

## Parents Beat Nosy Survey Again

RIDGEWOOD, NJ — Courageous parents have once again emerged victorious over nosy questionnaires in Ridgewood, NJ. Survey backers, who include the Ridgewood school board president, just lost another court battle.



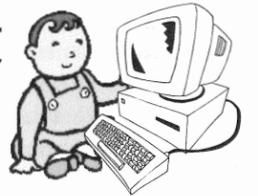
In 2001 the New Jersey state legislature passed a bill requiring prior parental consent before schools can ask students offensive questions in a nosy survey. It was vetoed by then Governor Christine Todd Whitman. After she was appointed by President Bush to head the Environmental Protection Agency, her successor signed a similar version of the bill.

The Ridgewood school board president sued to overturn the law in state court on the procedural grounds that a similar bill had recently been vetoed. New Jersey judges are among the most liberal in the country, but this lawsuit was too much even for them. A state appeals court dismissed the case.

This follows a prior victory for Ridgewood parents before the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit, which held that parents may sue to enforce their rights against schools that require children to answer nosy surveys. (See *Education Reporter*, Jan. 2002, Feb 2002, and Feb. 2003).



## Experts Speak Out Against Computers for Youngsters



A growing chorus of educators, doctors and child-development experts advises that computers don't belong in early childhood and elementary school settings.

Computers can damage the health and intellectual and social development of young children, according to a report called *Fool's Gold: A Critical Look at Computers in Childhood* released in September 2000 by the Alliance for Childhood. The report asserted that children need stronger bonds with caring adults, yet "powerful technologies are distracting children and adults from each other." It also argued that children learn through hands-on interactions with tangible materials, through play, and by interacting with nature, and that computers displace these normal learning experiences.

A petition calling for "an immediate moratorium on the further introduction of computers in early childhood and elementary education" until it can be determined what effect they have on young children was launched in September 2000. Its signers included Mary Pipher (author of *Reviving Ophelia*), Harvard psychiatry professor Alvin Poussaint, and psychiatrist Marilyn Benoit.

"Parents have been sold a bill of goods," said neurologist Frank Wilson, who believes long-term studies are needed on the effects of early computer use. (*U.S. News & World Report*, 9-25-00)

Educational psychologist Jane Healy agrees. "Everything we know suggests that this technology may do more harm than good," says the author of *Failure to Connect: How Computers Affect Our Children's Minds — for Better and Worse*. Despite the proliferation of "lapware" for children as young as 9 months old, she

believes children should not use computers until age 7.

Annual sales of lapware were \$16.2 million in 1998 and 1999. A larger number of programs is aimed at preschoolers, with \$309 million sold in 1999. Ten years ago, the typical educational software product was aimed at children aged 7 to 12, according to Ann Stephens, chief executive officer of market-research firm PC Data. (*Education Week*, 5-10-00)

On a typical day, 26% of two- to seven-year-olds spend time on the computer, averaging 40 minutes, according to a 2000 study by Kaiser Family Foundation. "Two-dimension play is not as good as three-dimension play," said Kathy Hirsh-Pasek, director of the Infant Language Laboratory at Temple University. (*U.S. News & World Report*, 9-25-00)

Computers appear to be no more useful in grade school than they are for toddlers and preschoolers. As Yale computer scientist David Gelernter pointed out, "Children are not being taught to read, write, know arithmetic and history. In those circumstances, to bring a glitzy toy into the classroom seems to me to be a disaster."

