

MN, FL Pass Pro-Parent Laws on Mental Health

Minnesota this year became the first state in the country to prohibit schools from coercing parents to either medicate their children with psychotropic drugs or submit them to mental health screening. In addition, universal "developmental" screening for toddlers was defeated in the 2005 legislative session. Senate Democrats tried unsuccessfully to require screening at least once by age 3, according to the nonprofit organization EdWatch.

In 2001 Minnesota became the second state in the nation to pass a prohibition against school coercion of parents to drug their children with stimulants such as Ritalin or Adderall. Subsequent incidents of coercion involving other types of drugs, such as antidepressants, convinced sponsors of the need to expand the 2001 legislation beyond the class of stimulant drugs. This year's education bill covers all psychiatric medications, not just stimulants.

Florida this year enacted a bill containing similar protections against forced medication or screening. The new law states: "A public school may not deny any student access to programs or services because the parent of the student has refused to place the student on psychotropic medication. . . . A parent may refuse psychological screening of the student."

Utah Gov. Jon Huntsman Jr. in March vetoed a pro-parent bill that would have blocked school officials from recommending psychotropic drugs and prohibited the removal of a minor from parental custody based on the parent's refusal to administer psychotropic drugs. Gov. Janet Napolitano of Arizona vetoed a pro-parent bill on mental health screening. The Texas legislature, which passed a pro-parent bill on psychotropic drugs in 2003, declined to pass a universal mental health screening bill in May. (See *Education Reporter*, June and July 2005 and Dec. 2003.)

Legislation calling for mental health screening in schools is being considered in many states in the wake of recommendations by President Bush's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health. (See *Education Reporter*, Feb. 2005.)

IL plan covers 0-5 years

At press time, Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich was reviewing his administration's final plan to "increase early intervention and mental health treatment services and supports for children: Ages 0-5 years." A plan to link the state

(See *Mental Health*, page 4)

Universal Preschool Gains Momentum

Benefits Debated; High Expulsion Rate; Head Start Deficiencies

Universal tax-supported preschool and full-day kindergarten moved ahead in more states this summer as part of a nationwide trend to expand early-childhood public education. While support for such programs by governors appears strong, they are expensive and there is little consensus among researchers on the programs' long-term benefits to children.



Vermont in June became the fifth state to enact universal preschool, acting without floor debate in the legislature or voter approval through initiative. Quietly added to an appropriations bill by a conference committee, the new law expands access to a statewide education fund that had previously been limited to programs for children from low-income families or with limited English proficiency. By enabling districts to add two more grades below kindergarten, the law is expected to cost taxpayers an additional \$40 to 70 million per year.

The Vermont law encourages "collaboration" between public school systems and licensed private daycare centers, but does not mandate it. Critics note that the law could drive hundreds of independent preschool providers out of business by attracting most of their clients into "free" public programs.

"Few legislators clearly understood

that this was happening. It was accomplished completely below the radar of public and legislative debate, with almost zero attention from the news media," wrote John McClaughry, former vice chair of the Vermont senate education committee and president of the Ethan Allen Institute. (*Barre Times Argus/Rutland Herald*, 7-3-05)

Urged on by Gov. Bill Richardson, New Mexico in March passed a preschool bill establishing a \$5 million pilot program. The governor's avowed goal is to provide preschool "for every child."

Gov. Richardson "has ruined education in the last two years," Maude Rathgeber, a former teacher who serves as president of New Mexico Eagle Forum, told the *Education Reporter*. In addition to backing public preschool, the governor successfully pushed to abolish the elected state school board and recently called for elimination of the state higher education commission.



Gov. Bill Richardson

40 states fund some preschool

New York, Florida, Georgia and Oklahoma formally guarantee pre-kindergarten for all children, although funding and available space fall short of making that guarantee a reality. Forty states and the District of Columbia sponsor preschool programs, up from ten in 1980. Most

federal and state programs target poor children.

The Census Bureau estimates that in 2003 nearly 60% of all eligible children were enrolled in public or private preschool, more than twice the percentage in 1980. There are still more children in private than in public preschools. (See *Education Reporter*, Mar. 2005.)

Nationwide proposal

A proposal for nationwide universal preschool and full-day kindergarten was announced in late August by Arizona Gov.

