

States Respond to New Math Guidelines: Back to Basics?

Waves of public debate over math education have hit Washington and several other states, since the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics released its new guidelines in September of 2006.

The NCTM report, "Curriculum Focal Points for Pre-kindergarten Through Grade 8 Mathematics," was the most important since the infamous 1989 standards (see *Education Reporter*, Nov. 2006).

"Focal Points" recommends that states simplify their math standards and objectives to teach just three crucial concepts in each grade. Compared to the 1989 standards, the new recommendations place a much stronger emphasis on basic skills and procedures, such as "quick recall" of multiplication and division facts in 4th grade, and multiplying fractions in 6th grade.

The 1989 standards profoundly affected math curricula in school districts across the nation. Only half of all states now require students to memorize multiplication tables at any point during their academic career. It's little wonder, then, that "Focal Points" has given educators and parents much to talk about — especially in Washington State, where a math crisis is making the discussion urgent.

Washington's class of 2008 is supposed to be the first in which every student must pass the 12th grade WASL math exam in order to graduate; but only 58% of this group passed the 10th grade math WASL last year. Gov. Chris Gregoire and Supt. Terry Bergeson support a measure, now pending in the legislature, to postpone the math requirement until 2011.

Other indicators in Washington State all point in the same direction. Only 52% of 7th graders pass the math WASL. Tutoring revenue has increased 340% in ten years. As in other states, a significant number of parents have banded together against the reform math curriculum they blame for students' math woes. Their group, "Where's the Math," includes "Washington parents and educators for mathematically correct curriculum." Spokeswoman M.J. McDermott "stars" in a short online movie explaining the shortcomings of Washington's two most popular reform math curricula, *TERC Investigations* and *Everyday Mathematics*. "Students who learn math by *TERC Investigations* rarely become efficient, confident, and fluent math users," she concludes after demonstrating the *TERC* approach to two-digit multiplication.

About two million children nationwide use the other curriculum, *Everyday Math*. Although Harvard mathematician Wilfried Schmid has called it the "least objectionable among the reform pro-



grams," McDermott demonstrates that neither of the textbook's two-digit multiplication processes (algorithms) is as efficient or straightforward as the standard multiplication algorithm familiar to all parents. Under pressure to innovate, both

of these textbooks have devised methods that make arithmetic more complicated for children, while still failing to help them understand the underlying concepts of arithmetic (which is reform math's goal and justification).

McDermott quotes at length from the teacher's edition of *Everyday Math*. The authors

"do not believe it is worth students' time and effort to fully develop highly efficient paper-and-pencil algorithms for all possible . . . problems. Mastery of the intricacies of such algorithms is a huge endeavor, one that experience tells us is doomed to failure for many students. It is simply counter-productive to invest many hours of precious class time on such algorithms . . . particularly because quotients can be found quickly and accurately with a calculator."

The new "Focal Points" report emphasizes that the algorithms in question are just such basic skills: long division, multiplying and dividing fractions, etc.

"Where's the Math" has seized on "Focal Points" as a tool against reform math, and Washington school administrators have taken up a defensive posture against the report. Supt. Bergeson

(See Math Guidelines, page 2)

'Overwhelming Majority' of Universities Restrict Free Speech

First Amendment rights are under attack on college campuses across the nation, according to a report released by the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE) in December. Out of 334 schools included in FIRE's study, 229 have at least one policy that "both clearly and substantially restricts freedom of speech." FIRE gave these 229 schools a "red light" designation. Almost 100 others received a "yellow light" for ambiguous policies. Only eight schools earned FIRE's "green light," meaning that they have no policies limiting constitutionally protected free speech.

Although the law generally does not require private institutions to guarantee First Amendment rights, most private universities do promise their students and professors the same freedoms that are enjoyed in society at large. Public universities cannot legally make any policy that restricts constitutionally protected speech. However, the FIRE report found that public colleges and universities are actually more likely than private ones to violate students' constitutional rights. Legal challenges to public universities' speech codes have resulted in federal courts striking down the policies, notably, at the University of Michigan, the University of Wisconsin, and Shippensburg University of Pennsylvania. Campus speech codes have nevertheless proliferated and grown even more restrictive. Many schools have policies that, if enforced, would squelch any public debate or statement of a controversial opinion, of any kind, at any time. These schools claim to espouse academic freedom, tolerance and free speech; but at the same time, they use their speech codes to censor and silence students who

express themselves in ways the institution finds "offensive."

