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U.S. is One of the Best Countries for Entrepreneurs

During the 2008 political campaign, Americans heard a lot of buzz about “global competitiveness” and our impending economic doom because India, China, and other nations produce a better educated workforce. The Partnership for 21st Century Skills released a report in September sounding the alarm and calling for governments and leaders to align their work with the “outcomes young people need in the 21st century.”

A few organizations are pushing major changes to K-12 and higher education and the creation of “workforce-development” and “economic-development” superstructures in order to address the problem of global competitiveness. Proposals for such superstructures remind some political conservatives of “Soviet five-year plans,” and education critic Diane Ravitch described Marc Tucker’s similar proposal in 2007.

Writer Gerald W. Bracey offers a refreshing reality check on America’s success. For example, he reminds us that international observers agree that in the category of fostering entrepreneurship, the U.S. is at or near the top of the list.

The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) researches entrepreneurial activity across the world. GEM’s most recent report studied entrepreneurship in 42 countries, including high-income countries such as the U.S., the nations of Western Europe, and the United Arab Emirates, as well as middle- and low-income countries such as China, India, and

the nations of Eastern Europe and Latin America. Based on data from GEM and the World Bank, CNNMoney.com ranked the U.S. the second-best nation in the world for entrepreneurs, just after New Zealand.

Bracey says that Americans tend to respect entrepreneurs and honor perseverance in the face of failure, two aspects of our culture that help to foster an entrepreneurial spirit. According to CNN Money, “In places such as Sweden — and even in England —

a business failure is regarded as a family disgrace. In Germany, a bankrupt business owner may wind up paying creditors for 30 years, making it nearly impossible to start over. If a second act is an impossibility, ambitious entrepreneurs may never attempt the first.”

The World Economic Forum and the International Institute for Management Development both rank the U.S. as the world’s most competitive economy, just as it has ranked for decades.

Gerald Bracey rounds up these facts, and asks those who wish to shape economic policy around global competitiveness to keep them in mind. “So, Bill Gates, Eli Broad, Roy Romer, Craig Barrett, and Bob Wise, can we lay off the math-science-good-jobs fear-mongering for a while?” Bracey pleads. Regardless of the changes we would all like to see in American education, comparisons to other nations should take all of the facts into account. (*Education Week*, 9-17-08)



Chicago Plans Gay High School

The city of Chicago plans to open a “gay-friendly” public high school, the Pride Campus of the existing Lawndale Little Village High School for Social Justice. Officials hope the Pride Campus will welcome 600 students when it opens in 2010.

Chicago Public Schools Chief Arne Duncan says he hopes about half of Pride Campus students will be homosexual, and half will be heterosexual. It is difficult to imagine how Duncan might achieve that vision, since by federal law school officials may not ask students about their sexual orientation.

The curriculum of the Pride Campus will “teach the history of all people who have been oppressed and the civil rights movements that have led to social justice and queer studies,” according to official materials. The school will also offer counseling to students.

Proponents of the gay-friendly high school say it is necessary because gay and lesbian students fare worse than their heterosexual peers in traditional schools. The Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) just released a study reporting that 32% of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender students missed a class in the past year because they felt unsafe. Only 5.5% of heterosexual students said they missed a class because they felt unsafe.

Kevin Jennings, founder and executive director of GLSEN, said that schools like the Pride Campus are a moral imperative. “If we keep doing nothing, we are going to keep getting these horrifying levels of harassment, greater rates of skipping, not going to college and more tragic violence,” he said. “We can continue to do nothing, and we know the results,

or we can save young people’s lives and offer them an education and a future.”

Opponents of the Pride Campus question the use of public funds to create a school themed on sexual orientation. “Why is the answer to bullying a return to separate but equal?” asked Andrew Breitbart, founder of the news site Breitbart.com. Breitbart called attention to the broader issue of “social justice” teaching in public schools. The School for Social Justice, which will be connected administratively to the Pride Campus, opened in 2005.

“Social justice” is all the rage in education schools and among many liberal activists. Some people confuse “social justice” with simple



SOCIAL JUSTICE HIGH SCHOOL

justice; but because of who usually uses it and how, the

term is inextricably tied up with the redistribution of wealth.

Breitbart reports that a group of social-welfare students at the University of California at Berkeley summed up social justice in this way:

“Social justice is a process, not an outcome, which (1) seeks fair (re)distribution of resources, opportunities and responsibilities; (2) challenges the roots of oppression and injustice; (3) empowers all people to exercise self-determination and realize their full potential; (4) and builds social solidarity and community capacity for collaborative action.”

Since these goals are far from politically neutral, Breitbart calls social justice schools and curricula “blatant political sectarianism on the public’s dime.” Creating the Pride Campus of Chicago’s School for Social Justice, furthermore, is “ghettoizing children based on identity politics in order to make them politically active collectivists,” says Breitbart. (*Washington Times*, 10-13-08)

New York City already has a high school for gay and lesbian students, the Harvey Milk High School in the East Village. Harvey Milk was a homosexual activist and San Francisco politician; the California legislature recently voted for schools across that state to celebrate Harvey Milk Day annually (*Education Reporter*, Sept. 2008).

Harvey Milk High School has served gay and lesbian students since 1985, but it became a “gay-themed” public high school in 2003. 100 students attend the school. While Harvey Milk High requires that the students it admits be at risk of dropping out of another school because of harassment, Chicago’s Pride Campus will be open to all interested students. The School Board will vote November 19 on final approval of the school. (*Chicago Tribune*, 10-9-08, CNN, 10-13-08)

Federal Government Sign on to Greater Funding and Control of Higher Education

The Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008, signed into law in August, was “among the largest authorized discretionary spending hikes in American history,” according to Brian Riedl of the Heritage Foundation. The law authorizes additional spending of up to \$142 billion over the next five years.