"Socialization and values are critical components of early education; it is hard to imagine that the computer enhances either," wrote journalist Jonathan Karl, who has advocated banning computers from all elementary schools. "What do young students do with computers? Play with them, mostly," observed columnist Bob Greene. (*Chicago Tribune*, 7-07-99)

"Every time I've seen the computer used as if it's a magic bullet that will solve

fundamental educational problems, I've seen people disappointed," said Sherry Turkle, professor of the sociology of science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the author of *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*. (*FamilyPC*, September 1999)

"Computers are fragmenting attention spans, to the point where children are losing the capacity to follow a line of thought through chapter or a book," complained Theodore Roszak, a history professor at California State University, Hayward, and the author of *The Cult of Information: A Neo-Luddite Treatise on High Tech, Artificial Intelligence, and the True Art of Thinking*. He is increasingly alarmed by intellectual deficiencies among college students. (*FamilyPC*, September 1999)

A 1998 study at Carnegie Mellon University found that teenage computer users show signs of increased loneliness and isolation. Adolescent instant-messaging is a weak social tie, according to Harvard Medical School's Harvey Waxman, principal investigator of the Project on the Internet and Human Behavior.

Some researchers think the problem is not that all computer use is bad, but that some software is better for children than others. "Children can have significant increases in IQ if they use developmental software, but if they use drill-and-practice software, they have significant losses in creativity," said Susan Haugland, a Southeast Missouri State University child development expert who evaluates computer programs. She describes drill-and-practice as software that gives several choices and requires the child to pick a correct response. (*FamilyPC*, September 1999)

More-recent research disputes that analysis, concluding that drill-and-practice software has repeatedly been shown to work, while problem-solving software works in some cases but not others. The City University of New York (CUNY) study "Computers and Young Children: Social Benefit or Social Problem?", published in *Social Forces* (September 2003), also found that young children who use home computers for more than eight hours a week spend much less time on sports and other outdoor activities and are substantially heavier than those who do not use home computers.

Another telling conclusion of the CUNY study is that "computers do not currently have a strong impact on student learning because most teachers find them to be of limited utility and hard to deploy in their daily teaching." If so, schools have wasted a lot of money purchasing computers. 

## Floats, Mascots, Flags Stir Passions at Schools

Symbols of Jesus, the Iraq invasion, the devil, Indians and Confederates all caused controversy at public schools around the country in November, demonstrating the challenges principals face in satisfying a diverse constituency.

Homecoming parade floats depicting Jesus and the toppling of Saddam Hussein were allowed at Dr. Phillips High School in Orlando, FL despite school officials' concerns that the floats were inappropriate. The principal was worried about offending the school's Muslim population. The Young Republicans Club and the Fellowship of Christian Athletes prevailed after contacting Liberty Counsel, an Orlando-based conservative civil liberties legal group, which threatened a federal lawsuit to assert the stu-

dents' free speech rights. (*orlandosentinel.com*, 11-5-03)

A Christian parent has objected to a public high school's use of devil as its mascot. Kenneth Locklear has offered to pay to rid Roosevelt High School in West Palm Beach, FL of representations of the mascot. The school district has not budged, citing the long history of the team name and the absence of other complaints. Three other schools in the same district also use a devil mascot.



"What if this was a cross?" asked Locklear. "Because it is the devil, it doesn't seem to be recognized as a religious symbol." (*sun-sentinel.com*, 11-7-03)

Legal challenges to devil mascots around the country have failed so far, but some high schools have voluntarily changed team names because of concerns of inappropriateness.

In another mascot controversy, Strom Thurmond High School in Johnston, SC changed its old Southern aristocrat mascot to a blue tick hound patterned after the University of Tennessee's mascot named Smokey, but the school will keep its "Rebels" nickname. The hound will wear a blanket with the initials of the late Senator after whom the school is named, "ST." (*Associated Press*, 12-10-03)

A Redskins mascot was retained by a unanimous vote of the Union Public (See *Floats*, page 4)

## EDUCATION BRIEFS

### College administrators flunk knowledge of First Amendment.

Only 21% of administrators and 30% of students knew the First Amendment guarantees religious freedom, according to two studies commissioned by the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education. This ignorance is increasingly leading to harassment of campus Christians. At Rutgers University and the University of North Carolina, the InterVarsity Christian Fellowship was threatened with the denial of official recognition because it insisted its members be Christians. At Penn State, the Young Americans for Freedom were told their constitution and mission statement were "discriminatory" because they identified rights as "God-given."