Wolves in Sheep's Clothing

Unconstitutional speech codes slip into school policies under four main guises, according to FIRE: disorderly conduct policies, policies on tolerance, respect and civility, harassment policies, and free speech zone regulations.



In its tolerance policy, UNC Greensboro prohibits "disrespect for persons." Rutgers prohibits "joking" comments (between friends, roommates, floormates) . . . which may be racist, sexist, heterosexist (homophobic)." At Jacksonville State University in Alabama, students may not "offend" anyone "on university owned or operated property."

In its harassment policy, Davidson College prohibits "comments or inquiries about dating," "patronizing remarks (. . . i.e. . . . referring to an adult as 'girl' . . .)," "innuendos," and "dismissive comments." Cal Tech defines harassment in part as "speech that demeans . . . another because of his or her personal characteristics or beliefs." In contrast, the Supreme Court has defined harassment in an educational context as conduct "so severe, pervasive, and objectively offensive that it effectively bars the victim's access to an educational opportunity or benefit." Colleges have punished numerous students in recent years for harassment, disorderly conduct or abuse, when in fact the students were

(See Free Speech, page 4)

Mothers Challenge Assignment of Bad Books

Is it "censorship" to exclude a book from a high school or junior high curriculum based on its content? Who should decide which books children may access in their school libraries? Adults have the freedom to choose their own reading material. Do children have that freedom, too?

Children's Library Use: Who's in Charge?

"The First Amendment restricts the government from censorship, *not* parents," says Laurie Taylor Masterson, mother and activist in Fayetteville, Arkansas. Masterson believes it is her responsibility to teach her children ethics and right conduct, and to protect them from sexually and otherwise explicit books until they are mature enough to evaluate such books for themselves. Therefore, she was alarmed when she discovered in 2005 that her daughters' school library made

several sexually graphic and explicit books available to 6th and 7th graders. She began a systematic search through the library's shelves, and found dozens of books with strongly objectionable content. For years, parents have protested the availability to public school children of books such as those by Judy Blume, which include fictional accounts of teenagers engaging in sexual activity.

Masterson also found many books in an entirely different category. These were nonfiction books overtly teaching middle schoolers a very specific view of sexuality — in Masterson's words, the view that it's all right "to have sex whenever, however, and with whomever they want." Some books included fully nude, explicit drawings, in-



structions on how to perform specific sex acts, and positive references to bestiality, group sex, and the use of pornography by minors (which may mean these books actually violate the law). Furthermore, the shelves also teemed with "young adult novels" like Blume's but far more explicit, sexually violent, and disturbing. Some books in the library had been partially published in *Playboy*. Masterson could hardly believe that her children could be exposed to such materials without her knowledge, permission, or input.

She began a campaign to inform other parents about the books, and to assert her right as a parent to limit what

(See Bad Books, page 4)

EDUCATION BRIEFS

Students are dropping out of school in record numbers, especially in the nation's largest public school districts. Among the 100 largest districts, an average of 31% of students drop out. In Baltimore, Cleveland, and Atlanta, only half of the students graduate. The Census Bureau reports the grim results: 68% of all state prison inmates are dropouts. And while high school graduates earn \$28,000 on average, dropouts average \$19,000. (*ABC News*, 11-20-2006)

Several states now send home data on students' weight along with their grades, including Pennsylvania, Tennessee, South Carolina, and Delaware. This "obesity report card" with the student's body mass index and percentile is intended to help reduce childhood obesity; but many parents have complained that there's no evidence the report cards will help students maintain a healthy weight. (*International Herald Tribune*, 1-8-2007)

Media will absorb almost half of Americans' time in 2007, according to the Census Bureau's "Statistical Abstract of the United States." The average American will spend 3,518 hours with media, including 1,555 hours watching TV, along with time online, listening to music, or reading. The figure has increased since 2000, when Americans consumed media for an average of 3,333 hours. (*USA Today*, 12-15-2006)

