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Nosy Survey in NYC

A new federally funded psychological study is targeting hundreds of Manhattan public school 6th-graders with potentially offensive questions.

The questions include:

- ▶ How much does your father or mother like or love you?
- ▶ How often do you feel that adults treat you like you're *not* smart because of your race or ethnicity?
- ▶ We have given you a list of the names of all the kids in your grade. Who gets picked on a lot? Who is not liked by teachers?
- ▶ How often do you spend time with your father?

Funded by a \$2.5 million National Science Foundation grant, researchers at New York University are paying \$5 to each student for the first batch of questions, and another \$20 for a follow-up interview. In addition, they offer up to \$180 each to mothers to respond to questions about their children and \$3 each to teachers for writing student behavioral evaluations. Researchers hope to study 1,000 children and follow them to 8th grade. The study is called Project RAP (Real Adolescent Perspectives).

The parental consent form offers to provide counselors' phone numbers to children who "feel upset or uncomfortable" with the survey. Some parents have objected to the racial tone of some of the questions.

Participating students were pulled from class to answer the questions. Math and social studies classes were interrupted until parents rebelled. The researchers subsequently conducted the surveys during gym class. City officials approved the study but denied giving permission for taking students out of any class. (*New York Post*, 2-7-05)

Group Fights for Parents' Right to Consent to Medical Services

Despite a recent contrary state attorney general's opinion, at least three California school districts have responded favorably to arguments that they can and should require parental notification and consent before releasing children from campus for confidential medical services. Such services may include abortion and contraception, pregnancy testing, sexually transmitted disease testing and treatment, suicide or counseling, and psychotropic drug therapy.

The vast majority of California districts have policies permitting students as young as age 12 to leave school grounds for such services without parental notification or consent, according to Capitol Resource Institute, a pro-family organization in California. California law clearly allows such policies, but the institute has successfully argued that it does not *require* them, persuading three different districts in January to retain their parent-friendly policies.

The institute's efforts were bolstered by parental turnout at school board meetings and recent poll results. About 25 parents spoke in favor of consent rights at the Fairfield-Suisun board meeting in January. "You guys want me to call you when my child won't be coming to school for the day," said one pastor/parent in attendance, "but you won't call me when he leaves?" The board voted to retain its policy in favor of requiring parental consent.

A poll taken by the institute of

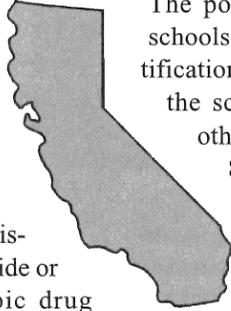
10,000 residents of Solano County (where the Fairfield-Suisun district is located) indicated overwhelming support for parental consent/notification rights.

The poll asked, "Should our public schools require parental consent or notification when a minor student leaves the school grounds for any reason other than an emergency?" Some 88% answered yes.

Similar institute polls in Placer and El Dorado Counties showed comparable levels of support. The Roseville Joint Union High School Board in Placer County and the El Dorado County Office of Education also decided in January to keep their parent-friendly policies.

"Parents do not want the public school to help their children keep secrets for them," noted the institute's Karen England.

After receiving requests for an opinion by El Dorado and Placer County education officials, California Attorney General Bill Lockyer opined in early December that minors have a right to obtain certain medical services without parental consent or notification. Opinions on both sides of the issue are based on conflicting interpretations of two different state statutory provisions.



California Attorney General Bill Lockyer

Schools Test More for Drugs, Alcohol

Drug and alcohol testing at public schools is quietly spreading from after-school activities to the school day.

Breath analyzers have been used for years at proms and pep rallies at thousands of schools. Now, however, a few districts around the country have begun to test for alcohol during the regular school day.

Drug testing of students is also expanding from athletics to other extracurricular activities and even driver's ed classes. The U.S. Supreme Court in 2002 approved student drug testing as a condition to participation in extracurricular activities (*Board of Education of Pottawatomie County v. Earls*).

