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CDC Says Condoms Won't Stop Commonest STD

The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released a report in late January recommending abstinence or monogamy, not condoms, as the primary prevention strategy against human papillomavirus (HPV), a cause of genital warts and cervical cancer.

The CDC missed its December deadline to issue a report on strategies to prevent the spread of HPV as required by a law signed by President Clinton in 2000. Under pressure from Rep. Mark Souder (R-IN), the agency completed the report the following month. The report states that most studies of the effectiveness of condoms in preventing HPV transmission did not show a protective effect.

HPV is the most common sexually transmitted disease in the U.S., infecting an estimated 20 million people, with 5.5 million becoming infected each year. It is believed to be the primary cause of cervical cancer, which is diagnosed in 12,000 women per year and takes the lives of 4,100 women.

Rep. Souder thanked the CDC for its report and said the next step is for the CDC to increase educational efforts about HPV.



Rep. Mark Souder



D.C. Voucher Program Approved

In a major victory for proponents of school vouchers, the Senate voted 65-28 on January 23 to establish an experimental voucher program in the District of Columbia costing \$40 million annually for the next five years. The plan will allow at least 1,700 poor D.C. public-school students to receive as much as \$7,500 toward the cost of private schooling.

The House of Representatives previously passed the bill by a narrow 209-208 vote as part of an omnibus spending package. President Bush has said he would sign it. President Clinton vetoed a similar D.C. voucher bill six years ago.

Education Secretary Rod Paige, who worked with D.C. Mayor Anthony A. Williams to win passage of the bill, called the Senate vote "a truly historic event." "School choice is one policy that will help create an educational system that makes no distinction between the poor and the privileged in terms of the quality of education received," he said.

Participation in the program is limited to children from households whose income is 185% of the poverty level or

less, and priority would be given to students in schools identified as underachieving under the No Child Left Behind Act. The median per-student cost of private elementary schools in D.C. is \$4,500 per year, according to a Cato Institute survey.

"This is the biggest education accomplishment in this city in 20 years," said Jeanne Allen, president of the Center for Education Reform in Washington. (washingtontimes.com, 1-23-04)

The unsung heroine of the voucher victory is Virginia Walden-Ford, executive director of D.C. Parents for School Choice, who learned how to fight while enduring racial taunts growing up in Arkansas public schools. Her youngest son benefited from a private voucher that turned his life around and inspired her to seek vouchers for more D.C. students.



Virginia Walden-Ford

Furious that Congressional opponents of vouchers send their own children to private schools but won't allow poor black children to do the same, she ran hard-hitting ads in the home states of Senators Mary Landrieu, Dick Durbin and Ted Kennedy, blasting them for standing

in the way of racial justice. During the Senate floor debate, only four Senators were willing to speak out against the bill, and Sen. Landrieu abstained in the vote. (*Wall Street Journal*, 2-2-04)

Small-scale voucher programs already exist in several states, including Wisconsin, Ohio and Florida. Florida has launched three voucher programs for economically disadvantaged or disabled children since 1999. Of the initial group of 58 pupils from two failing public schools in Pensacola, 34 are in Catholic schools, where 32 of the voucher pupils have progressed more than one grade level on a standardized test for each of the four years they have been in the program, according to Catholic school officials. (*Associated Press*, 12-22-03)

A Florida court ruling that spending public money on religious schools violates the Florida Constitution is on appeal. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 2002 in *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris* that a voucher program in Ohio did not violate the Establishment Clause of the U.S. Constitution, thus clearing the way for more experimentation with school vouchers.

New St. Louis School Proves Money Is No Panacea

Vashon High School reopened in fall 2002 with high hopes. Its gleaming, brand-new facility in the city of St. Louis had been built at a cost of \$40 million. A year and a half later, rather than a flagship for successful urban education, it has become a symbol of the failure of big dollars to deliver education in a depressed urban area.

By January 2004, teachers were complaining of frequent fights, habitual absenteeism, and students who strike their instructors, rule as a "mobocracy" and behave with "bold defiance." Dramatic photographs appeared in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* depicting an incipient fistfight watched by grinning students, and a room full of broken furniture.

