

# EDUCATION REPORTER

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## Minnesota Repeals Controversial Profile of Learning

ST. PAUL, MN — After a five-year battle, parents and citizens opposed to Minnesota's Profile of Learning finally have a reason to celebrate: the Minnesota legislature repealed the Profile's Graduation Standards and performance assessments on May 22.

During a victory rally at the State Capitol, supporters of the repeal thanked legislators for their votes. "The defeat of the profile is a monumental occasion," said Julie Quist, Vice President of the Maple River Education Coalition (MrEdCo), the pivotal organization in the Profile's ouster. "Minnesota's grassroots education movement has defeated what was misrepresented to the public as an exceptional idea."

MrEdCo described the Profile's overwhelming defeat as "truly historic." Sixty-four of the state's 67 Senators voted to repeal it, and the tally in the House was 125 to 9 in favor of the repeal.

At the victory rally, MrEdCo founder Renee Doyle stated: "Overturning the Profile required electing a new governor and new legislators. It required that parents, teachers and citizens come back year after year" voicing their concerns and reiterating their opposition to this federal initiative, which the Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning (DCFL) claimed was a local program. In 2000, federal administrators threatened to withdraw federal funds from Minnesota schools failing to implement the Profile, which decisively established the federal connection.

During the Minnesota Senate's debate before the final vote, Profile supporters' purpose became clear. While the House passed parameters for new education standards, requiring that they be based on factual, verifiable knowledge, those parameters were missing from the Senate bill. When Sen. Michele Bachmann — one of the "new" legislators referred to by Renee Doyle — demanded to know why the House requirements had been deleted by Profile supporter Sen. Steve Kelley, he stated: "When students are learning to write they are learning a skill. A skill isn't factual or verifiable."

Sen. Bachmann pointed out that House

parameters for the new standards also require that they "preserve and promote fundamental American principles as stated in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States." She asked Sen. Kelley why he had removed the Declaration of Independence from the parameters. He replied: "The declaration has no legal status in defining people's rights and privileges."

Opponents pointed to Sen. Kelley's remarks as the crux of why they worked so long and hard to defeat the Profile. Promoting and preserving the Declaration, natural law, national sovereignty, and free-market enterprise, they assert, were not among its goals, and were in fact words slated to be kept out of the parameters for Minnesota's new education standards. In short, an understanding of the American system devised by our Founding Fathers was *not* part of the Profile's education standards defining what Minnesota children should know. According to MrEdCo, the Profile was aligned with the new federal curriculum, which redefines traditional American principles of freedom and undermines knowledge-based education. (See *Education Reporter*, May 2003, page 4.)

### Profile In Controversy

From the moment Minnesota's Profile of Learning was implemented by the DCFL and the State Board of Education in 1998, it created controversy and stirred opposition among parents, teachers, and pro-family groups. The Profile essentially replaced traditional subjects with "performance packages," a complicated mixture of tasks focused on students' attitudes, feelings and beliefs rather than on academic knowledge. The Profile also created a mountain of paperwork for teachers. (See *Education Reporter*, April 1998.)

The Profile contained "Diversity Rules," giving state bureaucrats the power to force "diversity" training in the classroom. In one school dis-



Sen. Bachmann



Julie Quist



Renee Doyle

trict, parents spoke out against a textbook called *Diversity Perspectives*, which they described as advancing "an extremely liberal agenda." Parents charged that this text promoted socialism, homosexuality, and the creation of a new Bill of Rights that included a "right" to abortion.

Parents vigorously objected to the general dumbing down of the curriculum under the Profile. MrEdCo gave this example of a Profile class activity: "One class of juniors and seniors spent hours constructing a Mexican Government building out

of graham crackers to fulfill their World Language requirement."

### What's Next?

In the wake of the Profile's defeat, many are asking what's next for education in Minnesota. While cautiously optimistic, activists harbor no illusions. "This bill provides the vehicle and the map for Minnesota's new road," MrEdCo stated in a press release. "But there are enormously rocky ways ahead. The new standards and tests will be in constant conflict with the drive for the federal content, the federal curriculum, the redefining of our principles of freedom, and the undermining of genuine education." This victory, for example, does not do away with School-to-Work, which the Profile embraced and which continues full-speed ahead in Minnesota and other states.