Janet Napolitano, as co-chair of an education policy task force with ties to the Democratic Party. The plan also recommends a longer school year, a uniform national suggested curriculum for core courses, and use of schools for social services to parents. The estimated cost is a whopping \$325 billion in federal

money over the next 10 years, which the task force suggested could be generated by avoiding tax cuts proposed by Republican leaders. Gov. Napolitano has already established state-funded all-day kindergarten in Arizona.

CA mulls expensive plan

California voters will consider a universal preschool ballot initiative in June 2006. The measure, backed by actor/director Rob Reiner, would cost \$2.3 billion a year and would require pre-K teachers to have a bachelor's degree. The Reiner initiative even requires paying pre-K teachers on a par with high school science and math teachers. Funding would come from taxes on the superrich. (*Los Angeles Times*, 5-5-05)

Researchers at the University of California-Berkeley and Stanford University issued a study in May warning that the push to require a four-year degree is not supported by solid research. Such a standard is "very expensive and yields no consistent improvement for young children when compared to those kids whose teachers have two-year degrees and training in child development." The researchers, led by Berkeley education professor Bruce Fuller, also argue that there is no proof that children learn more in school-based programs than they do in other settings.

Supporters of the California proposal point to a study released by the Rand Corp. in March touting the benefits of universal preschool for 4-year-olds in reducing special-education needs, juvenile arrests, and holding children back a grade.

But as a letter to the editor of the *Los Angeles Times* noted, "The Rand study based its claims of cost savings on "high-

(See *Universal Preschool*, page 4)

As Global Studies Spread, Critics Complain of 'Political Brainwashing'

Global education may soon be coming to a school near you as a growing number of schools try to add a global perspective to their curriculum. At least 18 states have initiated policies encouraging or mandating more attention to instruction in world history and culture, foreign languages, and the interactions between the United States and other countries.

The four-year-old International Studies Schools Association has a mission to expand the number of teachers and schools that incorporate international content into the curriculum. The association is a network of schools housed at the University of Denver's Center for Teaching International Relations. (*Education Week*, 3-2-05)

While teaching about other countries sounds noncontroversial and, indeed, traditional, some global studies content amounts to little more than indoctrination of young children in global-government propaganda.

Thanks to an irate Carrollton, TX resident, the *Education Reporter* obtained a copy of the 6th-, 7th- and 8th-grade assignment plans being implemented by the school district in the Dallas suburb.

'How to run the world'

Some five weeks of 6th-grade class time are allotted to a simulation called "How to Run the World." Students are instructed as follows:

"You are the governing council of a new world order. No longer are there separate countries. The entire globe is under your guidance and leadership. There is chaos everywhere, because it as [sic] been a long and arduous process to organize the earth and it's [sic] people into a workable situation. You currently have pockets of wealth, but most of your people are extremely poor and hungry. There is in-fighting among people of different religions and various races. The new world economy is at an

(See *Global Studies*, page 2)



EDUCATION BRIEFS

Disenchantment with DARE grows. Chattanooga, TN in July became the latest large community to halt the DARE anti-drug program in schools. Police pointed to data showing the program was not effective. Schools in Cincinnati and Seattle began dropping the Drug Abuse Resistance Education program in 2001. A 1999 study at the University of Kentucky disclosed that students who took the course in 5th grade did not differ in their attitude toward drugs about 10 years later. About 80% of the nation's school districts still teach the course, which receives some federal funding. (*The Tennessean*, 7-28-05)

19% of the U.S. school population did not speak English at home in 2001 — as compared with 9% in 1979, according to the National Center for Education Statistics. In Western states the figure is 31%. Rising immigration and the “baby boom echo” have boosted U.S. school enrollment to 49 million.

Parents of pupil who choked to death in classroom game settle for \$2 million. An Illinois school district agreed in June to settle a wrongful-death lawsuit filed by the parents of a 6th-grader who choked on four marshmallows in a Glenview, IL elementary school in 1999. The student-initiated game involved stuffing marshmallows into the mouth one at a time until the participants were unable to say “chubby bunny” aloud. (*Education Week*, 6-15-05)

Alternate teacher certification picks up steam. Nearly a third of newly certified teachers who taught for the first time this year did not graduate from education colleges, according to a report issued by the National Center for Education Information in June. Alternate preparation and licensing of teachers has been implemented by 47 states and the District of Columbia. About 35,000 new teachers this year are former professionals or military personnel, mostly older than 30, who made a career change.