A December 18 letter to the district's director of high schools bearing the names of more than 600 Vashon parents, students and employees stated that "Students with 20, 30, 40 and even 50 days of absence are roaming the halls, causing

fights, disrupting classes and activities all over the building . . . threatening and assaulting teachers, staff and other students." An administrator, feeling powerless to clear the halls, asked a reporter, "How do you ask 50 students to go to class?" (*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 1-16-04)

In the wake of these revelations, district officials announced steps to increase the presence of security guards and city police, require the school to send daily discipline reports to district headquarters, use an in-school suspension room and counselors to intervene in minor disputes, and form a task force to develop further solutions. "There's no question that we have a discipline problem at Vashon," Acting Superintendent William V. Roberti said in a written statement. (*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 1-22-04)

In 1972, the infamous Pruitt-Igoue housing project in the city of St. Louis — designed by leading architects and built



in the 1950s — was dynamited after becoming a national icon for the failure of large-scale public housing projects. Gangs and vandals had taken over, and its common areas were notoriously unsafe. Vashon High School has a supportive community of parents, alumni and corporations, and the city school district is in the throes of a serious turnaround effort by a new board majority and an outside management firm. It is an open question whether Vashon will regain control of its hallways or will turn into another Pruitt-Igoue.

In the meantime, Vashon stands as a rebuke to those who argue that more money is the answer to the nation's educational deficiencies.

people "a state of mind - international-mindedness." He told the *Washington Times* (1-18-04) that the program is committed to changing children's values so they think globally, rather than in parochial terms from their own country's

viewpoint. (For a more detailed description of the IB program, see the *Education Reporter*, July 2003.)

The U.S. Education Department has issued its first \$1.2 million grant to implement the IB program in middle schools

that are to become feeder schools for the IB high school diploma in low-income school districts in Arizona, Massachusetts and New York. (*Washington Times*, 1-18-04)

However, fierce opposition to the program is mounting. (*See Backlash*, page 4)

Baccalaureate Backlash

Tax-Supported IB Program Spurs Complaints

The Bush administration has begun issuing grants to spread the European-based International Baccalaureate (IB) program to more American schools. However, schools that already administer the program have drawn fire from parents objecting to its anti-Western bias and its inferiority to the College Board's Advanced Placement (AP) system in the eyes of U.S. colleges.



The United Nations-sponsored program aims to become a "universal curriculum" for teaching global citizenship, peace studies and equality of world cultures. It has been adopted by about 1,450 schools in 115 countries, including 502 schools in the U.S., of which 55 are primary, middle and secondary schools in D.C., Maryland and Virginia.

The IB program started with UNESCO in 1996. Its director in Geneva, George Walker, describes it as offering

EDUCATION BRIEFS

College freshmen show more interest in conservatism and church attendance. An annual survey by *The American Freshman* released in January indicates that the percentage of conservatives has risen to 21% (compared with 24% who call themselves liberals, a figure that has plummeted from a high of 38% in 1971). Some 80% have recently attended a church service, up from a low of 69%.

Nashville schools have eliminated honor rolls for fear of violating state student-privacy laws, after a few parents complained that their children might be ridiculed for not making the list. School officials are developing permission slips to give to parents who want to have their children's work recognized. (Associated Press, 1-24-04)

Michigan voters may end racial preferences in college admissions and government hiring, if critics gather enough signatures to place the question on the ballot this fall. A *Detroit News* poll in January indicated that 64% of voters favor a ban and only 23% oppose it. The Michigan Civil Rights Initiative is leading the charge to gather the 317,757 signatures needed by July 6. The campaign comes in the wake of the U.S. Supreme Court's split decision last year on the use of racial preferences in admission to the University of Michigan. A similar initiative passed easily in Washington State five years ago, but state universities there are now pushing a bill in the legislature to again allow race to be used in admissions.

More families of color are homeschooling. Federal statistics compiled by the Education Department indicate about a quarter of homeschooled students are in "black, Hispanic and other" categories. Books, support groups and websites are springing up to address the needs of these growing categories. (boston.com, 1-21-04)

(More Briefs on page 4)

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Panel Backs Merit Pay, Revamped Teacher Certification

A study by the Teaching Commission advocates linking teacher pay to student performance and overhauling teacher certification. Both goals have long been opposed by teachers unions.

The 19-member privately funded panel of business and education leaders released a report in January entitled "Teaching at Risk: A Call to Action." Members include former IBM chief executive Lou Gerstner and former Education Secretary Richard Riley.

The authors point out that market incentives work in nearly every profession except teaching, where good teachers make no more money than bad ones. Teacher compensation is based on seniority and degrees rather than performance. This model also prevents school districts from paying teachers more to work in disadvantaged schools or to teach math and science (for which qualified teachers are scarce).