Perhaps the most positive fallout from the Profile's defeat will be the enormous boost it gives traditional education proponents, teachers, and legislators across the country. As one Minnesota activist put it: "This [victory] should give encouragement to other states to persevere as did the opponents of the Profile here in the heartland." 

## Single-Sex Class Makes Fans of Students & Teachers



MIDLOTHIAN, VA — An experiment in single-sex education that began with a computer glitch is having positive results at Bailey Bridge Middle School. Some of the 6<sup>th</sup>-grade teachers at the 1,600-student school were surprised last fall when they found that the computer had mistakenly assigned classes of nearly all boys or nearly all girls.

After pondering the problem for three days, principal Dr. Deborah Marks decided to accept the computer's mistake and create one *all-girls* "team" and one *all-boys* "team." At Bailey Bridge, students are divided into teams of 120 to 130 students, each team with five teachers. Three other 6<sup>th</sup>-grade teams remained coed.

At the end of the year, the single-sex classroom teachers and most of the parents and students pronounced the experiment a success. A Bailey Bridge spokesman told the Jim Lehrer Online NewsHour (5-19-03) that only one parent preferred to have her child moved out of the single-sex class, while several other parents requested that their children "be taken out of coed and put into the single grouping."

One parent whose child was placed in the single-sex class observed, "Wow, this is kind of a nice little taste of both worlds. It's almost like he's in his own little private school there, with an all-boy team." Another parent stated: "I didn't

(See *Single-Sex Class*, page 2)

## A 'Virtual' Escape from the Public Schoolhouse



APPLETON, WI — In Wisconsin and at least eight other states, thousands of students are enrolling in online "virtual" charter schools. These new cyber schools are run by private educational ventures, teaching students at home online in a form of "distance learning." They are quickly becoming popular with parents seeking an alternative to bricks-and-mortar public schools and the problems associated with them. Home cyber schools allow parents direct involvement in their child's education.

The Wisconsin Connections Academy opened last fall under a charter granted by the Appleton Area School District, and educated 250 students from 85 school districts in its first year. The academy has 275 students enrolled for next year with 650 applications pending.

A second virtual school, the Wisconsin Virtual Academy, will open this fall under a charter granted by the rural Ozaukee County School District. With 300 students already enrolled and 600 applications pending, the Virtual Academy

is making waves before its first students have logged on. School district administrators across the state are concerned about the prospect of losing dozens of students, and the state funds that go with them, to the new charter schools.

Under Wisconsin's open enrollment laws, students can enroll in any school district their parents wish. The student's "home" district must pay the \$5,000 cost of educating each child online for one school year. "I'm always concerned when there's a drain on our budget," David

Schmidt, superintendent of the Waukesha School District, told the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* (5-25-03). The Waukesha district reportedly could lose as many as 39 students to the Virtual Academy. The Milwaukee Public Schools have 44 students approved for enrollment in the academy, more than any single district in the state so far.

Schmidt admitted that if parents continue lining up to enroll their children in cyber schools, Wisconsin school districts

(See *Escape*, page 2)

## EDUCATION BRIEFS

**A homeschooler won the 2003 National Geography Bee**, the second straight year a home-educated student has taken top honors and the first prize of a \$25,000 college scholarship. James Williams, a 14-year-old from Vancouver, WA, correctly answered "Portugal" to the deciding question: "Goa, a state in southwestern India, belonged to which country until 1961?" James' parents said they decided to homeschool their children before they were born because they wanted to "make learning a lifestyle rather than something you have to do." A 13-year-old magnet school student from Nashville, TN, placed second in the bee and won a \$15,000 scholarship, and a private-school student from Hubertus, WI, took third place and a \$10,000 scholarship.

**An Indiana principal sets a double standard for absenteeism.** Principal Ed Mendoza of Westfield Middle School refused to excuse 8<sup>th</sup>-grader Brianna Tull's absence last month when she sang with the Indianapolis Children's Choir during an appearance by President Bush. The Mexican-born school chief sang a different tune 18 months ago, however, when he excused Hispanic students to attend an Indiana University event where he was the keynote speaker. "We need to have opportunities for Hispanic students to see people and leaders who have been through the process and can show them a college education is a possibility," he was quoted as saying at the time. Some parents and citizens are irate over the incident and are calling for an investigation.