**College tuition for 2003-04 rose an average of 14% at four-year public institutions and nearly 6% at private colleges,** according to a report from the College Board released in October. Tuition and fees now average \$4,694 per year for an in-state student and \$19,710 for a private college. Over the 10-year period ending in 2003, the average tuition increases were 47% for public and 42% for private colleges. Congressman Howard P. McKeon (R-CA) introduced a bill October 16 to withhold federal money from colleges that raise tuition faster than inflation.

**Democratic presidential candidate Sen. John Edwards wants a \$3 billion federal spending package for preschool programs.** He would finance the program by eliminating President Bush's rate cuts for taxpayers making \$200,000 a year or more. (nbc17.com, 11-3-03)

**Grade inflation is causing employers to look at SAT scores** and other indicators to determine a job applicant's true potential. (detnews.com, 11-12-03)

**A high-school student has the right to wear a T-shirt showing President Bush and the words "International Terrorist,"** a federal judge ruled in Michigan in September while issuing a preliminary injunction. (AP story reprinted at mlive.com, 10-1-03)

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## NYC Councilwoman Takes on Union Work Rules

A gutsy Democratic councilwoman exposed outrageous union work rules in New York City schools during four days of hearings in November. Some of the abuses uncovered by Councilwoman Eva Moskowitz include the following:



Eva Moskowitz

- Teachers cannot be assigned to patrol hallways, cafeterias or school yards. Unionized school aides must be hired to perform those duties, a rule that costs the city well over \$100 million per year, according to the Department of Education.
- Before he may get rid of an incompetent tenured teacher, a principal must issue failing job ratings for at least two years.
- A seniority-based, lock-step compensation structure bans merit pay and also mandates that gym teachers earn the same money as math and science teachers, who are in short supply.
- The chancellor has the authority to shut down a failing school and open

a new school in the same building, but half of the most senior teachers from the failing school have a right to a job in the new school — even if they are considered part of the original problem.

- The chancellor last year sought to offer \$25,000 annual bonuses as an incentive for star principals to transfer to low-performing schools, but he couldn't do so without approval of the union. The union refused.

- A custodians union contract covers mopping and sweeping but not vacuuming, so a principal was unable to require the janitor to vacuum rugs.

Moskowitz called some of the work rules "scandalous" and "indefensible." Union officials launched an unsuccessful media campaign to intimidate Moskowitz into canceling her hearings. Schools Chancellor Joel Klein said that he should be "held accountable" if some of the more egregious contract provisions aren't eliminated during the next round of union negotiations. (*Wall Street Journal*, 11-24-03)

## 'Humane Education' Fad Picks Up Steam

A controversial curriculum labeled Humane Education, which includes animal rights, environmentalism and concern about overpopulation, is finding its way into more public schools.

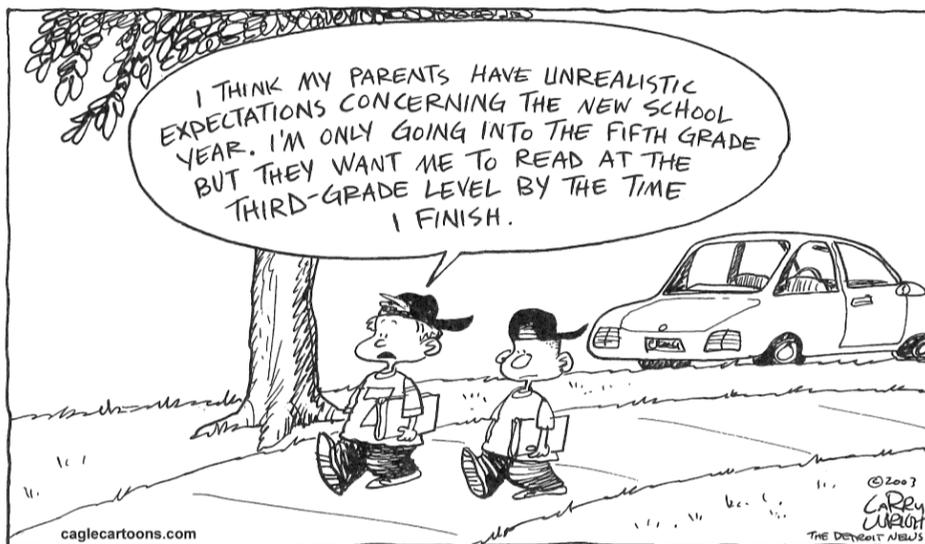
In October a California school district became the second district in the U.S. to create an entire school based on the curriculum. Seventeen states now mandate aspects of the curriculum, and two charter schools (in California and Florida) are entirely devoted to it.