In addition, most school districts require teachers to complete an accredited teacher education program, but are notably lax about competence in the field being taught. According to the report, 38% of urban secondary-school students are taught by teachers who lack either a college major or certification in the subject

they teach. A shocking 56% of all public high school students learn science from an "out-of-field" teacher.

In a letter to the editor of the *Wall Street Journal* (2-3-04), a college biology professor lamented that he cannot move

to a warmer climate and teach public high school science despite having a Ph.D. in microbiology, bachelor degrees in chemistry and zoology, and 23 years of teaching experience. "Though I am qualified to teach the teachers, it seems that I am unqualified to teach the students," he wrote.

"Teaching at Risk" was promptly criticized by the National Education Association. Sandra Feldman of the American Federation of Teachers, who co-signed the report as a panel member, nevertheless complained that it gave too much weight to basing pay on student achievement.

The report's recommendations are not new ideas and have already been tested in some areas. Dallas, New York, Denver and other cities have tried some form of merit pay in the last decade, and 200,000 people have become teachers through alternative certification programs (dispensing with lengthy education courses) since 1985.



New Opt-Out Form Available to California Parents



Dems Kill Bill Requiring Notice to Parents of Sex Ed Speakers

Pro-family organizations have prepared a new form to allow California parents to exempt their children from public-school classes and activities promoting abortion, condoms, homosexuality and transsexuality.

The new Student Exemption Form was updated after Gov. Gray Davis signed a law on the eve of his recall last October permitting schools to give sex surveys to children of any age without parental consent. (See *Education Reporter*, Nov. 2003.) The form is available on the web sites of Campaign

for California Families, Life Legal Defense Foundation, The Pro-Family Law Center, and United States Justice Foundation.

"Parents have important rights under state and federal law regarding the education of their children. The Student Exemption Form puts schools on legal notice that these rights must be respected, and gives parents a much stronger case

if they are forced to sue," said Scott Lively, attorney and president of the Pro-Family Law Center. (CNSNews.com, 1-21-04)

Undeterred by the recall of Gov. Davis, a Democrat-controlled committee of the California legislature on January 7 defeated a bill requiring public schools to notify parents if outside speakers were invited to discuss sexual matters with students.

Pro-family groups that backed the bill expressed deep disappointment. "Anti-family politicians who treat parents

like idiots and push unlimited sexual material on kids are giving moms and dads more reason than ever to remove their children from the morally bankrupt government education system," complained Randy Thomasson, executive director of the Campaign for California Families, who testified in support of the bill. (CNSNews.com, 1-8-04)

Book of the Month

The War Against Excellence: The Rising Tide of Mediocrity in America's Middle Schools, Cheri Pierson Yecke, Praeger Publishers, 2003, 246 pp.

Dr. Yecke, a distinguished educator who has taught, raised children, worked in the U.S. Education Department, and now serves as Minnesota's education commissioner, has written an exhaustively documented book on American middle schools and the wrongheaded theories responsible for their declining educational quality.

Middle schools did not arise until the late 1950s, and even today they do not exist in the private-school sphere, where middle-school students are taught on the same campus as elementary and/or high-school students. Beginning in the 1970s various trendy theories captured educators' imagination concerning the proper way to educate middle-school students: that the brain ceases to grow in the middle-school years and therefore the students should not be taught complex concepts (a notion discredited by the 1990s); that ability grouping and resources for gifted students are elitist, racist and unethical; that the purpose of public schools is to produce a more egalitarian society; and that "cooperative learning" — having brighter students help teach slower students — is the best method for leveling the playing field.

Motivated by her own frustration during the middle-school years of her two daughters, Dr. Yecke correctly zeroes in on the abolition of ability grouping as the single biggest problem with middle schools. Ability grouping simply works better and is overwhelmingly preferred by students and parents, but because many educators find it philosophically unacceptable they have succeeded in largely eliminating it.

The War Against Excellence is not intended for a general audience, as it draws extensively from the documentary record of educators' conferences over several decades. However, it rewards the reader with many revealing glimpses of the mindset of "progressive" educators, such as the following perfectly serious quote by middle-school activist Paul George: "Schools are about the redistribution of future wealth. That's what they're about. They're not about talent development. They're not about taking each child as far as he or she can go."