**Fingerprinting for food?** Students in the Akron, OH, public school district will be identified in school lunch lines by placing their fingers on a scanner. After the board voted to spend \$700,000 on the scanning system, one angry school board member told an Akron newspaper that many parents were furious that their children would be fingerprinted before they could "buy a cookie or a carton of milk." Children whose parents oppose the fingerprinting will reportedly be issued identification cards instead.

(Another Brief at right)

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## Single-Sex Class (Continued from page 1)

really realize the full aspect of what it would do for my child, but I absolutely love it. It has been amazing."

One teacher of an all-girl class said that after at first experiencing some reluctance, she felt as if she "had died and gone to heaven."

Most students also reacted positively. A boy told Online News Hour, "My grades have gotten better than they were." A girl noted: "You're not afraid to ask questions. If you don't understand something, you can raise your hand and ask."

Although there are no plans to expand the single-sex classes, Bailey Bridge hopes to offer the option again next year. Deborah Marks told the *Chesterfield (VA) County Observer*:

"Teaching methods have been adapted to meet the unique learning style of each gender with boys having information provided in smaller, more incremental portions and hands-on experience. Unified grouping does not result in additional costs and maintains the same student-teacher ratio as others classes."

In an interview with Online News-Hour reporter John Merrow, psychologist Leonard Sax said his organization, the National Association for Single-Sex Education, found that the chief benefit of single-sex schooling for both girls and boys is improved educational opportunity. "It allows girls to pursue their interests in math and computer science. It allows boys who might be interested in art, music, drama, to pursue those interests. In single-sex schools you break down gender stereotypes, you enhance educational opportunity."

Student performance in single-sex classrooms bears out Sax's observations. In a number of the approximately 50 schools around the nation where single-

sex classes are being tried, both improved academic achievement and behavior are the result. (See *Education Reporter*, November 2002.) But critics including the NEA, the ACLU, and various feminist groups have blasted single-sex education as discriminatory.

These critics often invoke Title IX, the law passed in 1972 to end gender discrimination and which barred separation of the sexes in public schools. However, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 includes an amendment authorizing single-sex education. Last year, Education Secretary Ron Paige pledged that Title IX regulations would be re-



U.S. Ed. Sec. Rod Paige

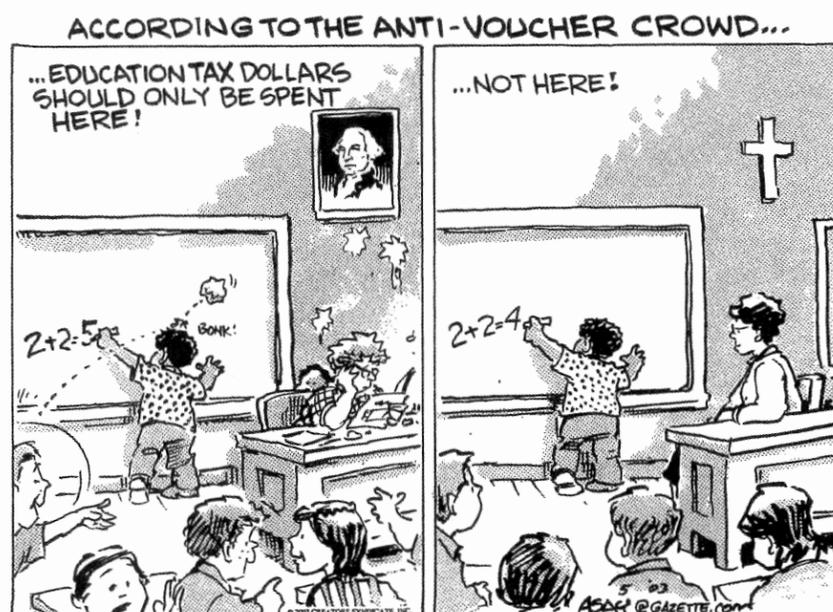
written to reflect the new law, but to date, new regulations have not materialized. Some, including Leonard Sax, question whether they will ever be rewritten.