Privacy concerns

Such testing programs tend to be controversial with parents, some of whom deem them an unwarranted invasion of privacy. However, school officials view substance abuse as a public health problem which they have a responsibility to minimize. Disciplinary action normally does not involve the police and sometimes involves counseling. President George W. Bush announced in his State of the Union address this year that he would seek \$23 million to expand drug testing in public schools.

Schoolday alcohol testing currently occurs in the East Hampton school district on Long Island and in a district in Mishawaka, IN, and is planned in the Avon school district in central Connecticut. The East Hampton district reacted to incidents of students showing up in class drunk after lunch. Testing there is done by a trained staff member, not a police officer, and the penalty is suspension. (*New York Times*, 3-3-05)

Random drug testing for extracurricular activities is now permitted by Virginia state guidelines, and anti-drug activists are pushing Fairfax County's middle and high schools to implement it. But "there are many, many parents who consider this a major invasion of privacy," said Lynn Terhar, president of the county Council of Parent Teacher Associations. (*connectionnewspapers.com*, 8-19-04)

Parents 'in denial'

"I don't believe in violating people's privacy unless there is reason to believe they have participated in illegal drug activity," Mount Vernon school board member Dan Storck told *connectionnewspapers.com*. Still, he acknowledged that "parents can be in denial about drug problems."

"Drugs are causing chaos in our schools," countered DeForest Rathbone, chairman of the Great Falls-based National Institute on Citizen-Drug (See *Drug testing*, page 4)



Mass. Supreme Court Balks at Raising Spending; NY Judge Orders New \$14.8 Billion for City Schools

In a surprise decision, the Massachusetts supreme court held in February that the state is meeting its constitutional duty to give students an adequate education and does *not* have to overhaul its school funding formula. The ruling reversed a 358-page lower-court decision. Most recent school funding decisions have sided with the plaintiffs.

The 5-2 decision was also noteworthy because the opinion was written by Chief Justice Margaret H. Marshall, who is not known for her judicial restraint. The South African-born judge was the author of the controversial opinion announcing a state constitutional right for gay couples to obtain marriage licenses, and is the wife of retired liberal *New York Times* colum-

nist Anthony Lewis. However, even she concluded that judicial intervention was unjustified in the school funding case in view of the state's expenditure of \$30 billion in public schools over the past decade and continued progress in narrowing pay gaps between rich and poor districts.

A 16-year-old plaintiff expressed disappointment with the ruling, grouching that "most of the classrooms don't have computers." (*Education Week*, 2-23-05)

44% increase for NYC

In the same week as the Massachusetts decision, a New York State trial judge gave state legislators a May deadline to devise a plan to add \$5.63 billion to the

New York City school budget and to produce a \$9.2 billion capital plan to fix school buildings. Gov. George E. Pataki decided to appeal the order because "these decisions should be made by elected representatives of the people, not the courts," according to a statement by his spokesman.

The New York judge endorsed the recommendations of an advisory panel, which urged a 44% increase in the city operating budget of state, local and federal funds as well as the additional capital expenditures. (See *Education Reporter*, Jan. 2005.)

In 2003, New York's highest court ordered the state to ensure that New York City has enough money to provide its students a "sound, basic education." The legislature did not produce a response in 2004, and the latest trial court ruling represents an attempt to implement the 2003 decision.



Chief Justice Margaret H. Marshall

EDUCATION BRIEFS

Boosting self-esteem has little effect on academic performance or misbehavior (including substance abuse, sex and violence), researchers concluded after a two-year review of studies on the subject. However, people with high self-esteem are significantly happier than others. (scientificamerican.com, 12-20-04)

The First Amendment guarantee of free speech and press is unappreciated by high school students, according to a \$1 million survey of 112,003 students last spring. More than a third of respondents believed newspapers need government approval of their stories before they can be published, and only half said newspapers should be allowed to publish freely without government approval. The study was commissioned by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, which released the results in January.