Students learn about such topics as endangered species, the ozone layer and global warming, according to the National Humane Education Society. Another supporter, the New World Vision Institute, explains that the curriculum encourages students to "examine [their] cultural assumptions regarding the inherent value of

different species and nature." The institute hopes for a world where "we no longer destroy each other or the Earth" and "other species have rights to life, liberty and freedom from torture."

Critics ridicule the premise of Humane Education. "The whole point here is to stick these kids' heads in the sand and teach them fantasies about how to loathe modern conveniences and prosperity and how to talk to the animals," Chris Horner, a senior fellow of the Competitive Enterprise Institute, told CNSNews.com (10-20-03). "Every environmental indicator is positive, and they refuse to acknowledge this."

Students indoctrinated with the "untrue drivel" of the humane education curriculum will have "a very ugly surprise when they graduate and realize they can't just hang out with rabbits," Horner said.



## Book of the Month



**Educating Teachers: The Best Minds Speak Out,** Trustees for Better Teachers, George C. Leef, Editor, American Council for Trustees and Alumni, 2002, 102 pps, \$14.95

The ten essays in this collection analyze the problems with America's teacher colleges and the educational philosophy that guides them. Alarmed by the poor performance of U.S. students on standardized tests relative to students in other countries and relative to previous generations, the publishing organization calls on university trustees to force changes on the teacher colleges, which obstinately resist evidence of best practices.

Heather Mac Donald identifies the prime culprit in the first essay: the progressive education philosophy that emerged in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In this child-centered approach to education, the child must "construct" his own knowledge, preferably in a group, rather than receive it from teachers. In preparing teachers to teach what Mac Donald calls Anything But Knowledge, an education program "can't have content specifics," according to a Hunter College administrator, "because then you have a point of view."

This aversion to content education means that education majors, who have the lowest average SAT and ACT scores of any program of study, typically do not master any particular academic discipline — not even the one that they will teach. Several of the essays conclude that alternative routes to teacher certification, allowing content mastery rather than education degrees, would be a step in the right direction. Teachers with degrees in traditional academic subjects are the usual choice of expensive private schools.

"The teacher as a 'sage on a stage' has been tossed aside in favor of a learning facilitator, more commonly known as a 'guide on the side,'" write Lawrence A. Baines and Gregory Stanley. "In the current educational climate, the worst insult that can be leveled at a teacher is that a lesson involves 'rote learning.'" After publishing their essay on the "rage against expertise," the authors heard from a student who had suffered through an education course from a professor who said, "If I ever catch you giving a lecture to the students, you will automatically receive an F for the course."

Essays by Douglas Carnine and Louisa Spencer report on the recalcitrance of the education establishment concerning teaching reading with systematic phonics, which research overwhelmingly demonstrates is the most effective method. Other essays describe more-successful teacher-training approaches outside of the U.S. public university system, in Japan and at Hillsdale College. Visit [www.goacta.org](http://www.goacta.org).

# FOCUS: *The Write Stuff* — Schools should teach the lost art of penmanship



By Christina Hoff Sommers

There are exceptions, but here is the rule: Boys are graphologically challenged. That males have many more problems with penmanship than females is “not even a question,” according to University of Maryland special education professor and distinguished scholar Steve Graham. “It is one of the better established facts in the literature.” Handwriting is a basic skill that serves us all our lives. Unfortunately, a problem that primarily affects boys is rarely on anyone’s list of educational priorities. This one could be solved readily enough, if schools would take the pains they once took to inculcate good handwriting.