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Model Resolution Promotes Western Civ

The following sample school board resolution affirms the value of teaching students about Western civilization and its historic accomplishments. With only slight wording changes, it would also be suitable for adoption by a state legislature. Consider sending it to your local school board official or state legislator for consideration.

Whereas the study and understanding of and appreciation for the importance of United States history, civics, democratic institutions, United States citizenship, and Western ideals are critical components of a vibrant United States culture, polity and society;

Whereas the contributions of Western civilization to the world include democratic institutions and the rule of law, the concept of universal human rights, the development of science and technology, and religious tolerance;

Whereas if young people are not taught to understand and appreciate the values and culture Americans share, the

United States will continue to become increasingly vulnerable to social division, mutual distrust and animosity; and

Whereas an appreciation for the accomplishments of Western civilization, including democratic institutions and the rule of law, individual liberty, the concept of universal human rights, the development of science and technology, and religious tolerance can provide this common set of values and purpose;

Now, therefore, be it resolved, that this school board does hereby recognize that teaching young people to have an appreciation of Western civilization is central to the development and maintenance of a vibrant, united and enduring American culture; and

Further resolved, that this school board will ensure that appropriate curricula and textbooks are utilized to instill the concepts, ideals, values and accomplishments of Western Civilization effectively in all students who graduate from our high schools.



Global Studies (Continued from page 1)

all time low, because there hasn't been any leadership in this area in a very long time. What will you do to organize your world into a productive, economically feasible world where everyone gets to eat healthy food and drink clean water and earn livings to support their families?"

The students are asked to form groups to do the following:

- ▶ *"List 15 problems that you currently see in the world.*
- ▶ *Categorize these problems into 3 or 4 groups, and label these groups (for example Department of Health and Human Services)*
- ▶ *Elect a leader of your group, and assign other group members to become your cabinet members over each of the categories in which the problems you listed exist.*
- ▶ *Determine what you would require to attack these problems in your world. Money? Crops? Manpower? And determine what you would do to get what you require.*
- ▶ *Create 10 laws that you would need to enforce right away. And create a plan of how you would intend to enforce these laws.*
- ▶ *What kind of leadership would you require in order to be successful in this endeavor? What kind of qualities would your leadership need?*
- ▶ *How would you solve problems that seem to have multiple solutions? How would you solve problems that seem to have NO solution?*
- ▶ *Discuss these questions with your group and devise a 'How to Run the World' booklet outlining what your world would look like if you and your group were running it."*

In addition, students are asked to read a biography of a “world leader” and do all of the following projects outside of class time:

- ▶ *"Create a Power Point about your chosen world leader*
- ▶ *Create a paper doll of your world leader*

- ▶ *Create a world leader wallet*
- ▶ *Participate in a wax museum as your world leader character."*

'Implicitly dismisses the Constitution'

District resident Bill Mullins is “angered that 6th-grade students would be assigned a study that implicitly dismisses and taints the Constitution as a programmed brainwash to introduce the New World Order.” The retired physicist and college instructor called the curricular materials “appalling” and “grade school political brainwashing.”

Last spring Mullins and a neighbor with a 6th-grade daughter presented their objections to the school principal and the assistant superintendent of curriculum instruction, who said they would look into the matter. No response has been forthcoming.

Mullins also decried the fuzzy content of the 8th-grade “interdisciplinary seminar for gifted and talented” students, focusing on “interdependence.” The materials include the following “Thematic Focus Questions (to be reviewed throughout the year)”:

1. *"Why is interdependence an important theme to study throughout the year?"*
2. *How do cultures affect interdependence?"*
3. *What kinds of conflict can occur as a result of interdependence or lack thereof?"*
4. *How does the development of technology and art impact interdependence?"*
5. *Does interdependence affect males and females in the same way?"*

It is hard to see how such global studies content will advance grade-school students' knowledge of any real-world political systems. It is even harder to justify the class time spent on such generalities and fantasies in an era of increasing public school accountability for test scores.

Book of the Month



The Politically Incorrect Guide to American History, Thomas E. Woods, Regnery Publishing Inc., 2004, 246 pp., \$19.95.



The typical American student leaves high school (or college, as the case may be) with a head full of misconceptions about American history: the success of entrepreneurs like Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller was founded on exploitation of the poor; FDR's New Deal pulled America out of the Great Depression; Senator Joe McCarthy's claims that Communist sympathizers had infiltrated the State Department were largely unfounded. This book is a corrective to the biased and inaccurate information often found in school textbooks.