Police charged a Danville, PA 6th grader with disorderly conduct after she wet her pants in school. The child has a history of behavior problems and may have urinated on purpose. The citation was later withdrawn, and the superintendent admitted that calling the police was "probably not a good idea." (*Press Enterprise*, 1-6-2007)

Longer school days in Massachusetts may become a national trend. Ten Massachusetts schools have lengthened their schedules by 30% this year, mostly by adding hours to the school day. Sen. Ted Kennedy plans to file legislation favoring longer school days nationwide, through grants for schools that change their schedules. (*Boston Globe*, 1-8-2007)

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Web site: <http://www.eagleforum.org>
E-mail: education@eagleforum.org

San Francisco School Board Wages War on JROTC Program

San Francisco's school board voted to terminate the city's Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps program, despite strong support for JROTC from the mayor, the superintendent, and 1,600 participating students. Hundreds of students and their families lined the streets before the school board meeting, holding signs to support the program. Those students were dismayed when the board voted 4-2 against JROTC.

Board members opposing the program gave two reasons for their decision. For one, they believe the program thwarts the "curriculum of peace" they want San Francisco city schools to teach. One board member called the program "military branding, military thinking, military recruiting, and that has to stop." Board members also said JROTC "manifests the military's discrimination against LGBT (lesbian gay bisexual transgender) people."

Mayor Gavin Newsom criticized the board for what he called an "ideological decision, not a practical decision." He also warned that the decision sent "the wrong message. It's important for the city not to be identified with disrespecting the sacrifice of men and women in uniform."

JROTC has been in San Francisco schools for 90 years. Over 2,600 high schools nationwide offer JROTC, and several hundred thousand students parti-

pate. The Department of Defense estimates that 40% of JROTC cadets go on to perform some military service. Prior to the 1990s, the program was popular mostly in rural areas. Now, about one-third of the units are in inner-city high schools. California has the second-most inner-city JROTC units, after Texas.

Numerous parents and editorialists have attacked the board's arguments, saying the program instills leadership, citizenship, and discipline, rather than "militarizing" education. Colin Powell also defended the program in his book, *My American Journey*. "The junior program can provide a fresh start in life for thousands of endangered kids, particularly those from minorities living in crime-plagued ghettos," he said.

Several groups, including the American Friends Service Committee and the Project for Youth and Non-Military Opportunities, oppose JROTC nationwide.

Budget analysis indicated the JROTC's cost to the San Francisco school district should roughly equal the cost of replacement gym classes for the 1,600 students affected. The balance of opinion on the board may change, with a new board coming in before the program is scheduled to phase out. However, one newly elected member said she doubts the board will revisit the issue, though she personally supports JROTC.



Math Guidelines (Continued from page 1)

announced in October that she stands by existing standards and encouraged the state to "stay the course." Both she and Gov. Gregoire blamed failed implementation by teachers rather than the curriculum itself.

It remains to be seen whether the public outcry in Washington will lead to back-to-basics math standards, but it is likely to do so. Maryland is also the scene of much discussion over "Focal Points." Critics of the math standards that Maryland has been using point out that the curriculum is anything but focused; the objectives for each grade number between 50 and 60, with much repetition of concepts in each year. The Maryland Department of Education is now meeting with math supervisors to discuss "Focal Points," with a view toward

adopting the new standards.

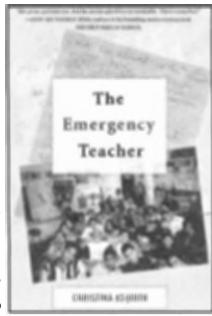
At least 12 states have told NCTM they plan to change their math standards based on the new recommendations. California has been moving away from "reform" math for nearly a decade, and Indiana and Massachusetts have already instituted back-to-basics changes. Utah, North Carolina and Florida are among the states that plan to revise their standards within the next few years. If all these large states follow the NCTM's new advice, the textbook industry will almost certainly respond with major changes to math materials.

View information on NCTM's report online at www.nctm.org/focalpoints/intro.asp. View Where's the Math's movie, *Math Education: An Inconvenient Truth*, at www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tr1qee-bTzI.