Two powerful groups have opposed the teaching of penmanship—the techno-enthusiasts and the progressive educators. The former regard handwriting as a quaint relic of the past; the latter believe handwriting instruction inhibits a child’s creativity and spontaneity.

The techno-optimists have been around a long time. Since the invention of the typewriter in the 1870s, experts have predicted the imminent demise of handwriting. With each new innovation—the telephone, the Dictaphone, the tape recorder—technology enthusiasts have declared the end of penmanship. “Handwriting nowadays is as out-of-date as the hand-lettered book,” according to a 1956 article in *Look* magazine. Thirty years later, in a 1986 article in *Classroom Computer Learning*, a middle school teacher wrote, “Right now we may be living in the last days of the pencil-and-paper age.”

But here we are in the new millennium, and the last days of pen and paper have not yet arrived. Children are still required to bring pencils to class. Adults continue to fill out forms, address letters, and sign their names—all by hand—on a daily basis. Prospective employers look at handwriting samples for signs of instability. College entrance exams now include a handwritten essay. . . .

“I have no idea what I meant,” said my bewildered sixteen-year-old David, struggling to decipher class notes he himself had written, but which now appeared to him like something in ancient Akkadian. My son is untroubled by his messy handwriting: “It doesn’t matter,” he assures me. “I do most of my work on the computer.” But whenever I look through his notebooks, I see page after page of class notes, homework assignments, and in-class exams in his manic scrawl. Even in the information age, penmanship remains a basic and essential skill; but it is not a skill that my son was ever trained to master. And he is far from atypical.

Techno-enthusiasts can be reasoned with. Show them evidence that children are harmed by poor handwriting and they will relent. Progressive educators are the more steely-minded opponents of teaching handwriting. For they quite sincerely believe that the “penmanship regime” is stultifying for children. They favor a “whole language” methodology that dis-

courages teachers from the instruction of subjects such as phonics, grammar, spelling, and penmanship. They want children immersed in a rich and exciting language environment that will stimulate their curiosity and imagination and lead them naturally toward literacy, clarity, and legible writing. Here is an early (1957) expression of their philosophy from a Brooklyn College professor, writing in the journal *Elementary English*:

“When he feels deeply about his experience patterns, he will not only write well he will want to write correctly. The habit of correct writing is best achieved when the child wants desperately to communicate experience.” . . .

By the early 1980s whole language theory was dominant in schools of education and professional associations, and the direct instruction of phonics, grammar, spelling, and penmanship was out of favor. The unhappy effects on children’s reading skills are familiar. Less known are the effects of the lack of handwriting instruction on writing skills. The progressive prejudice against teaching handwriting was many times articulated. Here is whole language proponent Professor Donald Graves in a 1978 “research update” for the National Council of Teachers of English: “Handwriting was one of those early school experiences I have tried to repress.... [I]t was punishing, mindless, and mechanical whereas composing with ideas was lofty and worthwhile.”

A few years later a first-grade teacher would write, “I know Donald Graves says not to worry about handwriting; it will come. But I can’t help wonder if it really will, so I teach handwriting.... I just see these kids struggling, almost making marks instead of letters. How can they learn to write legibly?”

In fact, many of them, especially boys, do not learn to write legibly. There are, of course, many examples of great men with questionable penmanship. Try deciphering a handwritten line from Sir Winston Churchill, Franklin D. Roosevelt, or John F. Kennedy. But these men had compensating assets—including great wealth and distinguished schooling. What about the average boy?

Handwriting is not correlated with IQ. . . . But it does appear to be strongly correlated with grades. Several studies have confirmed that, when teachers are asked to grade papers of comparable quality, those that are neatly written get higher

marks. As education scholar Pamela Farris reported in *Language Arts* (1991), “Illegible or poor handwriting can hinder students in getting fair and objective grades from their teachers . . . [T]he quality of students’ handwriting influences how teachers evaluate papers; students with better handwriting receive higher grades than those with poor handwriting.”