In addition to covering the basics, Woods reveals a number of lesser-known fallacies. One chapter demonstrates that certain laws enacted as a result of the civil rights movement have had unfortunate consequences for blacks and whites alike. For instance, *Brown v. Board of Education*, the case that declared segregated facilities inherently inferior, led to the disastrous practice of forced busing. At one time the average bused child in Los Angeles spent almost two hours a day on a bus. Both black and white parents came to criticize the practice, and the result has been that sufficiently affluent people (primarily white) have moved or transferred their children to private schools — thereby causing the very segregation that *Brown* meant to do away with in the first place. While this is old news to most readers of the *Education Reporter*, it is not obvious to today's generation of students.

One of the best chapters is entitled “Yes, Communist sympathizers really existed.” While liberals long denied the existence of Communists in the U.S. government, liberal writer Nicholas von Hoffman finally admitted in 1996 that two generations of students have been falsely taught about the '40s and '50s. In Hoffman's words, new evidence such as the Venona files proves that “Ethel and Julius Rosenberg, executed in June 1953 for atomic espionage, were guilty; Alger Hiss, a darling of the establishment, was guilty; and dozens of lesser known persons ... whose innocence of the accusations made against them had been a tenet of leftist faith for decades, were traitors, or, at the least, ideological vassals of a foreign power.”

This feisty work devotes too much space to revisionist theories about the Civil War. However, it makes a lively counterweight to the liberal bias prevalent in most history textbooks.

FOCUS: How Schools Cheat

by Lisa Snell

On March 17, 2005, 15-year-old Delusa Allen was shot in the head while leaving Locke High School in Los Angeles, sending her into intensive care and eventually killing her. Four months before that,



Lisa Snell

several kids were injured in a riot at the same school, and last year the district had to settle a lawsuit by a student who required eye surgery after he was beaten there. In 2000, 17-year-old Deangelo Anderson was shot just across the street from Locke; he lay dead on the sidewalk for hours before the coroner came to collect his body.

Violent crime is common at Locke. According to the Los Angeles Police Department, in the 2003-04 school year its students suffered three sex offenses, 17 robberies, 25 batteries and 11 assaults with a deadly weapon. And that's actually an improvement over some past years: In 2000-01 the school had 13 sex offenses, 43 robberies, 57 batteries, and 19 assaults with a deadly weapon.

Sounds unsafe, doesn't it? Not in the skewed world of official education statistics. Under the federal No Child Left Behind Act, states are supposed to designate hazardous schools as "persistently dangerous" and allow their students to transfer to safer institutions. But despite Locke's grim record, the state didn't think it qualified for the label.

Locke is not unique. In the 2003-04 school year only 26 of the nation's 91,000 public schools were labeled persistently dangerous. Forty-seven states and the District of Columbia proudly reported that they were home to not a single unsafe school. That would be news to the parents of James Richardson, a 17-year-old football player at Ballou Senior High in Southeast Washington, D.C., who was shot inside the school that very year. It would be news to quite a few people: The D.C. Office of the Inspector General reports that during that school year there were more than 1,700 "serious security incidents" in city schools, including 464 weapons offenses.

Most American schools are fairly safe, it's true, and the overall risk of being killed in one is less than one in 1.7 million. The data show a general decline in violence in American public schools: The National Center for Education Statistics' 2004 *Indicators of School Crime and Safety* shows that the crime victimization rate has been cut in half, declining from 48 violent victimizations per 1,000 students in 1992 to 24 in 2002, the last year for which there are complete statistics.

But that doesn't mean there has been a decline at every school. Most of the violence is concentrated in a few institutions. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, during the 1999

-2000 school year 2% of U.S. schools (1,600) accounted for about 50% of serious violent incidents — and 7% of public schools (5,400) accounted for 75% of serious violent incidents. The "persistently dangerous" label exists to identify such institutions.

So why are only 26 schools in the country tagged with it?

The underreporting of dangerous schools is only a subset of a larger problem. The amount of information about schools presented to the general public is at an all-time high, but the information isn't always useful or accurate.