According to the *Washington Times* (5-08-03), the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights (OCR) has announced that it "is currently in the process of reviewing the approximately 170 comments received" (during a 60-day period that expired July 8, 2002). "After the Department has completed its review and assessment of all comments received," the announcement stated, "the Department will decide if amendments to the regulations are warranted."

If the OCR is successful in thwarting the intent of Congress to allow public schools to offer single-sex classes as an option for parents and students, many believe the very children its foes claim to champion will be hurt. At least one school intended to offer the option of single-sex math classes to parents of 5<sup>th</sup>-grade girls in Maryland last year, but cancelled the plan.

**Preschool Prestige: Wealthy parents hire consultants to place their toddlers in 'Baby Ivy' preschools.** Consultant Amanda Uhry told the *New York Times* (5-28-03) she earns a seven-figure salary plotting strategy to enroll the children of well-heeled working parents into New York City's top nursery schools, which can cost up to \$17,000 per year. These schools have hundreds of children on

waiting lists and preschool directors who, when the time comes, write 12-page recommendations to help their charges obtain slots in the most sought-after kindergartens. Ms. Uhry described ambitious parents who insist that their tykes attend only preschools on the most prestigious "short list," and when they can't get them in, ask, "What did I do wrong?" or "Why is my kid a loser?"



## Book of the Month



**Breaking Free: Public School Lessons and the Imperative of School Choice**, Sol Stern, 2003, 235 pps., \$25.95

In *Breaking Free*, author Sol Stern's tales about the New York City public school system remind us that it has been called the "Twilight Zone," after the 1950s television drama featuring bizarre, inexplicable themes. Chapter 3 blows the whistle on Stuyvesant High School in lower Manhattan, one of New York's three highly sought after science and math high schools. While its admissions process is "one of the last bastions of pure meritocracy in American education," Stern writes, Stuyvesant nonetheless has a "dirty little secret."

The secret is in the seniority provision of the teachers' union contract, which ensures that as many as half of the teaching vacancies each year at Stuyvesant may be filled on the basis of seniority alone by teachers seeking transfers from other city schools. "The fact that many of those selected lack the academic qualifications to teach to the level of Stuyvesant's students is irrelevant to the union and the system," Stern writes.

A product of the urban schools of the 1940s and 50s when a good public education was not an oxymoron, Stern noticed the differences when he enrolled his sons at what are considered some of New York City's best public schools. At P.S. 87, for example, dubbed "the Dream School of the Upper West Side," he found incompetent teachers who were "protected by a state education law that guaranteed them a permanent job in the same building for life."

Stern also grew disenchanted with the "progressive" curriculum. "It was only after my older son's first three years at P.S. 87 that I began to suspect how readily the doctrine of 'child-centered' education could lead to an abdication of pedagogical responsibility," he writes, "especially in math." The boy's highly regarded math teacher "devoted months of class time to an across-the-curriculum project on Japan, which included the building of a Japanese garden." When asked by his parents on any given day what he had done at school, the child answered, "we measured the garden."

By contrast, Stern tells of Catholic schools that successfully educate underprivileged children on shoestring budgets. He describes how children in Milwaukee and Cleveland have been "rescued" from violent and crumbling inner-city public schools by voucher programs. *Breaking Free* provides a unique perspective on parental awakening.

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# FOCUS: Video violence is murder on young minds

By Daphne White

I recently spent half an hour watching a teenage boy play the No. 1-selling video game in the world. As I looked on, he cheerfully killed six police officers by shooting two of them in the stomach with a shotgun and breaking the necks of four others, stabbed two people with a stake and participated in several drive-by shootings. The game's statistics page showed that in less than four hours, he had fired 9,662 shots and scored 574 "kills." All done to an exciting cinematic score and enhanced sound effects for the machine guns, martial arts kicks and explosions.



"I know you are out there. You possess great skills. Follow the white rabbit," a disembodied voice on the game's soundtrack encouraged the teen. "Follow the white rabbit" — that's a line from the first movie! — the boy exclaimed happily, and prepared for his next murderous mission.

And what is the name of this thrilling game? Enter the Matrix — a "companion" game to the recent blockbuster movie "The Matrix Reloaded." This game sold a record 1 million copies in North America and Europe in the first week following its release.