Standardized tests do not usually include handwritten answers, and boys tend to do better on them than girls. This has led several women’s groups to accuse the tests of being gender-biased. But what about all the in-class assignments and tests that require written answers? Shouldn’t someone consider the possibility that there is grading bias against boys—and that by not teaching handwriting, boys are disadvantaged? At every stage of education boys get lower grades than girls. Their handwriting deficits are almost certainly a factor.

Some researchers, such as University of Maryland scholar Steve Graham, believe that children who are denied explicit and sustained handwriting instruction can be harmed in a very direct way. In the early grades, when children begin to put down their thoughts in writing, a child who has trouble with the mechanics of writing will be distracted. Instead of focusing on ideas and quickly putting down the two or three thoughts he holds in his mind, he is held up, and diverted by worries about how to form the letters....

Children who are unskilled in forming letters cannot easily form plans: Their attention is elsewhere. This means that for children with handwriting problems, or inadequate training in writing, the earliest experiences with writing will be frustrating. We know that early frustration with handwriting is associated with an abiding dislike for all writing. Computers are not the answer because children are not developmentally prepared for keyboards until third grade.

To write legibly, fluently, quickly, a child needs to learn to grip the pencil correctly, to stay on the line, to space words properly, and to form the letters. Bad habits can be corrected in the early years; after fourth grade, it becomes almost impossible to correct them.

By the time they reach high school, boys are about a year and a half behind girls in reading proficiency. The gap in writing is much worse. A recent Department of Education study found that in

writing, “Male eleventh graders score at about the same level as female eighth graders.” Some of the disparity can be ascribed to differences in handwriting skills. Isn’t it time for educators to be concerned about the link between problems with the mechanics of handwriting and overall lifetime literacy?

What are the schools doing about the problem? On the whole, penmanship education is inconsistent and unpredictable. Some schools do it, some do not. There are at least fifty different methods and there is little continuity from teacher to teacher. Handwriting research has not been fashionable in schools of education, and it is very hard to get good information on actual classroom practices. . . .

For the past several decades, schools have been burdened by poorly conceived initiatives from schools of education. Throughout my son’s education (he is now in tenth grade), the emphasis has been on creative art projects in English and social studies classes.

For one history assignment, David had to make a relief map of Israel out of pizza dough. His grandmother and I spent an entire Sunday afternoon baking it and indicating rivers with blue thread and forests with parsley. . . .

But these things are not what he or any other child needs. What they need is more work on grammar, semantics, essay construction, and vocabulary development. All children, but boys especially, need better legibility and neatness in writing. As education professor Kay Huitt warned in the early seventies, . . . “Handwriting skills are too important to be left to chance.” . . .

In her valuable study, *Handwriting in America: A Cultural History*, historian Tamara Plakins Thornton cites penmaster Uriah McKee, saying in 1880 that wayward boys who become interested in “artistic penmanship” undergo a significant change of focus: “Vulgar stories, bar-room scandals, and billiard halls begin to lose their attraction.” At a 1910 meeting of a penmanship teachers association, one presenter claimed that the Palmer method “was the initial step in the reform of many a delinquent.”

There is no solid evidence that handwriting instruction will save boys from the corrupting effects of billiard halls. We do know, however, that penmanship is a basic and essential skill, that it plays a critical role in a child’s basic literacy and overall success in school, and that when schools choose not to teach it, it is boys who pay the highest price.

*Christina Hoff Sommers is a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute. Her book, The War Against Boys (Simon & Schuster), has appeared in paperback. This article appeared in the summer 2001 issue of The Women’s Quarterly and is reprinted with permission, slightly cut for reasons of space.*



Christina Hoff Sommers

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# St. Louis Student Takes Objections to College History Course to Board



St. Louis Community College — Meramec

The September 2003 Education Reporter reported on a St. Louis, MO family's deep disappointment in the content of an introductory American history course offered at Meramec Community College. On November 20, the student, Kimberly Level, addressed the college board of trustees about her concerns. Her remarks follow:

My name is Kimberly Level and I was previously enrolled in the American History I [course taught] by Dr. K.J. Blalock. When I was first enrolled I was excited about going to college, but became quite shocked, offended and insulted by some of the major components of the reading material Dr. Blalock has selected for this course.