Despite the bleak landscape, the author sees reasons for optimism. School districts in Milwaukee, Cleveland and Cincinnati have turned their backs on the middle-school concept, returning to smaller K-8 neighborhood schools. Under parental pressure, Nashville middle schools are restoring gifted programs. Surveys indicate that state legislators are much more open to ability grouping and gifted programs than education commissioners and can be lobbied to effect change through legislation. The subject-matter competence eventually required by the No Child Left Behind Act should upgrade teacher quality in middle schools. Alternative teacher certification should open up the profession to the winds of change. Visit www.praeger.com.



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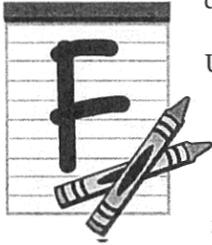
Education Dip

Did Not Just Begin Yesterday

By Dot Ward



How many times have we heard that Mississippi has received a failing grade in public education? State Superintendent Henry Johnson is preparing us for some more bad news when nationwide test scores are released in September. The projection is that fewer than 100 of Mississippi's 880 public schools will meet federal student progress requirements.



When schools fail, we try to find somewhere to place the blame. We blame the tests, the teachers, the administrators, the parents, and even the students, when in reality the demise of public education has been a long time in the making.

Education "reform" became a national objective in 1983 when the Reagan administration's National Commission on Excellence in Education reported that the country's education system was "being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and a people."

We've suffered through one reform program after another – BEST, PRIME, Goals 2000, No Child Left Behind – and have experimented with new math, whole language, Outcome-Based Education

(OBE), Multiculturalism, Global Ed, School to Work and CAREERS. Sadly, 20 years and billions of dollars later, there has been little or no advancement in student academic achievement.

Public education in the United States began its downward spiral just after World War I when Progressive Education theorists James Cattell, John Dewey and Edward Thorndike, influenced by the new behavioral psychology of Wilhelm Wundt of the University of Leipzig, developed new theories that would virtually destroy our educational system.

The new learning techniques were designed to de-emphasize attainment of literacy and to teach "social skills" to assure that students would "fit" into society.

The metamorphosis was gradual. It took years to train an army of new teachers and superintendents and for the teachers and superintendents of the "old school" to retire or die off. But by the 1970s, it became apparent that the United States was facing an education crisis.

The education theorists who today call themselves "social constructionists" continue to permeate every aspect of pub-

lic education. They control university schools of education where future teachers are indoctrinated to the progressive-humanist-behaviorists philosophy. They write the textbooks, curriculum, and professional journals.

Until that changes, there is little possibility that public education can achieve any degree of academic excellence.

And no amount of money will change a failed education system. More money means perpetuating continued failure and declining literacy.

On June 19, the annual National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) released nationwide test scores in reading. Out of a possible score of 500, Mississippi fourth-graders scored 203 (14 points below that national score of 217), while eighth-graders scored 255 (8 points below the national score of 263.)

The next day, a *Clarion-Ledger* headline heralded Mississippi's improvement in reading scores. Improvement? When Mississippi students are below the national average and 36 percent of U.S. fourth-graders can't read at what the test defined as a "basic" level?

Who are we kidding?

Education analyst Dot Ward lives in Mississippi. Reprinted from Clarion Ledger, August 7, 2003.

Cheating, Rudeness on Rise Among Students...



Cheating in high school is rampant and increasing. A 2002 study by Michael S. Josephson found that 74% of 10,000 students surveyed nationwide had cheated on a test in the previous year, up from 61% ten years earlier. A 2001 study by Rutgers University professor Donald McCabe similarly found that 75% of 4,500 students had cheated at least once on a test, up from 50% in 1993 and 25% in 1963. Both researchers were convinced that the problem is more acute among more-affluent students, who face pressure to get into an Ivy League college.

"I don't think this is a generation of moral mutants," said Josephson, who runs an ethics institute in Los Angeles. "What's changed is parenting. If you catch their kid cheating they threaten a lawsuit." (*New York Times*, 11-26-03)

Rudeness is harder to quantify, but a 2002 study by Public Agenda determined that 79% of Americans think lack of respect and courtesy should be regarded as a serious national problem, and 6 out of 10 believe it is getting worse. Coarser standards in television and music and less family time over dinner are among the causes cited.