Now follow the white rabbit. Look at the rating proudly displayed on the front of the game. You're thinking M for "mature," right? As in, appropriate for players 17 or older? After all, the movie itself is rated R. Wrong. The game is rated T for "teen," as in anyone 13 or older. The teenager I watched is 15.

How, I want to know, is this possible? This game shows more violence per minute than the film. According to the copy on the video game box, the movie

and video game together constitute "the most integrated entertainment experience to date." The hype continues: "There is only one way to enter the Matrix. Larry and Andy Wachowski, creators of the Matrix trilogy, invite you to enter an alternate reality."

The actual "alternate reality" being sold here is a reality in which an ultra-violent, adult-rated movie like "Matrix Reloaded" can be marketed to a younger audience through a companion video game — and no harm is done. Don't succumb to that reality.

"We're not talking fairy-tale violence here or mild cartoon violence. The intensity, gruesomeness and morbid nature of these games make them comparable to a form of obscenity.

"It would be an odd conception of the First Amendment . . . that would allow a state to prevent a boy from purchasing a magazine containing topless women in provocative poses . . . but give the same boy a constitutional right to train to become a sniper at the local arcade without his parent's permission," wrote U.S. District Judge David Hamilton in upholding an Indianapolis video game ordinance that would have allowed the city to fine retailers who sell or rent explicit video games to minors. The video game industry got the ruling overturned on appeal, but Washington state just passed a first-in-the-nation bill to limit sales or rentals of video games depicting violence against police to minors, and a similar bill is pending in Congress.

As a parent, what I want to know is this: Who comes up with these ratings systems? For the answer to this question, pay no attention to the two men be-

hind the screen: Jack Valenti of the Motion Picture Association of America, representing the movie industry, and Doug Lowenstein of the Interactive Digital Software Association, representing the video game industry. They tell you their ratings boards are "independent," but they

**New brain research indicates that teenagers' brains are still developing and that they may store violent images as real memories.**

created the boards, they hire the boards' directors and their industries pay the raters' salaries. Neither industry has been willing to make public the criteria used to arrive at the ratings.

Why should any of this matter? These are just make-believe movies and video games, right? And children know the difference between fantasy and reality, don't they? Well, new brain research indicates that teenagers' brains — not just children's brains — are still developing and that they may store violent images as real memories. The consensus of the public health community, based on more than 30 years of research, is that "viewing entertainment violence can lead to increases in aggressive attitudes, values and behavior, particularly in children." This conclusion was presented to Congress in July 2000 in a statement signed by six public health groups.

The merchants of violence market their products directly to children, mostly bypassing parents. Have you seen ads

for Grand Theft Auto: Vice City or Outlaw Golf in any magazine that you normally read?

The cult of "The Matrix" pretends that there is deep spiritual meaning to the story. Yet the driving theme of the trilogy involves the Mother of All Battles (to save the Earth, of course), and "Matrix Reloaded" just treads water with vacuous dialogue and highly choreographed martial arts scenes. I shudder to think what kind of understanding of life kids will take into adulthood if we allow Tinseltown to market the ultraviolent "Matrix" to them as a spiritual epic.

Americans have decided not to market cigarettes, alcohol or pornography to minors. It's time we took the same public health position regarding children and media violence. Ultra-violent video games and movies should be marketed to adults only. Parents need clear labels on these "entertainment" products so that they know exactly what their content is. Labels could include information such as "This game includes decapitations, eviscerations, shootings, bombings and other illegal acts."

Unlike the grim vision of reality offered to teens in "The Matrix" — where pronouncements like "there is no choice" abound — I believe we do have a choice. We can see these "murder simulators" for what they are, and we can urge our legislators to require truth in labeling for these products.

Daphne White is the founder and executive director of the Lion & Lamb Project, a national parents organization based in Bethesda, Maryland, that seeks to stop the marketing of violent entertainment to children. Their website is [www.lionlamb.org](http://www.lionlamb.org). This essay first appeared in the Washington Post. (Reprinted with permission.)