Four books were selected for this course. One is highly questionable for a course entitled "American History I". The book that is most offensive to me is *The Devil's Dominion* written by Richard Godbeer. Out of all of early American history, is the material this book covers — witchcraft, sorcery, astrology — and what the instructor wants to spend a great amount of classroom discussion on, the most beneficial use of time — a sub-

ject that, given the extensive class time and reading, is insulting to my personal convictions and beliefs?

Another questionable book that has been selected is a novel entitled *The Killer Angels* written by Michael Shaara. There are not any textbooks being used, which I was unaware of when selecting this course.

Are the Puritans going to be portrayed as negative influences that harmed our country? I hope not, because I feel that I would have much in common with the Puritans. The actions of a few should not discredit the good accomplishments by the many other Puritans in the colonies and their contributions to society.

I believe that the subject of witchcraft in the colonies is a small slice of history that is being given undue class time. In my discussion with Dr. Blalock, she stated she felt that in our American patriotism, Americans have justified our unjust actions, and she feels it is her responsibility to portray our negative history. Neither side is an accurate portrayal of history. The true, unbiased facts are what are most important in history.

Dr. Blalock suggested that I should

maybe consider attending a Christian college. Meramec Community College should be acceptable for all in the community. I find the fact that my opinions and beliefs would not be welcome, given equal time and value, highly unacceptable. Would it be discriminatory to say to an African-American to go to another college because the subjects in our courses would be offensive? History ought to be presented in a non-offensive way acceptable to all. Just as subjects slanderous to an African-American or Indian are prohibited, so should subjects that inaccurately portray my religion.

It is my desire to attend a college where in an American history course my beliefs are welcomed and valued, and where proper emphasis is placed on the subjects of our history. If this is not possible with the current instructor, I ask that you employ faculty satisfactory to meet the needs of the community.

I did plan to attend many of my general courses at Meramec, but I now feel that it would not be the most beneficial college to attend because of the discriminatory position your college, not the community, has [taken] against my religion.

## College Paper Reflects Anti-Christian Bias

Kimberly Level's father, Tom Level, notes that the Meramec Community College student newspaper, *Montage*, "is evidence of the hostile, intimidating and demeaning environment. It also reflects how low things have really gotten, instead of striving for excellence. Perhaps it should be renamed *The Gutter Gazette*." The October 23, 2003 issue contains the following items:

- "Good Moon Rising," an article describing a Wiccan witches' ceremony and recommending attendance at one in the future
- "Music is not Satanic, Silly," a commentary defending rap music lyrics such as "I am the Antichrist" and "Disemboweled on the altar Jesus Christ, entrails in the pentagram circle, spill his blood and reversing catholic hymn, invoke the onslaught of Satan," and an avowed satanist singer who has "an upside-down cross burned into his forehead"
- A column advocating a protest against an anti-homosexual religious plaque in Wyoming and suggesting use of websites [www.hardcoreramming.com](http://www.hardcoreramming.com) and [www.satan.net](http://www.satan.net)
- Various profane entries not suitable for reprinting.

Tom Level says that with professors like Dr. Blalock, it is not surprising that students feel comfortable printing such articles. Mr. Level reports that in his meeting with Dr. Blalock to complain about her American history course, "She made many outrageous statements: The Jesuit missionaries were not missionaries but the pope's army and just killed people." He adds, "She has problems with organized church and religion."