Some schools have responded by teaching etiquette or weaving character education into lessons to compensate for parents' failure to teach such subjects at home. "It used to be that the parent and the school were in cahoots to make sure the student was doing the right thing. Now the parent often sides with the kid," noted Ed Harris, principal at Cahokia High in Illinois. (*stltoday.com*, 11-28-03)

"I think there has been an incredible deterioration [of manners] and there are many causes," said Alex J. Packer, author of *How Rude! The Teenagers' Guide to Good Manners, Proper Behavior, and Not Grossing People Out*. (*newsday.com*, 1-25-04)

Moral relativism is a big problem in childrearing and schooling today, according to psychiatrist and former '60s radical Robert Shaw, author of *The Epidemic: The Rot of American Culture, Absentee and Permissive Parenting, and the Resultant Plague of Joyless, Selfish Children*. He encourages parents to sheer off from contemporary culture and make the family an island, or the children will not be fit for adult life.

...While Teachers Cheat Too, Seeking Better Test Results

Pressure to show results on standardized tests leads to numerous cases around the country of teachers or principals cheating in order to gain an advantage for their students.

Recent episodes of cheating by those who should know better include:

➤ The resignation of a principal in Greene County, IL accused of distributing a state achievement test to teachers who then disseminated it to students (*Greene Prairie Press*, 11-05-03)

(See *Cheating*, page 4)

Online Public 'Virtual Schools' Gain Favor Teachers Unions Cry Foul

Some public school districts have begun experimenting with innovative online learning programs as a way to reach homeschooled students, raising the hackles of teachers unions fearing a loss of state-certified teaching jobs.

The Minnesota Virtual Academy began in November 2002 under a state law passed last spring and now enrolls 280 students from outside the small, rural district that created it. It uses the curriculum and other services provided by K12 Inc., a company led by former U.S. Secretary of Education William J. Bennett which now operates virtual academies in 11 states.

The district employs 15 state-certified teachers who work out of their homes around the state, communicating with students and their parents by e-mail and telephone. Students complete lessons online, using computers and mailed learning materials. Field trips and occasional face-to-face activities are organized by the teachers. The district receives \$5,100 for each student who transferred from an-

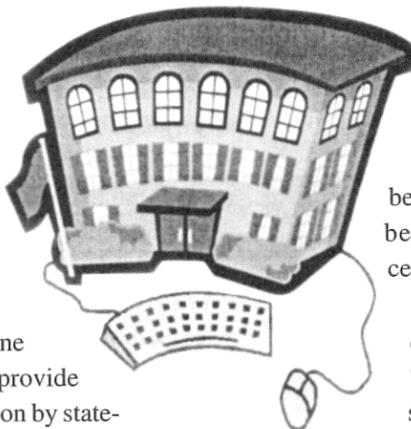
other district to the academy this year.

Minnesota's largest teachers union and two other school districts have challenged the legality of state funding of the academy. In a lawsuit filed October 9, Education Minnesota (an affiliate of the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers) asserted that the online program does not provide adequate supervision by state-certified teachers. The state argues that certified teachers are sufficiently involved to comply with the law. In addition, online students must meet the same state standards and take the same tests as other Minnesota students. (*Education Week*, 10-29-03)

In neighboring Wisconsin, hundreds of students have enrolled in Wisconsin Vir-

tual Academy, another partnership between a small, rural district and K12. At least six Wisconsin cyber-schools offer online learning for students whose needs cannot be met in traditional classrooms. The state Department of Public Instruction and Wisconsin's largest teachers unions are critical of online instruction because of the limited contact between students and a licensed teacher.

Virtual-school promoters discount the criticisms. "We're bringing homeschoolers back into the public schools, and we think that's a good thing," said Dan Bauer, head of the Monroe Independent Education Charter High School, a cyber-school with 45 students, in an interview with the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* (11-29-03). "If we don't do it, the private companies are going to come in and we will lose out."