Kindergarten teacher censors child reading from Christian book. A Sacramento girl who was invited to bring two of her favorite books to share with the class chose a book containing moral precepts attributed to Jesus. The teacher interrupted the girl and told her she needed to read her other book because pupils weren't allowed to read books about God in class. In another case, a 9th-grade student assigned to write an essay on personal feelings about starting classes wrote of her anxiety and how God helped to calm her down. The instructor told the class she did not want any more "writing about religion." The Pacific Justice Institute assisted families of both students in educating school officials about the legality of religious expression by students.

Phonics helps adults with dyslexia, too. Intensive phonics instruction actually modifies activity in reading-related parts of the brain in a way that fosters improved performance on reading tests, a team of neuroscientists at Georgetown University Medical Center in Washington, DC concluded last fall based on a brain-imaging study. Phonics techniques have been found to boost reading skills in children with dyslexia but hadn't previously been studied in adults with the condition. (Science News, 11-6-04)

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The New Gender Gap: Reading

Girls increasingly outperform boys academically, as evidenced by reading and writing assessments in 4th, 8th and 12th grades, according to a U.S. Department of Education study released in November. Girls are less likely to repeat a grade or drop out of high school, and girls enrolling in college are more likely than boys to graduate within six years. Boys still have a small edge in math.

These academic trends have caught the eye of First Lady Laura Bush, who recently launched an initiative called Helping America's Youth to focus on boys at risk. "A lot of the problems associated with boys are because they are not successful at school," she told *Education Week* (2-23-05).

Female classroom culture

Reasons given by experts for the decline in boys' academic performance include the female-oriented classroom culture of elementary schools, which fail to account for the physically active nature of young boys, and the disproportionate number who are diagnosed as learning-disabled early in life. (*Detroit News*, 1-9-05)

The gender gap in reading, which Education Department statistics show widened from 1992 to 2002, carries over into young adulthood. The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) announced last summer that 59% of young women read books in 2002 while only 43% of young men did so. Both percentages represent a significant decline from 1992, but the gender gap rose from 8 to 15 points.

Few heroic stories

Some commentators have concluded that typical reading assignments in schools are contributing to the problem. "It has long been known that there are strong differences between boys and girls in their literary preferences," write the NEA's

Mark Bauerlein and Northwestern University's Sandra Stotsky. At the elementary school level, "Few strong and active male role models can be found as lead



Laura Bush

characters. Gone are the inspiring biographies of the most important American presidents, inventors, scientists and entrepreneurs. No military valor, no high adventure. On the other hand, stories about adventurous and brave women abound."

In middle schools, "Young Adult Literature" — short novels about teenagers with depressing problems such as drug addiction, teenage pregnancy, alcoholism, domestic violence, divorced parents and bullying — and "culturally relevant" literature appealing to ethnic group identification have become endemic. "There is no evidence whatsoever that either of these types of reading fare has turned boys into lifelong readers or learners," Bauerlein and Stotsky observe. (*Washington Post*, 1-25-05)

Single-sex classes address gap

Partly in an effort to close the gender gap in reading scores, some schools are experimenting with single-sex education, taking advantage of new flexibility allowed by the No Child Left Behind Act. (See *Education Reporter*, Oct. 2004.) There are now 154 U.S. public schools offering single-sex education.

They have received encouragement from Michael Gurian, author of *Boys and Girls Learn Differently*. "We're at the point where we've identified more than 100 differences between the male and female brain," he told the *Washington Post* (1-8-05).

Pressure Builds on Teachers Unions

Schwarzenegger, MSM Attack Contract Rules

Longstanding sacred cows of teachers' contracts are drawing fire from more politicians and mainstream media outlets seeking solutions to the dismal performance of public schools.

California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger came out swinging in his January State of the State address, when he proposed overturning teacher tenure and linking teacher compensation to merit and performance instead of seniority.