Book of the Month



The Emergency Teacher. Christina Asquith, West Parley Press, 2005, 273 pp., \$19.95



"If only these reporters could get past the school's public relations and tell us what's *really* happening!" If you've ever thought something similar, read *The Emergency Teacher*. Christina Asquith left her career as a *Philadelphia Inquirer* journalist to serve as an emergency teacher. The school system placed her in a bilingual 6th-grade class in a middle school ranked 42nd out of Philadelphia's 42. Asquith recounts the story of her year, in an inside look full of human interest and candid observations.

"I wanted to be a success story and to have a message that new, idealistic teachers could succeed in this environment." Asquith still believes that with training and support, emergency teachers could survive and prosper. Yet the problems she encountered went far beyond the mere shortage of teachers and proper training. "I felt that in the current school environment, anyone who wanted to improve the situation or make a difference was seen as a threat to an entrenched, corrupt, well-funded bureaucracy that was accountable to no one, and which would defend itself even to the extent of denying the problem."

Asquith tells us that for weeks, she spent every moment creating lesson plans from scratch, when administrative mismanagement left her without textbooks. She describes how both special education and bilingual education at her middle school were largely mythical, existing only on paper, while students with special needs languished. Although Asquith sees little evidence that bilingual education helps students, she decries the injustice of pretending students are receiving it when they are not. The story grows even more alarming as the year goes on, and the administration gradually loses control of the school. Students suffer as every day the situation spins farther into anarchy.

By the end of the year, the principal's mantra, "Failure is not an option," takes on an ominous double meaning. She demands that teachers advance students to the next grade, regardless of the skills they have (or have not) attained — all in order to create the appearance of improvement and success. Asquith's loyalty lies not with the teacher's unions or the system, but with the students and their families. With humor, honesty and insight, she brings us face to face with the systemic problems she discovered, and with the teachers and students who struggle to teach and learn in spite of those problems.

FOCUS: Writing the Tucker Plan into Law

By Allen Quist

Bills are being introduced in Congress that, if passed, will write much of the Marc Tucker education plan into law. The most significant of these bills so far is the SPEAK Act (S. 224, H.R. 325), also referred to as the "Dodd-Ehlers bill." Future bills will likely be forthcoming to implement other features of the Tucker plan.

What does Tucker's plan hope to accomplish? The focal point of his proposal, says Tucker, is "to adopt internationally benchmarked standards for educating" our students and workers. [Executive Summary of the Tucker Report, paragraph 1, emphasis added]. He says again that in order to improve education, we must enable students to "succeed against internationally benchmarked education standards" [Executive Summary, p. 12].

What are "internationally benchmarked education standards"? In the field of education, the word "standards" means (1) "content standards," or "curriculum," the subject matter schools are to teach, and (2) "achievement standards," the level of accomplishment regarding the curriculum that students must achieve as measured by tests of some kind. "Benchmarks" are the detail of the curriculum and the tests. So the term "internationally benchmarked education standards" means **international curriculum and international tests**.

What international curriculum and tests does Tucker have in mind? He clarifies on page 87 of his Report that he favors the PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) tests and curriculum. PISA are the politically-correct international tests and curriculum favored by the postmodern left. They focus on fuzzy math instead of traditional math. They disregard errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar. They ignore reading fluency and comprehension in favor of students being able to "construct" and "reflect" on what they have read.

Not surprisingly, PISA tests give far different results than knowledge-based tests. When Tucker calls for "internationally benchmarked standards," he wants to give the impression he is speaking of high expectations on academic knowledge and skills. Nothing could be further from the truth. The PISA tests are all about political-correctness and the leftist worldview; they do a poor job of measuring knowledge and skills.¹ (For an analysis of fuzzy math and the damage it is doing to our children, see the author's *America's Schools: The Battleground for Freedom*.)

All educational curricula and achievement tests are based on a political and educational philosophy. The philosophy of the PISA tests Tucker prefers is not consistent with the worldview and wishes of most parents and other citizens in the United States.



Perhaps that is why his plan also calls for the elimination of locally elected school boards.

International Education

The international PISA tests and curriculum are consistent with the international education system already being followed by the United States. The first President George Bush, on behalf of the United States, signed the international education agreement known as The World Conference on Education for All (EFA) (1990), an accord overseen by UNESCO. This international agreement required the United States to establish a national system of education as opposed to a state and local system—a feat largely accomplished by the Goals 2000 Act of 1994.