Free Exercise Clause Gets Workout

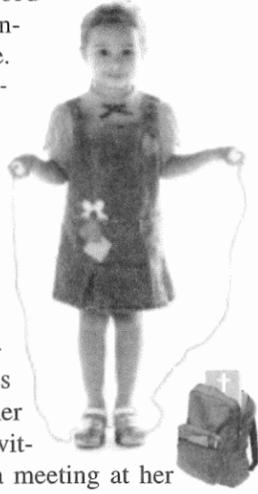
The constitutional right of Americans to free exercise of religion continues to bedevil public-school administrators, as suggested by the following recent disputes:

- A seven-year-old girl in Pittsburgh was suspended for telling a boy who had said "I swear to God" that he would go to "hell." The suspension was based on a school code banning profanity. Her parents have complained to the principal and the school district is investigating the suspension. (news.bbc.co.uk, 2-5-04)
- A nine-year-old girl in Collinsville, IL was forbidden to read her Bible on a school bus. After her father challenged the rule, the bus driver was disciplined and reassigned. (belleville.com, 1-24-04)
- A Dupon, IL high-school senior who was kicked off a school broadcast program for a month because he signed off with "God bless" is appealing the decision on the ground that it violates his First Amendment rights. (belleville.com, 1-20-04)
- The U.S. Supreme Court will be asked to review a decision prohibiting a five-year-old boy from distributing pencils and candy canes with religious messages at pre-kindergarten holiday parties. The pencils read "Jesus loves little children" and the candy canes came with cards explaining that their J shape was in honor of Jesus and that the red stripes represented his blood. Last August, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit affirmed a lower court's finding that school officials had acted properly in confiscating the items.

The Rutherford Institute is handling the case. (philly.com, 1-06-04)

- A Ft. Lauderdale, FL girl has filed a federal lawsuit against a school district after being forbidden to pass out flyers to her classmates inviting them to a meeting at her church. The Liberty Counsel is handling the case. "The Supreme Court has made it very clear that government may not treat religious literature differently from other literature simply because it is religious. That is what the district has done in this case," said Mat Staver, president and general counsel.

The First Amendment guarantee of freedom of religion may rear its head in a different sort of controversy in California, where a lawyer is trying to gather 598,105 signatures by May 24 to put a measure to state voters to use the King James Bible as a textbook for literature studies in public schools. Matt McLaughlin sees Bible study as broadening students' understanding of religious symbolism and allegory in great works. Children whose parents don't want them to participate would not have to. Americans United for Separation of Church and State has called the plan unconstitutional and predicted court battles. (contracostatimes.com, 1-8-04)



Backlash (Continued from page 1)

gram has emerged in Fairfax County, VA, where one high school has dropped the IB curriculum under pressure from parents and teachers.

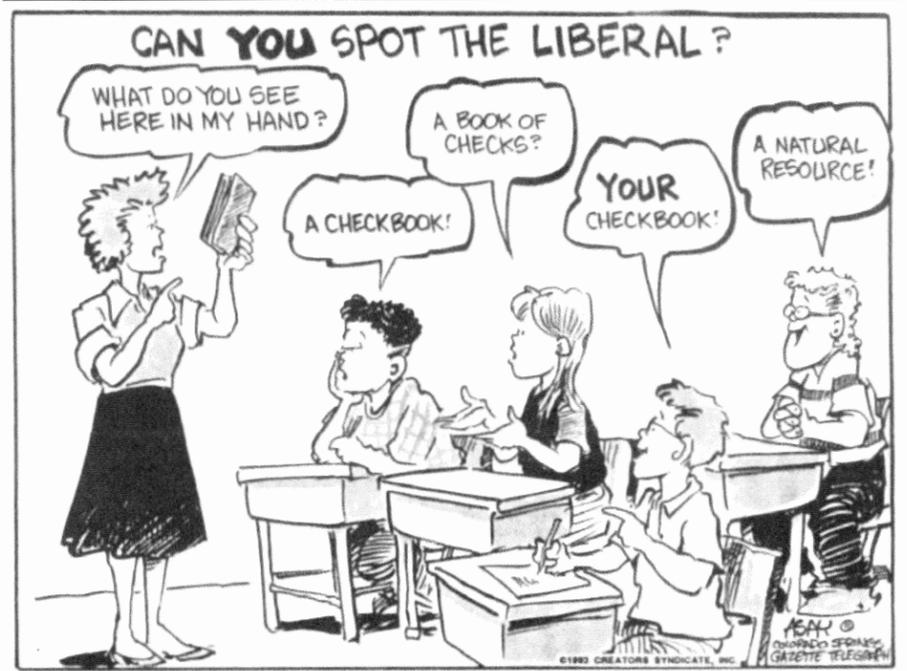
"Administrators do not tell you that the current IB program for ages three through grade 12 promotes socialism, disarmament, radical environmentalism, and moral relativism, while attempting to undermine Christian religious values and national sovereignty," wrote longtime critic Jeanne Geiger last year in the *Reston Connection*. Her children were required to enroll in IB classes at South Lakes High School.