'Special vs. children's interests'

Calling the current system "an educational disaster," Schwarzenegger said to legislators, "This is a battle of the special interests versus the children's interests. Which will you choose?"

California teachers currently receive tenure or "permanent status" after completing a two-year probationary period. Once tenured, the teacher for practical purposes cannot be fired. From 1990 to 1999, only 13 dismissal panels were convened for the huge Los Angeles school district, and just

one tenured teacher's case went through the dismissal process from beginning to end. (*School Reform News*, Mar. 2005)

No less a journalistic bastion than the *New York Times* editorialized in February that better teachers are needed, even if that means forcing out unqualified teachers and changing the age-old practice of funneling the least-prepared teachers into the weakest schools. (2-1-05)

Power must 'be taken away'

An op-ed piece in the *Wall Street Journal* was blunter. Noting that "even the most incompetent teachers are virtually impossible to remove from the classroom," Stanford political science professor Terry M. Moe wrote, "If the teachers unions won't voluntarily give up their power, then it has to be taken away from them — through new laws that, among other things, drastically limit (or prohibit) collective bargaining in public education, (See *Unions*, page 4)

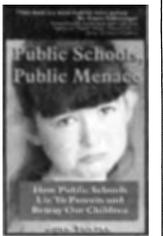


Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger

Book of the Month



Public Schools, Public Menace: How Public Schools Lie to Parents and Betray Our Children, Joel Turtel, Liberty Books, 2004-05, 344 pp.



This book offers a well-researched look at the problems of public schools and urges parents to use alternative educational methods for their children. While it has a strong point of view, it uses more reasoned argumentation than one might expect from the alarmist title.

Readers of the *Education Reporter* already know about many of the problems highlighted in the book, including anti-parent and anti-Judeo-Christian values, whole-language reading instruction, failed approaches to teaching math, politically correct and anti-American social studies texts, failure to discipline students, refusal to group students by ability, official pushing of mind-altering drugs, and senseless union-backed rules on teacher licensing and tenure that don't exist in the private sector.

Less familiar to most readers is the historical overview of the rise of public schools. Most early Americans learned reading and arithmetic at home. At least ten U.S. presidents were home-schooled. Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Edison had almost no formal schooling. Not until about 1900 did the U.S. have universal public schooling with compulsory attendance.

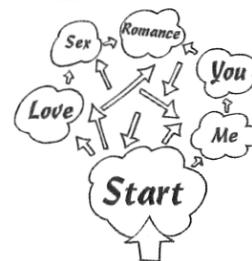
In 1765, John Adams wrote that "a native of America, especially of New England, who cannot read and write is as rare a phenomenon as a comet." A 1992 adult literacy survey by the Educational Testing Service found that 42 million Americans over the age of 16 couldn't read. What's wrong with this picture?

Turtel fails to point out that the early New Englanders came from British stock, and the U.S. subsequently absorbed huge numbers of immigrants from non-English-speaking countries who needed to be educated by someone other than their parents. Still, in 1940 the literacy rate was 96% for whites and 80% for blacks, whereas by the 1990s the illiteracy rate had quadrupled for whites and doubled for blacks. Obviously something went wrong with the U.S. educational system over that 50-year period.

The author believes that the regimentation and one-size-fits-all approach of public schools are unnatural for children, who develop at different paces. "Albert Einstein didn't talk until he was three years old and didn't read until he was eleven," Turtel notes.

The most useful chapters in the book are those on low-cost alternatives to public schools, chiefly homeschooling and cyber-schooling. Turtel gives detailed advice to parents on how to select a learning plan, along with a lengthy compilation of additional resources. The internet age has made homeschooling easier than ever.

FOCUS: Parents Beware! 'Abstinence-Plus' is a Lie



by Rebecca Hagelin

Parents, does the school your children attend feature a sex-education program that's billed as "abstinence-based" or "abstinence-plus"? If so, you may be under the understandable impression that it tells teens, in clear-cut language, that they're not ready for sex. That they should wait. That it focuses on ... well, abstinence.