The updated version of EFA was formulated in 2000 and is known as "The Dakar Framework for Action." It was signed by President Bill Clinton. This second international agreement, commonly known as **Dakar**, is an expansion of the 1990 Education for All agreement.

On October 3, 2003, in a speech to UNESCO, U.S. Education Secretary Rod Paige said: "*Education for All* is consistent with our recent education legislation, the *No Child Left Behind Act*." Paige also said that the United States and UNESCO were pursuing a "common strategy" and were "implementing joint action" in education policy. **The reason No Child Left Behind is consistent with Dakar is because NCLB was structured to meet the requirements of the international agreements.**²

The Content (Curriculum) of International Education

The Education for All website explains the international curriculum that participating countries are expected to teach. Paragraph 58 says education should "strengthen respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms as proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights [UDHR] (Article 26)." Article 26 of UDHR says education "shall further the activities of the United Nations." **In other words, at Dakar the United States agreed to design an education curriculum that promotes the activities of the UN including treaties and documents America has not signed such as the UDHR, the Treaty on the Rights of the Child, Kyoto, the UN Treaty on Biodiversity, the Earth Charter, and the International Criminal Court Treaty, to name just a few.**

Like PISA, the curriculum required by the UN documents and treaties focuses on attitudes, values and worldview, not high knowledge-based expectations. The Earth Charter, for example, calls for legalized abortion, gay marriage, income redistribution within

nations and between nations, military disarmament, and education in Pantheism along with numerous other positions of the hard left. Dakar requires the United States to promote the political agenda of the UN in its education curriculum.

Do these international education agreements have the force of law in the United States? No. Since the agreements have never been ratified by the Senate, they do not have the force of law in and of themselves. **The signatures of U.S. Presidents on these agreements, however, mean the agreements are now the education policy of the executive branch of our government.** Since the Department of Education is an arm of the executive branch, it is expected to comply with the international agreements—and it does.

In addition, Goals 2000, School-to-Work and NCLB have written key features of the international agreements into our law. **The Tucker plan does more of the same.** Following is a description of how it will work.

Writing the Tucker Plan into Law

Tucker explains that his plan will require students to pass new Board Exams. He says:

Our first step is creating a set of Board Examinations. States will have their own Board Examinations, and some national and even international organizations will offer their own. A Board Exam is an exam in a set of core subjects that is based on a syllabus provided by the Board. So the point of the exam is to find out whether the student has learned from the course what he or she was supposed to learn. [Executive Summary of the Report, p. 10].

As stated by Tucker, these Boards will determine the content that students must learn and will also write the tests to see if the students learned what they were supposed to. But Tucker says he is speaking of content and tests written at three levels of government: state, national and international. (Tucker also indicates that we need a singular national curriculum.) How can curriculum and tests written by three levels of governance be brought into conformity? **The answer to that question is provided in the SPEAK Act (S. 224, H.R. 325), the Dodd-Ehlers bill.** According to the bill summary of SPEAK provided by the New America Foundation, this bill does the following:

Purpose: To create, adopt, and implement rigorous, voluntary American education content standards in math and science in grades K-12 and incentivize states to adopt them. [The bill]: 1. Tasks the National Assessment Governing Board . . . with creating . . . national content standards in math and science for grades K-12. [emphasis added]

These "American education content standards in math and science" have already been written. (See *Fed Ed: The New*

Federal Curriculum and How It's Enforced.) That is why the bill says the board can "adopt" as well as "create" national standards (curriculum). (Look for other bills to add in the other subject areas.) **The effect of the Dodd-Ehlers bill is to (1) legitimize the national education content standards (national curriculum) already written, (2) authorize the National Assessment Governing Board (NAG Board) to adopt or change the curriculum, (3) give this non-elected board the authority to dictate the educational content and tests for all our schools, and (4) equip the NAG Board to "incentivize" (translate "force") the states to adopt its curriculum.³**

Non-elected Gatekeepers

Since the voting members of the NAG Board are appointed by the President of the United States, one non-elected board will now have the authority to dictate the education content for all public schools as well as the authority to write the important tests. According to Tucker's plan, the resulting Board Exams, first given in tenth grade, will determine if a child can continue in school or not. A second Board Exam will dictate if students may attend college or not. **This non-elected Board, therefore, serving at the wishes of the President, becomes the education gatekeeper for the children of our country.** As explained above, these Board Exams will be more interested in measuring the attitudes and values desired by the hard left than in measuring knowledge-based academic achievement.