Woodson High School in Fairfax dropped the IB program this year after facing a backlash from parents dating from 1999, when the AP school began converting to an IB curriculum. The last straw came when parents and teachers learned that the IB-required standard-level

courses making up half the curriculum's two-year high school diploma program were not accepted by top-ranked Virginia colleges.

E.J. Nell Hurley, mother of four daughters in Fairfax public schools, led the successful fight to remove IB from Woodson High School. She told the *Washington Times* of a conversation with the admissions director for the University of Virginia, who said, "If you are at an IB school and you are not going for the IB diploma, don't waste your time applying to UVA or any other top-rated schools. Your child's application will go to the bottom of the admissions pile."

Even with an IB diploma, Hurley said, a recent Woodson High graduate was awarded only 9 credits by UVA, versus 36 credits awarded to an older student who took the AP curriculum.



Cheating (Continued from page 3)

- 21 proven cases of teacher cheating in New York state from 1999 to spring 2002, using such means as reading off answers during a test, sending students back to correct wrong answers, photocopying secure tests for use in class, inflating scores, and peeking at questions then drilling topics in class before the test
- A Reston, VA teacher placed on leave in June 2000 after prepping 8th graders with questions that showed up on their state social-studies exam
- 18 school officials indicted in Austin, TX in April 2000 for altering student tests
- Adult tutors guiding Columbus, OH students to the correct answers or calculating math problems for them during the mandatory state test (Associated Press, 10-28-03)
- A Concord, CA teacher accused of giving 90 middle-school students advance copies of some state standardized test questions
- 50 districts reporting testing irregularities to the California education department in 2002, including failing to take down helpful material from classroom walls and allowing students to use calculators (bayarea.com, 2-20-03)
- A Boston-area principal accused of handing out state exams to teachers days before testing began and a special-education teacher accused of later helping pupils choose correct answers (boston.com, 12-25-03)

Briefs (Continued from page 2)

New York City schools will end "social promotion" for third-graders this year. Officials estimate that at least 20%, or more than 15,000 pupils, will repeat third grade after failing to pass standardized tests – four times as many as have been held back before. Mayor Michael Bloomberg called social promotion – automatically passing poorly performing students to the next grade – a "discredited practice." (nypost.com, 1-9-04)

The Gates Foundation is funding new "small schools" in Chicago. Environmental issues and social justice will be the focus of the newest such public high school, in West Garfield Park. The college preparatory program will also stress research skills and computer technology, and enrollment will be limited to about 400 students. School founders say they hope students will become agents of social change. (chicagotribune.com, 1-15-04) Meanwhile, Congressional investigators have discovered that Chicago public schools allowed \$5 million of federally funded computer equipment to languish in a warehouse for years. (chicagotribune.com, 1-16-04)



No surprise: Study says U.S. teens are the fattest. American teenagers have higher rates of obesity than those in 14 other industrialized countries, according to a survey in 1997-98 published in the January issue of *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*. Among 15-year-olds, 15% of girls and 14% of boys were obese, and an additional 31% of girls and 28% of boys were overweight. U.S. teens were found more likely to eat fast food, snacks and sodas and to be driven to school and other activities. A different study published in the January issue of *Pediatrics* determined that every day nearly a third of American children aged 4 to 19 eat fast food, which likely adds about six extra pounds per child per year.



Bullies are often popular. A study of school bullying published in the December issue of *Pediatrics* concludes that bullies are commonly considered "cool" by their classmates and do not suffer from low self-esteem or show signs of depression, loneliness or anxiety. Most anti-bul-



lying programs in schools are based on the inaccurate belief that bullies pick on others because of low self-esteem.

NEA commits \$1.75 million to try to unionize charter-school teachers. Most charter schools currently operate without a union, and a study last July by the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research showed that charter schools slightly outperformed public schools serving similar student populations. The nation's largest teachers union has announced an aggressive campaign to organize charter-school teachers, beginning in California, one of the first states to allow charter schools.

Georgia acted to drop the word "evolution" from its teaching guidelines, then restored it under pressure. State education officials announced plans in January to replace the word "evolution" with "changes over time." Six days later, they reversed the decision. (Associated Press, 2-5-04) Georgia also recently altered the state history curriculum to eliminate world history prior to 1500 and U.S. history prior to 1876 (except for three weeks on the founding of the nation). (*Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 1-25-04)