But a major study from The Heritage Foundation, "Comprehensive Sex Education vs. Authentic Abstinence: A Study of Competing Curricula," shows that isn't the case. Like "People for the American Way" or "Planned Parenthood," the label "abstinence-plus" is a flat-out lie. There's a lot of "plus" and precious little "abstinence."

Contraception is discussed ad nauseam. "Condoms are available at any drugstore or family planning clinic," teens are told in one program, absurdly titled *Reducing the Risk*. "They may also be available in outdoor or all-night condom vending machines. Anyone can buy condoms, regardless of age, and no prescription is needed." Not exactly the message most parents want presented to their judgment-impaired teens. Yet, as the Heritage study shows, such messages are commonplace in "comprehensive" sex-ed programs.



Worse, the programs often rely on role-playing games that are plainly designed to reinforce immoral behavior and break down the natural modesty that might

otherwise keep many teens from engaging in premarital sex. In *Becoming a Responsible Teen* (another eye-rolling misnomer), parents are given the following scenario: "My partner and I are alone. We've been leading up to sex for a couple of weeks. The only thing we haven't discussed is protection. My partner needs to persuade me to use a latex condom."

Well, this parent has a different suggestion: Things shouldn't even get this far, but if they do, one of the kids needs to say a firm no. When will that be taught? Not surprisingly, some of these programs also present homosexuality as just another "lifestyle choice" that's above reproach. In *Be Proud! Be Responsible!*, teens are told, "You can accept your bisexuality."

In *Reducing the Risk*, we find this role-playing exercise: "Tony and Dylan have been to a party and then go to Tony's home to be alone. They start to kiss and undress each other. Dylan reaches into his jacket pocket and realizes that he doesn't have the condom he planned to use.

"What can Tony and Dylan do to avoid unprotected sex?"

And that's the tame stuff. From condom "races" (seeing which team of students can be the first to successfully unroll one onto a banana or a cucumber) to

graphic descriptions of how teens can perform oral sex on each other "safely," these programs are frequently lewd and disgusting. I lack the space (and the stomach, quite frankly) to cite every example, so I'll refer the terminally curious to the Heritage report mentioned earlier.

The underlying message is unmistakable: Teen sex is normal, so let's just tell the kids how to avoid pregnancy and disease. There's a token nod or two to abstinence, but as Heritage's Robert Rector notes, it often amounts to a sentence or two amid pages and pages of explicit, pro-condom propaganda. Teens get the impression that abstinence is some unattainable ideal — not the only option that's fail-safe (not to mention moral).

You probably need little proof that parents want such pornography kept far from their kids, but a Zogby International poll of more than 1,000 parents of school-age children provides some: 91% said they want teens taught that "sex should be linked to intimacy, and commitment, and that these qualities are most likely to occur in marriage." In overwhelming numbers, they rejected the morally objectionable content and approach of "abstinence-plus" programs.

Asked when sexual activity should begin, more than three out of every four parents said teens should wait until they're married or close to marriage. Another 12% said to wait until they've finished high school. Only 7% said "protected sex" in high school is OK. Yet that's almost exclusively what these programs teach our teens.

Which means that we're setting them up for failure. A host of social-science research shows that early sexual activity is dangerous not just because of STDs, but because it hampers the ability to form stable marriages later in life (making the additional \$38 million President Bush has proposed for abstinence-only programs a sound investment).

Parents, your teens deserve an unambiguous abstinence message. If your school isn't providing one, you need to equip yourself with reliable research, network with other parents and make a change. It's time to subtract the "plus" from "abstinence-plus."

There's a lot of 'plus' and precious little 'abstinence'

This column by Rebecca Hagelin first appeared on worldnetdaily.com and townhall.com and is reprinted with permission. Hagelin is a vice president at The Heritage Foundation. Her first book, Home Invasion: Protecting Your Family in a Culture That's Gone Stark Raving Mad, hits bookstores nationwide in April.