Thanks to the No Child Left Behind Act, now three years old, parents are seeing more and more data about school performance. Each school now has to give itself an annual report card, with assessment results broken down by poverty, race, ethnicity, disability, and English-language proficiency. Schools also are supposed to accurately and completely report dropout rates and teacher qualifications. The quest for more and better information about school performance has been used as a justification to increase education spending at the local, state and national levels, with the federal Department of Education alone jacking up spending

to nearly \$60 billion for fiscal year 2005, up more than \$7 billion since 2003.

But while federal and state legislators congratulate themselves for their newfound focus on school accountability, scant attention is being paid to the quality of the data they're using. Whether the topic is violence, test scores or dropout rates, school officials have found myriad methods to paint a prettier picture of their performance. These distortions hide the extent of schools' failures, deceive taxpayers about what our ever-increasing education budgets are buying, and keep kids locked in failing institutions. Meanwhile, Washington — which has set national standards requiring 100% of school children to reach proficiency in math and reading by 2014 — has been complicit in letting states avoid sanctions by fiddling with their definitions of proficiency.

Prospering cheaters

Under No Child Left Behind, if schools fail to make adequate yearly progress on state tests for three consecutive years, students can use federal funds to transfer to higher-performing public or private schools, or to obtain supplemental education services from providers of their choice. In addition, schools that fail for four to five consecutive years may face state takeovers, have their staffs replaced, or be bid out to private management.

Wesley Elementary in Houston isn't a school you'd expect to be worried about those threats. From 1994 to 2003, Wesley

won national accolades for teaching a majority of its low-income students how to read. Oprah Winfrey once featured it in a special segment on schools that "defy the odds," and in 2002 the Broad Foundation awarded the Houston Independent School District a \$1 million prize for being the best urban school district in America, largely based on the performance of schools like Wesley.

It turned out that Oprah was more right than she realized: Wesley was defying the odds. A December 31, 2004 exposé by the *Dallas Morning News* found that in 2003 Wesley's 5th-graders performed in the top 10% in the state on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) reading exams. The very next year, as 6th-graders at Houston's M.C. Williams Middle School, the same students fell to the bottom 10%.

The newspaper obtained raw testing data for 7,700 Texas public schools for 2003 and 2004. It found severe statistical anomalies in nearly 400 of them. The Houston, Dallas and Fort Worth districts are now investigating dozens of their schools for possible cheating on the TAKS test. Fort Worth's most suspicious

case was at A.M. Pate Elementary. In 2004, Pate 5th-graders finished

in the top 5% of Texas students. In 2003, when those same students were 4th-graders, they had finished in the bottom 3%.

In the Winter 2004 issue of *Education Next*, University of Chicago economist Steven D. Levitt and Brian A. Jacob of Harvard's Kennedy School of Government explored the prevalence of cheating in public schools. Using data on test scores and student records from the Chicago public schools, Jacob and Levitt developed a statistical algorithm to identify classrooms where cheating was suspected. Jacob and Levitt's analysis looked for unexpected fluctuations in students' test scores and unusual patterns of answers for students within a classroom that might indicate skulduggery.

They found that on any given test the scores of students in 3% to 6% of classrooms are doctored by teachers or administrators. They also found some evidence of a correlation of cheating within schools, suggesting some centralized effort by a counselor, test coordinator or principal. Jacob and Levitt argue that with the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act, the incentives for teachers and administrators to manipulate the results from high-stakes tests will increase as schools begin to feel the consequences of low scores.

Texas' widespread cheating likely was a response both to high-stakes testing and to financial incentives for raising test scores. The Houston school district, for example, spends more than \$7 million a year on performance bonuses that are largely tied to

test scores.

Those bonuses include up to \$800 for teachers, \$5,000 for principals, and \$20,000 for higher-level administrators.

Texas is not the only state where schools have cheated on standardized tests. Teachers provided testing materials to students nearly a dozen times in 2003 in Nevada, for example. And Indiana has seen a raft of problems, including three Gary schools that were stripped of their accreditation in 2002 after hundreds of 10th-graders received answers for the Indiana Statewide Testing for Education Progress-Plus in advance. A teacher in Fort Wayne took a somewhat subtler approach in 2004, when school officials had to throw out her 3rd-grade class's scores after she gave away answers by emphasizing certain words on oral test questions. In January 2005 another Fort Wayne 3rd-grade teacher was suspended for tapping children on the shoulder to indicate a wrong answer.

