think children should be taught that the military are bad guys."

Justice Policy Institute Study
According to a 2000 study by the Justice Policy Institute, a project of the non-profit Center on Juvenile and Criminal

Justice, zero-tolerance policies have led to a doubling of student suspensions and expulsions since the mid 1970s. "Despite relatively stable rates of student victimization over the past 23 years," the report states, the rate at which America's students "were suspended and expelled from schools almost doubled between 1974 and 1998, from 3.7% of students in 1974 (1.7 million) to 6.8% in 1998 (3.2 million)."

The Institute's report notes that the increase in suspensions "seems to have had little to do with reported victimization," which it says adds to "the growing body of research that calls into question the harsh application of zero tolerance policies," often for "trivial acts." The report also cites research showing that suspended students often drop out or "engage in troublesome behavior."

Zero Tolerance Fallout

As the above study suggests, punishments resulting from zero tolerance policies may have additional negative or unintended consequences for students and school districts. A few examples include:

- ◆ Two eight-year-old boys who pointed paper guns at classmates last March in Irvington, New Jersey were charged with "making terrorist threats" and given a sobering tour of the juvenile justice system. Although a judge ultimately dismissed their case, the incident may remain on court records until the boys are 18, and some educators say the children suffered "needless trauma."

- ◆ A seven-year-old first grader in the Edgewood Independent School District in San Antonio, Texas, was banished to an "alternative school" for troubled students when he was caught bringing a pocket

knife to school. For three days, he was the only first grader at the facility, where older students guilty of serious offenses are sent. When word of his punishment got out, the child was removed from the alternative school and placed in another program for the remainder of his 11-day punishment, but some observers wonder if the experience will have a lingering adverse effect.

- ◆ In Houston, 13-year-old Ryan Oleichi required hospitalization after being beaten by two classmates as he was leaving school. He was carrying a book with a picture of the Confederate battle flag on the cover, which he had checked out of the school library for a report on Gen. Robert E. Lee. Although he did not fight back, the school refused to do anything about the incident.

Ryan's mother believes school administrators incited the tension that led to the beating. Her son, who is half-Lebanese, had previously been given a three-day detention and was ordered to make a public apology to black students for wearing a shirt

with a small Confederate flag on the sleeve. Although the routine punishment for dress-code violations is a half-day suspension, the assistant principal said that the school would make an "extreme example" of Ryan's offense.

- ◆ After graduating last June, a 19-year-old New Jersey student sued his school district because of a three-day suspension he had received in March after being branded a racist. His offense: wearing a T-shirt from Wal-Mart emblazoned with comedian Jeff Foxworthy's "Top 10 Reasons You Might Be a Redneck Sports Fan." Among the "reasons": "Your bowling team has its own fight song."