Rebecca Hagelin

SAT Unveils Essay Question

The SAT I test for college-bound students began in March to incorporate an essay question along with multiple-choice writing questions, adding 45 minutes to the previously three-hour test. Analogies are gone, and more advanced algebra questions are included in the math sections. The SAT II writing test is being eliminated since the SAT I now includes a writing section.

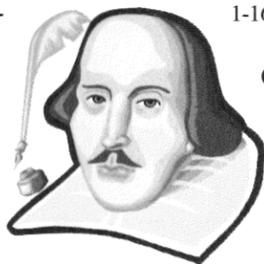
While a writing sample produced under high-pressure test conditions has obvious advantages in showing the unassisted writing ability of a college applicant, many observers worry about the subjective nature of scoring an essay question taken by 1.4 million students. Two readers, typically high school English teachers, will read each essay and score it.

Graded in 1-2 minutes

It is unlikely that any of the thousands of readers hired to read the essays will spend more than a couple of minutes on each essay, according to the *New York Times* (1-30-05). A whole industry of writing tutors is busy preparing students to crank out a cogent argument in 25 minutes, generally encouraging a standard five-paragraph format of opening paragraph, three development paragraphs with examples, and concluding paragraph. A

new book, *Mastering the New SAT Essay* by Elizabeth Drumwright, already promises a seven-step path to boosting scores.

Critics have characterized the essays as lightning-fast, formulaic exercises that are unlikely to reveal a student's true writing abilities. "There's no time for rewriting, which is the essence of good writing," complains Adam Robinson, an author of test-preparation books. (*Washington Post*, 1-16-05)



How would Shakespeare fare?

Sample questions from the College Board, which administers the SAT tests, indicate that the essay questions will typically start with a quote from a prominent work and ask the students to present an argument on an issue raised by

the quote, such as "Do people have to be highly competitive in order to succeed?"

The College Board has some experience with grading essay questions because the now-discontinued SAT II writing test included one for a number of years. However, that test was taken by a much smaller pool of students than the SAT I.

Writing by formula

Scorers are expected to reward evidence of logical reasoning more than writing mechanics. The test-preparation company Princeton Review has suggested that

(See *SAT*, page 4)

Study: Rules Choke U.S. Schools

Land-Use Laws Hamper Formation of Private Schools

U.S. schools are greatly overregulated, in many cases to the point of paralysis, according to a study by the bipartisan legal reform coalition Common Good released last November.

The study sets forth thousands of laws and regulations applicable to public schools in New York City. Similar rules typically govern other large school districts across the U.S.

The Common Good website (cgood.org) lists 63 different sources of regulation, with links. Extensive flowcharts illustrate how convoluted procedures impede disciplining a student, firing an inept teacher, filling a teacher vacancy, or even conducting an athletic event.

Sources of regulation include state education laws and regulations, the federal No Child Left Behind Act, teachers' contracts, student disciplinary regulations, and appeals decisions.

"The demands of excessive paperwork are taking precious time, money and attention away from education nationwide," said Paul Houston, executive director of the American Association of School Administrators, in a statement accompanying the report.

"Educating our children — not compliance — should be the top priority for teachers," said Common Good chairman

Philip K. Howard in another statement accompanying the report. "We should let the administrators and teachers use their judgment and then hold them accountable for their performance."

Most of the rules should be thrown out, Howard subsequently argued in a *New York*



Times op-ed piece. Law is "brilliantly ill-suited" as a management system and "leaves no room to adjust for the circumstances." (12-3-04)

Barriers to private schools

A separate report released in December analyzes the effect of overregulation on the supply of private schooling, focusing on three case studies in California.

Environmental laws, zoning and parking requirements, and building codes place large and expensive hurdles before anyone seeking to build a private school, according to Bahaa Seireg, a George Mason University Ph.D. candidate. These barriers have prevented the supply of private schools from keeping up with the demand.