## The End of the Boy Scouts in Philadelphia

By Hans Zeiger

Philadelphia's Cradle of Liberty Boy Scout Council self-destructed last month. Its executive board voted unanimously to include "sexual orientation" in its nondiscrimination code. This outrageous move came after years of intense pressure from radical homosexual and atheist rights groups.

The Philadelphia Council is the third largest local council in the country, serving 87,000 boys and men. It is an unfortunate addition to a list of councils that have eagerly dismissed the Boy Scouts of America and its moral codes. Last year, San Francisco and Boston became the first councils to reject the concept of "moral straightness."

We must be reminded that the Boy Scouts are not an intolerant, homophobic, racist, or anti-Semitic bunch. In fact, the Boy Scouts have always taught tolerance and have been at the forefront of celebrating diversity. Since 1911, the BSA



has reached out to disabled youth, racial and ethnic minorities, Native Americans, and inner city children.

Scouting has also taught the difference between right and wrong, between honor and indecency, and between justice and perversity.

For a Scout troop, sexual orientation is an issue that goes beyond differences in skin color or economic status. It affects such critical matters as tenting arrangements and the development of pre-teen masculinity in a close-knit group of boys and men. But the BSA's position against homosexuality is not only an issue of moral principle in an effort to affirm the Scout Oath and Law, it is a serious safety effort to prevent sexual abuse and harassment.

To the vast majority of Americans, the importance of preserving Scouting's traditional moral code is a no-brainer. It is therefore time for families in Philadelphia to show that they oppose the leadership

of their local Boy Scout Council by leaving the organization.

Furthermore, the BSA national office must disconnect itself entirely from the Philadelphia, Boston, and San Francisco Councils. Boy Scout councils around the country must take notice that their entire mission depends on the moral character of the boys and men involved, and that if they sever core principles from the program, they will destroy Scouting entirely.

The pressures from the radical Left must be dealt with as well. As the Left has opened fire on the Scouts, the reaction of Americans has been interesting. Some say the Scouts don't need defending because they are strong. Others argue that ignoring the opposition is the best thing for the Scouts. Perhaps that would be true in a small-scale conflict, but those who lead the drive against the Scouts have proven their capacity for a dangerous perversion of morality, when, in a hundred other scenarios, they've struck deep-

est when decent Americans either weren't looking or chose not to fight back.

Now is the time for all Americans to turn sullen eyes on Philadelphia. It is time we smell the awful stench that arises from the moral relativism condoned by the Boy Scout Councils in Boston and San Francisco. Now is the time to fight back and defend the Scouts from further damage.

As an Eagle Scout and assistant Scoutmaster, I cannot hide myself in the dark chamber of apathy as my organization is taken over by special interests whose political agenda contributes to the breakdown of character and family. The Boy Scouts have the God-given right to establish standards for their membership, and those standards have been highly respected for over 90 years. Citizens across America have a God-given obligation to ensure that the Boy Scout Oath and Law are upheld for another 90 years.

Hans Zeiger, 18, is an outspoken advocate for Scouting. He is a Seattle Times columnist and chairman of Washington Young Americans for Freedom, email: [hanszeiger@yahoo.com](mailto:hanszeiger@yahoo.com). (Edited slightly for space.)

# Ignorance of American History Puts Nation at Risk, Expert Says

WASHINGTON, DC — Pulitzer-prize winning author and historian David McCullough believes that the ignorance of American history among U.S. high school students and teachers is a threat to national security. McCullough outlined his concerns in April before a Senate panel seeking to promote legislation for federally sponsored summer “presidential academies” aimed at educating American history and civics teachers. Four-week academies are proposed for students.

McCullough told the panel, headed by Sen. Lamar Alexander of Tennessee, that “we are raising a generation of people who are historically illiterate.”

A former president of the Society of American Historians, McCullough blamed the blending of history with broader social studies curricula for poor student knowledge of the subject. “It is impossible for even the best-trained teacher to do justice to the full sweep of America’s

history in a curriculum that also covers such topics as geography, the environment, conflict resolution and world cultures,” McCullough stated.

McCullough testified that students can’t name the American Revolutionary War commanding general at Yorktown, nor do they know much about George Washington. It is important to know who Washington is, he explained, because without him “we wouldn’t have our Constitution nor would we have the presidency that we have.” Last year, McCullough won the Pulitzer for his latest work, a biography about Founding Father John Adams.