Phantom dropouts

If you want to make a school's performance look more impressive than it really is, you don't have to abet cheating on standardized tests. Instead you can misrepresent the dropout rate.

In 2003 the *New York Times* described an egregious example of this scam in Houston. Jerroll Tyler was severely truant from Houston's Sharpstown High School. When he showed up to take a math exam required for graduation, he was told he was no longer enrolled. He never returned.

So Tyler was surprised to learn, when the state audited his high school, that Sharpstown High had zero dropouts in 2002. According to the state audit of Houston's dropout data, Sharpstown reported that Tyler had enrolled in a charter school — an institution he had never visited, much less attended. The 2003 state audit of the Houston district examined records from 16 middle and high schools, and found that more than half of the 5,500 students who left in the 2002 school year should have been declared dropouts but were not.

The Manhattan Institute's Jay P. Greene argues, in his 2004 paper "Public School Graduation Rates in the United States," that "this problem is neither recent nor confined to the Houston school district.... Official graduation rates going back many years have been highly misleading in New York City, Dallas, the state of California, the state of Washington, several Ohio school districts, and many other jurisdictions." Administrators, he explains, have strong incentives to count students who leave as anything other than dropouts. Next to test scores, graduation rates are an important measure of a school's performance: If parents and

(See *Cheat*, page 4)



Universal Preschool *(Continued from page 1)*

quality" preschool programs, and that is my major concern. California has proved itself incapable of providing high-quality elementary, middle or high school programs. Why should we believe it will do better with preschool?" (4-2-05)

'Constitutional right to preschool'?

One legal scholar, James E. Ryan of the University of Virginia law school, argues that "a very strong legal case, based on education clauses within every state constitution, can be made on behalf of a state constitutional right to preschool." (University of Virginia Legal Working Paper Series, 6-22-05)

Full-day kindergarten is coming soon to Oklahoma now that Gov. Brad Henry persuaded legislators to appropriate \$145 million for that purpose this summer.

Reacting to the growing trend toward state funding of pre-kindergarten and full-day kindergarten programs, the conservative American Legislative Exchange Council in May approved model legislation to maximize efficiency for taxpayers and parental satisfaction with such programs. Its Smart Start Scholarship Program offers choices between full- and half-day kindergarten, full-time or flexible preschool schedules, and private preschool providers.

High expulsion rate

Preschool children are three times as likely to be expelled as K-12 children, according to the first national study of pre-K expulsion rates, researchers from the Yale Child Study Center reported in May. On average, boys are expelled at 4.5 times the rate of girls, African-Americans at twice the rate of Latinos and Caucasians, and 4-year-olds at 1.5 times the rate of 3-year-olds.

The study was based on a telephone survey of 4,815 state-financed pre-K classrooms. It is estimated that more than 5,000 preschool children are expelled each year. To minimize expulsions, Tufts Educational Day Care in Somerville, MA actually has unruly 5-year-olds sign "contracts" promising such things as "I will not scream, try to hit, or say you're not my boss." (*Boston Globe*, 6-2-05)

Benefits questioned

The benefits of preschool, even for disadvantaged children, are debatable. A National Bureau of Economic Research working paper concluded earlier this year that early education does boost reading

and mathematics skills at school entry, but also increases children's classroom behavioral problems and reduces their self-control. "Further, for most children the positive effects of pre-kindergarten on skills largely dissipate by the spring of first grade, although the negative behavioral effects continue." (NBER Working Paper No. 10452)

A review of full-day kindergarten research likewise found fleeting benefits: "Research shows that most full-day kindergarten students demonstrate somewhat higher academic and social achievement than half-day kindergarten students; however, the higher academic achievement seems to diminish somewhat over time," concluded a February 2001 report prepared for the Kansas Department of Education.

Not much of a Head Start

The federal government released a report on a long-term study of the \$6.7 billion Head Start program in June, finding that the program didn't affect preschoolers in half of the 30 categories measured, including most behavioral areas. It helped 4-year-olds in only 6 of the 30 categories. A sizable reading readiness gap remains, and the program has no effect on premath skills.

Head Start also faces congressional allegations of financial mismanagement and embezzlement in some local programs.

The Bush administration advocates sending Head Start money to states to dole out instead of directly funding local grantees from Washington. Governors active in the National Governors Association have proposed streamlining the 69 federal programs spread across nine departments or agencies dealing with children under age 5.