In one case study, state land-use regulations tripled the cost of school, including the requirement of "a red tile roof."

"The government buries anyone interested in building a school under a mountain of needless regulation," said Reason Foundation's Lisa Snell, the study's project director. (*School Reform News*, Mar. 2005)

Academic Bill of Rights Gains More Sponsors

Alabama Student Senate Rebukes Faculty

The "Academic Bill of Rights" to combat left-wing political bullying on campus has found receptive lawmakers in at least eleven state legislatures. Bills or resolutions have been introduced or are expected to be introduced this year in California, Ohio, Florida, Indiana, Colorado, Washington State, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, Utah and Michigan. The model bill, conceived by leftist-turned-conservative activist David Horowitz, is intended to reduce harassment of conservative students and professors in higher education.



David Horowitz

A version was introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives in 2003 and a similar bill passed the Georgia Senate in 2004. In Colorado, after a similar bill passed the House education committee in early 2004, four state university presidents stepped forward and agreed to ensure that their policies protect political diversity. (See *Education Reporter*, May 2004 and Dec. 2003 for background on the Academic Bill of Rights, and Dec. 2004 for more evidence of left-wing bias in universities.)

Despite making that pledge, the University of Colorado continues to suffer national embarrassment over its tenured ethnic studies professor Ward Churchill, who wrote an essay in 2002 comparing victims of the 9/11 terrorist attack to Nazis and has

made fraudulent or unsubstantiated claims about U.S. government policy toward Indians and about his own (apparently non-existent) Indian ancestry. The university president, Betsy Hoffman, resigned in March under pressure over Churchill and an athletic recruiting scandal.

Horowitz's group Students for Academic Freedom is targeting some 20 states for legislative action on the bill. Student councils at at least six universities have passed resolutions supporting the Academic Bill of Rights. (*Arizona Capitol Times*, 2-7-05)

Students slam speech codes

One manifestation of left-wing thought control at colleges is the prevalence of "speech codes" designed to punish speech deemed offensive to certain classes of people on campus. In a strong rebuke to the University of Alabama faculty, which recently passed a resolution calling for a speech code, the student senate in February unanimously passed a resolution condemning the concept of a speech code.

"Free speech is absolutely vital to the mission of any university," the student resolution states, and "speech codes have been used by other colleges and universities to silence dissenting speech, not merely so-called 'hate speech,' and to persecute those with unpopular opinions."

After calling on the administration and faculty "to refrain from adopting any form of speech code," the resolution urged them "to adopt policies that explicitly protect free speech for all students at the University of Alabama."

Drug testing (Continued from page 1)

Policy. "It's disrupting the kids' education. And it's a major health and safety issue." He cited statistics indicating that 22,000 deaths a year result from drug abuse.

The Virginia guidelines allow a school to compel a student who tests positive into drug treatment and bar the student from extracurricular activities. Research on the effects of drug testing on drug use is mixed.

In James City, VA, a principal who describes himself as a civil libertarian is leading the charge for testing athletes for drugs this fall, and perhaps expanding the program after that. "I wouldn't favor this if I thought it [drugs] wasn't a real problem for the youth in this town," said Parke Land of Lafayette High. The program won't involve police and will keep test results private. Parents and students must sign a consent form before the students can try out for a team. (*Virginia Gazette*, 11-20-04)

In Alton, IL, school officials began testing students for alcohol before school dances, starting with the Christmas dance last December. Suspension and mandatory attendance in a student assistance program are the penalties. Some parents and students expressed outrage, but Alton High principal Phil Trapani said, "I have a difficult time understanding why any

parent would be against this."

"I wonder if the school would get the blame if a carload of kids left the dance drunk and got in an accident? I'd get roasted," he told the *Alton Telegraph* (12-8-04).