The author and historian pointed out that only three U.S. colleges require a course on the Constitution and they are all military institutions: the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, the Naval Acad-

emy at Annapolis, and the Air Force Academy.

Last month, McCullough gave the annual Jefferson Lecture for the National Endowment of the Humanities, where he reiterated the importance of the factual teaching of American history. “For a free, self-governing people, something more than a vague familiarity with history is essential if we are to hold onto and sustain our freedom,” he asserted.



David McCullough

McCullough was more outspoken with reporters, comparing “thought police” in American schools and “rotten history books” to terrorists in terms of their threat to American freedom. “Something’s eating away at the national memory, and a nation or a community or a society can suffer as much from the adverse effects of amnesia as can an individual,” he told the *Washington Times* (5-16-03).

McCullough professed agreement with education research professor Diane Ravitch in her new book *The Language Police: How Pressure Groups Restrict What Children Learn*.

Ravitch contends that “students who learn about the world” from today’s history textbooks “are unlikely to understand why some civilized nations flourished and others languished, or why people vote with their feet to leave some places and go to others.” (See *Ranking High School History Textbooks*, below) “Nor will students “have any deep knowledge of the great ideological, political, economic, and military struggles between democratic nations and their totalitarian adversaries in the 20<sup>th</sup> century,” she wrote.

McCullough pronounced Ravitch’s assertions “all true.” “If you’re going to teach just segments of history – women’s issues – youngsters have almost no sense of cause and effect,” he explained. “So many of the blessings and advantages we have, so many of the reasons why our culture has flourished aren’t understood, they’re not appreciated.”

“If you don’t have any appreciation of what people went through to get, to achieve, to build what you are benefiting from,” he continued, “then these things don’t mean very much to you. You just think, well, that’s the way it is. That’s our birthright. That just happened.”

## Escape (Continued from page 1)

may be forced to begin denying students open enrollment. Others are suggesting that the Wisconsin legislature reconsider the open enrollment laws and some districts are even contemplating starting their own cyber schools in an effort to stem the tide.

Virtual schools have the teacher unions up in arms as well. The Wisconsin Education Association (the state’s NEA affiliate) filed suit last September against the Wisconsin Connections Academy, claiming the cyber school is illegal and ineligible for state funding because it does not physically enroll students. Also named in the suit are the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction and the Appleton Area School District, which the union claims illegally granted the academy’s charter.

On the other side of the spectrum, some homeschooling groups fear that virtual charter schools provide public school districts with the means to lure homeschooling families into the system, noting that many of the new cyber school students were already homeschooled. The Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) called the Wisconsin Connections Academy “a Trojan horse,” and warned homeschoolers that families who enroll their children will “waive certain parental rights and agree to homeschooling according to public school rules.”

HSLDA noted that in other states where cyber schools are operating, “more and more regulations are gradually placed on the enrolled homeschooling family each year. If the family does not comply, the ‘virtual’ school will demand return of the computer, curriculum, etc.”

The Connections Academies are K-8 schools sponsored by Sylvan Ventures, the research and investment arm of Sylvan Learning Systems Inc. (Their website is [www.connectionsacademy.com](http://www.connectionsacademy.com)) Sylvan provides the curriculum, a staff of six teachers, computers for each student, and internet access to students’ homes. In addition to the new charter school in

Wisconsin, Connections Academies are operating in Colorado and Pennsylvania (fall 2003), with legislative initiatives underway to introduce them in Florida and Georgia.

The K-12 Virtual Academies are operated by a private company headed by former Education Secretary William Bennett. Established in 1999 by Bennett and a group of educators and corporate leaders concerned about education, Virtual Academies offer a K-12 curriculum in six subjects: language arts, math, science, history, art, and music. Computer systems with printers and internet connection are provided. Instructional materials include textbooks, workbooks, planning and progress tools, maps, math and science supplies, videos and CDs.

Students are graded by both parents and teachers, with teachers awarding semester grades. Parents review their children’s work on a daily basis, while teachers review the work online. Parent-teacher conferences are conducted by telephone every two weeks.