As noted above, the United States already agreed to teach the UNESCO curriculum when our Presidents signed Dakar. **The Dodd-Ehlers bill gives Dakar the force of law.** In this way the central features of the international education agreements will become law in the United States without ever facing hearings or a ratification vote in the U.S. Senate. The Constitution of the United States will have been effectively bypassed.

International Baccalaureate as Prototype

The UNESCO curriculum is now being taught in 680 American schools in the form of the International Baccalaureate (IB) program. In 1996 the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) formed a "partnership" with UNESCO to form a pilot program for what the IBO and UNESCO websites describe as an "international education system."⁴

The IB curriculum focuses on students and faculty becoming what IB calls "world citizens." Faculty and students are expected to memorize the 10 values of world citizenship. (The Ten Commandments have been replaced with the 10 values of IBO-UNESCO.) These IB values are vague and non-academic. IBO refers to them as the "attitudes and values" that are central to the IBO curriculum. Like PISA, the IBO curriculum does not focus on knowledge, it focuses on the attitudes and values of the internationalist left.

(See *Tucker Plan*, page 4)

Free Speech (Cont. from page 1)

engaging in constitutionally protected free speech.

For example, shortly after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Zewdalem Kebede, a student at San Diego State University, challenged a group of four other students who were loudly celebrating the attacks. School judicial officials took disciplinary action against Kebede, accusing him of "abusive behavior" toward the other students, though he was indisputably within his rights.

Often, speech codes and the associated mentality result in administrators punishing or restricting students based on vague and nebulous charges. In 2005, an administrator at Seminole Community College in Florida prohibited a student from distributing literature on slaughterhouses. The pamphlets came from PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals), and the administrator gave as her chief justification, "PETA instills a feeling in me that I can't, and won't, take a chance on campus."

Enforcing the Code

The Speech Code Report is a must-read for anyone who cares about freedom of speech and its future in our nation. FIRE's case files also expose how some institutions enforce the unconstitutional limits they place on students' expression. The latest case involves Michigan State University's Student Accountability in Community seminar (SAC), which the university describes as an "early intervention" for students who use "power-and-control tactics." MSU's sexual harassment policy stays relatively close to the Supreme Court's definition, and the school does not restrict speech through any official tolerance or respect policies. However, the university has found that it doesn't need an unconstitutional harassment policy to enforce what FIRE president Greg Lukianoff has called "compelled speech" and "blatant thought reform." Under current regulations, MSU judicial officials can require a student to attend SAC for any of the following actions, among many others:

- "making sexist, homophobic, or racist remarks at a meeting"
- "humiliating a boyfriend or girlfriend"
- "insulting instructors"
- "aggressive behavior"—judicial administrators have sent students to SAC for slamming a door during an argument, and for playing a practical joke on another student.

The program materials further describe "power-and-control tactics" to include:

- "perfectionism"
- "using others to relay messages"
- "honeymooning" others [unclear what this means]
- "acting 'crazy' or invincible, like 'I have nothing to lose.'"

Students who demonstrate such behaviors and are required to attend SAC pay \$50 for four one-hour sessions. If they refuse to attend, the school places a hold on their student accounts, making it impossible for them to register, and thus ef-

fективly expelling them.

At the SAC sessions, students must fill out questionnaires about their actions, motivations, and what they should have done instead. The SAC facilitator often requests the student to fill out the questionnaire multiple times until the student is no longer "obfuscating"—in other words, until the student writes what the administrator thinks he should write.

In a letter to MSU, Lukianoff called this procedure a major violation of freedom of speech and conscience. "Such utter disregard for the autonomy and agency of others is the hallmark of totalitarianism and has no place at an institution of higher learning in any free society, let alone a public university in the state of Michigan."

Lukianoff sat in on a training seminar several years ago on how to implement SAC-like programs at other schools. One participant asked, "How do I deal with people with religious beliefs that 'justify' their anger?" Lukianoff reports that one of the trainers representing MSU responded, "Religious beliefs may be a form of obfuscation."