Electronic tracking

Concern for children's privacy centers on a different tactic in Brittan Elementary School in rural California: pupils are required to wear radio frequency identification badges that track their every move. The system was imposed by the school as a way to simplify taking attendance, reduce vandalism and improve student safety. Similar devices are used to monitor youngsters in some parts of Japan. (cbsnews.com, 2-9-05)

The American Civil Liberties Union generally opposes drug and alcohol testing of students as well as physical-monitoring systems.

Unions (Continued from page 2) — link teachers' pay to their performance, make it easy to get rid of mediocre teachers, give administrators control over the assignment of teachers to schools and classrooms, and prohibit unions from spending a member's dues on political activities unless that member gives explicit prior consent." (1-22-05)



Mi\$\$pending Charges Mount

Mismanagement and/or corruption by administrators or teachers plague some public school systems, as evidenced by the following recent examples:

▶ Roslyn High, a high-achieving school in an affluent Long Island, NY community, saw the arrest of a former administrator and a voter revolt last year following revelations that school funds were allegedly used to buy luxury homes, cars, jewelry, artwork and other personal items for administrators. A state audit recently found at least \$11.2 million in illegal diversions over eight years, making the case the most pervasive such school fraud in the country, according to the National School Boards Association. Three employees have been indicted for grand larceny and up to 26 other people benefited from the diversions. (*New York Times*, 3-3-05) Incensed voters responded by overwhelmingly rejecting a district spending plan last May.

▶ Atlanta public schools diverted at least \$5 million in federal E-rate grants intended to benefit poor schoolchildren, using the money for unauthorized consulting fees, cellphone bills, plasma TV monitors, temporary worker wages and air conditioners between 2000 and 2002. (*Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 12-19-04)

▶ Chicago schools using E-rate funds became so bogged down in mismanagement, politically tainted contracts and waste that they are two years behind in wiring classrooms and forfeited more than \$50 million earmarked for projects there. (*Chicago Tribune*, 9-12-04) The E-rate program was established by the Clinton administration to fund internet connections for schools, using revenues from a tax on phone bills. The program has been hit with so many allegations of waste, fraud

and abuse that the Federal Communications Commission ordered a halt in funding for several months last year pending adoption of new accounting procedures. (See *Education Reporter*, Sept. 2004 for other examples of E-rate abuses.)

▶ Three sisters and another teacher were paid tens of thousands of dollars by Chicago public schools to create math instruction manuals that were later deemed useless because they contained so many errors. An internal investigation found that the leader in the two-year project earned \$164,421 in 2001 alone, including \$73,549 in overtime pay. She hired two of her sisters to assist her, one of whom had failed the teacher's certification process at least seven times. Another teacher hired to help earned \$52,117 in 2001, including \$63,036 for overtime. Even the overtime vouchers were riddled with math errors, the report concluded. (*Chicago Tribune*, 1-18-04)

▶ A Richmond, CA adult literacy program was improperly drained of \$221,447 in restricted state funds in order to pay high salaries of administrative employees, who then laid off nearly all the literacy teachers for lack of money. The administrators also violated the city anti-nepotism policy. (*Contra Costa Times*, 12-16-03)

▶ A sophomore at Watchung Hills Regional High School, a "Blue Ribbon school of excellence" in New Jersey, reported that instead of spending money on desperately needed books and functioning bathrooms, the superintendent spent a fortune on TVs for every classroom, eight TVs/VCRs/DVD players for each lunchroom, artificial turf for the football field, "SMART Boards" to display computer images in class, and a 14-day junket to China. (*Echoes-Sentinel*, 11-17-04)

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great writers such as William Shakespeare would probably do poorly on the test because they would not write according to the formula. Others say creativity isn't the point; making a quick, clear argument is a much more important life skill.

Another danger is that politically correct teachers will penalize students for expressing views they disagree with.

While penmanship is not supposed to be considered in the score, poor handwriting — or spelling for that matter — could well try the patience of the bleary-eyed graders devoting a minute or two to each essay. In the computer age, fewer and fewer schools emphasize acquisition of good curative writing and spelling skills.