K-12 Virtual Academies claim to provide a quality education and to involve parents in program design and development. The website [www.k12.com](http://www.k12.com) states that “more than 1,000 parents have volunteered to help us create our program and gauge its effectiveness. Parents participate in surveys, focus groups, lesson reviews, round-table discussions, and product testing.”

Bennett’s company denies that its Virtual Academies are detrimental to homeschooling. “We strongly support home schooling,” the website states. “We believe families should be able to make their own choices in how their child is educated, and the more options families have, the more they are empowered.”

In addition to the new Waukesha charter school in Wisconsin, Virtual Academies are operating in Arkansas, California, Colorado, Florida, Idaho, Minnesota, Ohio, and Pennsylvania.

## Ranking High School History Textbooks

The Mel Gablers Educational Research Analysts recently reviewed U.S. History textbooks adopted by the state of Texas, including high school texts. They found that of the four publishers submitting new textbooks, three “had more or less the same old pro-big government, anti-free market, political correctness problems.”

“Liberals cry ‘censorship’ when political correctness loses its monopoly in textbooks,” say the Gablers. Following are three examples of political correctness found in other history textbooks and the censored historical facts:

**1) Sand Creek Massacre, Colorado 1864** — The politically-correct view: After a bout of frontier warfare, Cheyenne chief Black Kettle sought peace. The U.S. Army promised him protection and told him to camp with his Indians at Sand Creek, pending negotiations. As Black Kettle waved an American flag and a white flag, about 700 soldiers attacked this camp, killing several hundred Indian men, women, and children.

However, frontiersmen reported that:

- Indian behavior was seasonal. They “surrendered” in the fall (Sand Creek occurred in November), when grass for their ponies died. They returned to the warpath in the spring when the grass grew.

- Black Kettle was friendly. His warriors were not, and they had not received a pledge of truce.
- The commanding officer reported after the encounter that “. . . scalps of white men, women and children . . . were taken from the belts of dead warriors on the battlefield.”

**2) The Vietnam War**— The propaganda:

- Gentle, avuncular Ho Chi Minh originally “admired” the U.S. and was “disappointed” it did not support his “nationalist movement for Vietnamese independence.”

- South Vietnam’s pro-U.S. president Ngo Dinh Diem was “oppressive” and “corrupt.” With U.S. support, he cancelled a 1956 Vietnam-wide election because he feared a loss to the more popular Ho Chi Minh.

- In 1968, American soldiers massacred 200+ noncombatants at My Lai, South Vietnam.

Historical facts, however, tell a different story:

- North Vietnamese communism under Ho Chi Minh was Stalinist and Maoist in practice.
  - Ho came to power in 1945 on a wave of communist terror where thousands of his political foes died, including non-communist nationalist leaders.
  - More bloody than Diem’s rule in the south was the 1951-56 purge by communists in the north that killed 50,000.
  - Diem cancelled the 1956 Vietnam-wide election because Ho opposed a free vote (with international observers) in the north.
  - The communist massacre of about 3,000 civilians at Hue in 1968 dwarfed the killing of 200+ civilians by U.S. soldiers at My Lai that same year.
- 3) Civil War Reconstruction**—The politically correct view: Southern white racism caused all the ills of Radical Reconstruction. Carpetbag state government corruption was just part of Gilded Age political culture.

In fact, Radical Reconstruction involved many Constitutional conflicts unrelated to race, such as:

- Taxation without representation.
- A standing army in peacetime without consent—ex-Confederate states were not represented in Congress and the U.S. Army occupied the south.
- Trials without juries: Peacetime military tribunals during Radical Reconstruction lacked juries.

The Gablers report, however, that one new high school history textbook “broke ranks to become a benchmark.” *The American Republic Since 1877*, published by Glencoe, 2003, is superior in scholarship to other high school history texts the Gablers have reviewed over the past 40 years. This book features:

- Inclusion of pro-free enterprise perspectives
- Rightly defines strict and loose construction of the Constitution, and properly discriminates between them.
- Distinguishes states’ rights from state sovereignty, and Constitutional supremacy from federal supremacy.
- Occasionally notes Jeffersonian-Jacksonian views of original intent on major Constitutional issues.
- Generally avoids partisanship on controversial topics in economic history from 1929-1939.