10 letters of the alphabet

1998 federal legislation established academic standards for Head Start, including the expectation that all Head Start children learn at least 10 letters of the alphabet. Testing for reading and math readiness was beefed up in the past year.

As academic pressure increases on the youngest learners, so does the idea of "toddler tutoring" for overanxious affluent families. Programs known for boosting older children's academic achievement — such as Sylvan, Kumon and Kaplan — are now offering tutoring programs for children as young as 2. Sylvan typically charges about \$45 an hour. (*Wall Street Journal*, 7-12-05)

Mental Health *(Continued from page 1)*

Office of Mental Health with various state agencies and every school district in the state was required by the Illinois Children's Mental Health Act of 2003, which passed both houses of the legislature with only one opposing vote.

State Rep. Patti Bellock (R-Westmont), who co-sponsored the original Illinois bill, says it went much further than she intended. She wants to sponsor new legislation requiring families to opt into the school mental health screening programs, rather than having to opt out. (*School Re-*

form News, June 2005)

In July the federal Child Medication Safety Act went into effect, requiring state

education agencies to bar schools from keeping students out of class in cases when parents disagree with a recommendation to medicate a special-needs child with Ritalin or similar stimulants. Rep. John Kline (R-MN) wants to expand the act (passed late last year as part of a reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Act) to include all psychotropic drugs including antidepressants.



Cheat *(Continued from page 3)*

policy makers believe a school is producing a high number of graduates, they may not think reform is necessary. Greene writes that "when information on a student is ambiguous or missing, school and government officials are inclined to say that students moved away rather than say that they dropped out."

Greene and his associates have devised a more accurate method for calculating graduation rates. Simplifying a bit, it essentially counts the number of students enrolled in the 9th grade in a particular school or jurisdiction, makes adjustments for changes in the student population, and then counts the number of diplomas awarded when those same students leave high school. The percentage of original students who receive a diploma is the true graduation rate. Using Greene's methodology, the national high school graduation rate for 2002 was 71%.

As Sharpstown High School's former assistant principal, Robert Kimball, told the *New York Times*, "We go from 1,000 Freshman [sic] to less than 300 Seniors with no dropouts. Amazing!"

The problem isn't limited to Texas. In March researchers at Harvard's Civil Rights Project released an analysis of state graduation rates for 2002, in which they derived their figures by counting the number of students who move from one grade to the next and then on to graduation. The report found serious discrepancies between the rates calculated by the Civil Rights Project and those offered by education departments in all 50 states. In California, for example, the state reported an 83% graduation rate, but the Harvard report found that only 71% of students made it through high school.

The Civil Rights Project's paper also found a high dropout rate among minorities, which California officials hides behind state averages. Almost half of the Latino and African-American students who should have graduated from California high schools in 2002 failed to complete their education. In the Los Angeles Unified School District, just 39% of Latinos and 47% of African-Americans graduated, compared with 67% of whites and 77% of Asians.

Moving goalposts on proficiency

A subtler way to distort data is to report test scores as increasing when in fact more students have been excluded from taking the test. One egregious example of this practice took place in Florida, which grades schools from F to A based on their standardized test scores. Oak Ridge High School in Orlando boosted its test scores from an F to a D in 2004 after purging its attendance rolls of 126 low-performing students.

The students were cut from school enrollment records without their parents' permission, a violation of state law. According to the *Orlando Sentinel*, about three-quarters of the students had at least one F in their classes, and 80% were 9th- or 10th-graders — a key group, because Florida counts only the scores of freshmen and sophomores for school grades. More than half of the students returned to Oak Ridge a few weeks after state testing.

The *Sentinel* also reported that in 2004 some 160 Florida schools assigned students to new schools just before standardized testing in a shell game to raise school grades. In Polk County, for example, 70% of the students who were reassigned to new schools scored poorly on Florida's Comprehensive Assessment Test, suggesting they were moved to avoid giving their old schools a bad grade.

Florida is not alone. Houston's Austin High used a strategy of holding back low-scoring 9th-graders and then promoting them directly to 11th grade to avoid the 10th-grade math exam.

States are also excluding a higher percentage of disabled students and students for whom English is a second language. And states often report that their test scores are going up when they've merely dumbed-down their standards by changing the percentage of correct responses necessary to be labeled "proficient" or by changing the content of the tests to make them easier.

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