FIRE has challenged MSU and asked that the institution dismantle SAC. A school official responded to say that MSU would review the program.

Read FIRE's Speech Code Report at www.thefire.org/speechcodereport.php.

Tucker Plan (Continued from page 3)

The central theme of these IB values is explained in a power-point presentation on the IBO webpage. One frame asks the question: "Freedom fighter or terrorist? [According to] Mahatma Gandhi: Honest disagreement is often a good sign of progress." This frame defines the moral relativism and multiculturalism that is central to the IBO curriculum — terrorists exist only in the minds of some people, it's all a matter of one's perspective. In direct contrast, the United States creed, as stated in the Declaration of Independence, insists that truth and morality are real and universal — not mere cultural constructs.

Which Direction Will We Take?

Other details in the Tucker plan make his agenda easier to accomplish. Those details include (1) having teachers be hired by the state, (2) having states take over teacher certification, (3) requiring that teacher education be based on the Board's curriculum, (4) establishing universal preschool (the structure already exists to force the same international curriculum on pre-school education (see Quotes and References from Early Childhood Testimony), and (5) establishing merit pay for teachers who help facilitate the system.

The big question in education "reform" today is this: What values and worldview will form the foundation for the curriculum and tests? Will we follow the fundamental principles of the United States as stated in our Declaration of Independence and Constitution? Or will the

Bad Books (Cont. from page 1)

she saw as harmful influences on her children. "I never asked for any books to be banned, burned or anything else," she explained in a recent talk. "I only wanted to restrict what my children would read." Nevertheless, some journalists decried her efforts, labeling her a "book-burner" and a "bigot."

Many parents stepped up to second Mrs. Masterson's complaints, and to join the group she started, called "Parents Protecting the Minds of Children" (teachclean.com). Together, these parents raised public awareness of the issue, and appealed for changes in library policy. Beginning in June of 2006, Fayetteville public schools conceded to parents the right to prevent their own children from checking out specific books. The school board also moved two of the most objectionable nonfiction books to the parent section of the library — though it also said children could access the parent section freely.

NC-17 Curriculum Content: Is It Really Necessary?

Debate over controversial material in books also raged in Cook County, Illino-



is, in 2006. In Cook County's District 214, board member Leslie Pinney questioned the appropriateness of nine books as required reading for area high schoolers. "High school students are not college students," she reminded the community and the other board members. "While in high school we hope to prepare them for college, we can still do so without giving them R-rated material from which to learn."

Pinney publicized excerpts that she thought detracted from the books' overall literary merit and value for high school coursework. Books on the list contained graphic descriptions, not only of adolescent promiscuity, but also of sexual torture, incest, infanticide, and bestiality. Since some of the books on the list were written at a 6th grade reading level, Pinney asked, how could their supposed literary value justify forcing teenagers to read such disturbing material?

Leslie Pinney succeeded in raising parents' awareness about the curriculum and required reading lists at their children's schools. Vigorous debate on the issue culminated in five hours of public discussion on the evening of the board's vote on the books with 1,000 people attending the meeting. When the board finally voted at 1:30 a.m., six board members voted to keep the books in the curriculum, and only Pinney voted to replace them. This vote did not reflect the community's stance on the issue, since polls revealed that 44% of area parents stood with Ms. Pinney.

Although the effort to replace the books did not succeed, Pinney and other community members have been able to challenge District 214 to make good on its "controversial issues" policy and its "alternative assignments" policy. While the district has claimed to offer alternative assignments if a student or parent requests one, in practice this has not helped students to avoid objectionable assignments.

For example, one student requested an alternative assignment when his class was required to watch an R-rated movie. Instead of assigning him a different movie or a comparable project, his teacher asked him to write a 12-page paper. The school district is now working with parents to ensure that alternative assignments will be fair.

However, Pinney and Citizens for Quality Education, a group of concerned parents in the area, still say the system leaves much to be desired. Students who ask for alternative assignments become targets of ridicule from their peers, and this also often pits children and parents against each other. Many parents wish students had to "opt in" to reading or watching explicit materials with parental permission, rather than having to ask to "opt out."

Even more, they wish the curriculum would take more advantage of the many outstanding books that could introduce high schoolers to great literature, without flooding them with violent, often sordid situations and descriptions.