## Floats (Continued from page 1)

School Board of Education in the Tulsa, OK area despite protests from civil rights groups and the U.S. Civil Rights Commission's recommendation that all non-Indian schools change mascots using Indian team names. Some 59 other Oklahoma schools use Native American terms for teams, including Warriors, Indians, Chieftains, Redskins, Savages, Chiefs and Braves. ([ktul.com](http://ktul.com), 11-10-03)

On the other hand, a principal in Skokie, IL forbade first-graders from dressing as American Indians for their annual Thanksgiving celebration after a

parent complained the construction-paper headdresses might be offensive. Pilgrim black hats and bonnets were also banned. American Indian groups in Chicago applauded the Madison School principal's decision, but parents who had worked on costumes for a month didn't appreciate it. ([chicagotribune.com](http://chicagotribune.com), 11-22-03)

Parents have collected more than 100 signatures to protest the raising of the flag of the Iroquois Confederacy at a high school in Lafayette, NY, saying it promotes "segregation." The superintendent defended the plan as a way of re-

specting differences with the Onandaga Indian Nation, which borders the town. Native Americans make up 23% of the high school enrollment. The school does not fly the American flag. (AP story reprinted at [statesman.com](http://statesman.com), 10-30-03)

A teacher in Hampton, VA has started a petition to change the names of Robert E. Lee Elementary and Jefferson Davis Middle Schools, saying it is inappropriate to send a predominantly black student population into buildings named after Confederate leaders. (AP story reprinted at [wavy.com](http://wavy.com), 11-11-03)



## What Is Going On in Schools?



### Roundup of bizarre recent events in public schools around the United States:

- An eighth-grade class in the Bronx has not had a math teacher yet this school year and spends the class time watching movies. The New York City Department of Education admits it has been unable to fill two math positions at the school. A superintendent blames a math teacher shortage. ([abclocal.go.com](http://abclocal.go.com), 11-21-03)
- A DC-area high-school English teacher instructed his class to repeat a profanity involving the "F" word 10,000 times as a way of desensitizing them to its appearance in the novel *Catcher in the Rye*. A shocked student brought the incident to the attention of administrators, who concluded that the teacher was joking. ([washingtontimes.com](http://washingtontimes.com), 11-26-03)
- A Florida student was suspended from school October 31 for wearing a T-shirt covered with condoms, which she allowed other students to remove and keep. The girl's mother supported her daughter's decision and even took the 16-year-old to buy the condoms. ([sun-sentinel.com](http://sun-sentinel.com), 11-2-03)
- A 12-year-old girl and a 14-year-old boy allegedly engaged in oral sex during a science class in Dallas, TX October 28. The teacher was absent and an adult security monitor was supposedly in charge. Disciplinary action was taken against the students. ([star-telegram.com](http://star-telegram.com), 10-31-03)
- A Helena, MT school bus driver was fired and prosecuted for assault for slapping a middle-school boy across the head when he wouldn't stop saying the word "penis" on the bus on October 7. The boy did not require medical attention. (AP story reprinted at [billingsgazette.com](http://billingsgazette.com), 10-31-03)
- An Illinois social-studies teacher was suspended in October after allegedly ordering a 12-year-old boy to disrobe down to his underwear in front of his classmates, apparently to make a point about the need for laws. The boy became very upset, suffered an anxiety attack and passed out, ac-

ording to his mother. ([reviewatlas.com](http://reviewatlas.com), 10-28-03)

- Colorful plastic "jelly" bracelets have been banned from an Ohio middle school because of a purported sexual connotation. According to the October 27 issue of *Time* magazine, the bracelets convey a code signifying different levels of intimacy. ([mansfieldnewsjournal.com](http://mansfieldnewsjournal.com), 11-4-03)
- A North Carolina student was suspended for three days for displaying a drawing of the Confederate flag on his notebook, on which he had written "Rebels never die." The incident marked the high school's 24<sup>th</sup> flag-related suspension since October 7, when school officials banned the Confederate flag. ([heraldsun.com](http://heraldsun.com), 10-14-03)
- A Los Angeles-area school gave extra-credit to students studying Islam in history class for fasting three days during Ramadan. (AP story reprinted at [nbc4.tv](http://nbc4.tv), 11-25-03)