Besides reauthorizing the federal government’s existing higher education programs, the law authorizes 45 new programs. Some of the law’s provisions increase student loan forgive-

ment, increase Pell Grant amounts, and seek to make it easier to apply for federal financial aid. Under HEOA, the Department of Education will obtain students’ tax data directly from the IRS when they apply for financial aid.

President Bush signed a law with some similar provisions last year — the College Cost Reduction and Access Act of 2007, but that legislation only authorizes an estimated \$15 billion over ten years.

“This is just the latest of the Democratic majority’s budget-busting initia-

tives,” said Brian Riedl on the subject of HEOA, the 2008 law. “But what makes this unique is that it received general bipartisan support. Republicans were, for the most part, complicit in passing this bill.”

Rep. Pete Hoekstra (R-MI), a dogged opponent of federal control of education, agrees that HEOA represents a significant expansion of federal power. “We have experienced the negative consequences of transferring state control of K-12 education to Washington bureaucrats under No Child Left Behind,” says Hoekstra. “So there is no reason not to expect the same result with transferring state control of higher education to Washington.” (*School Reform News*, October 2008)



EDUCATION BRIEFS

More than 90% of NEA campaign spending goes to Democratic candidates and causes even though, according to outgoing president Reg Weaver, a third of members are Republicans and a third are independent. The California NEA affiliate donated at least \$1.25 million to the campaign against Proposition 8, the initiative to protect traditional marriage in that state. Each California teacher pays \$922 each year in CTA dues. 28 states require teachers to join the union. "If the unions are so beneficial, why do teachers need to be *forced* to join and to fork over such hefty dues in most states?" asked teacher Larry Sand. (*Los Angeles Times*, 10-18-08)

"Swing Semester 2008" offered students the chance to campaign for "progressive" causes in swing states, sometimes even for college credit. The group helped connect students with organizations including NARAL Pro-Choice and ACORN, as well as individual candidates' campaigns. On its website, Swing Semester promised to help students to earn three to nine college credit hours for their activism in key cities such as Denver, Cincinnati, and Virginia Beach. (www.swingsemester.com)

The Supreme Court declined to hear the parents' appeal of the famous Lexington, MA case on teaching children about homosexuality in school. In 2005, David and Tonia Parker objected to their local school's teaching their kindergartner about homosexuality and same-sex marriage. (*Education Reporter*, July 2005, June 2006, April 2007) The Parkers and another family, the Wirthlins, sued the district, arguing that parental rights "preclude a public school from egregiously usurping the parental role in religious and moral matters of the utmost importance." The Supreme Court's decision not to hear the appeal does not indicate a ruling on the case's merits, but it is the end of the Parkers' and Wirthlins' long battle. Meanwhile, David Parker has become a powerful parents' rights advocate, speaking to audiences of thousands — and both the Parkers and the Wirthlins have removed their children from public school.

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More Students are Taking Latin

Latin teachers are in high demand as both public and private schools experience something of a classical renaissance. Many past generations, including the generation of the Founding Fathers, saw Latin as essential knowledge for any educated person. Even in 1905, 56% of American high school students studied Latin. The language's popularity in schools reached its nadir in the 1970s, when only around 6,000 high schoolers took the National Latin Exam each year.

In 2005 and 2006, more than 134,000 students took the National Latin Exam. Twice as many students now take the Advanced Placement Latin exam as took it just a decade ago. Popular culture also reflects a new and living interest in this dead language. Several of the Harry Potter books, for example, are available in Latin translations, such as *Harrus Potter et Camera Secretorum* (*Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*). Children might also enjoy *Cattus Petasatus*, the Latin version of Dr. Seuss's *Cat in the Hat*.

Latin is currently the fourth most pop-

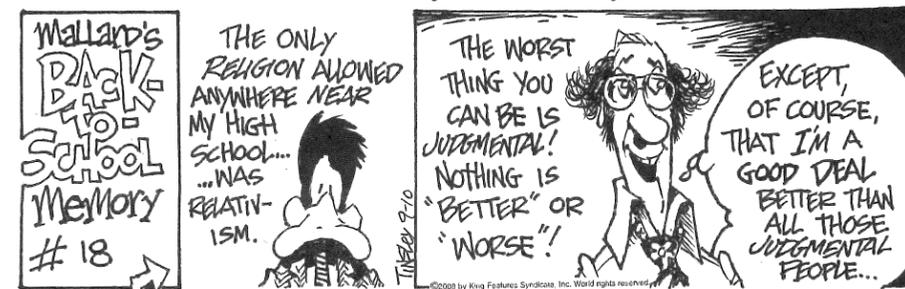
ular language studied in schools, after Spanish, French and German. According to Marty Abbott of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, Latin may soon, even next year, pass up German for the third most popular spot. (*New York Times*, 10-07-08)

Harry Mount, author of *Carpe Diem: Put a Little Latin in Your Life*, writes about the virtues of Latin. Learning Latin trains the mind and sharpens English literacy in ways nothing else can approximate, according to Mount. Mount hopes that the signs of Latin's resurgence might mean good things for American politics and discourse as well, as future leaders study Roman history and Latin literature and language.

"It is no coincidence that the professionalization of politics — which encourages budding politicians to think of education as mere career preparation — has occurred during an age of weak rhetoric, shifting moral values, clumsy grammar and a terror of historical references and eternal values that the Romans could teach us a thing or two about," writes Mount. (*New York Times*, 12-03-07)



MALLARD FILLMORE / by Jeff Tinsley



The No Child Left Inside Act: 'No Child Left Alone'

The U.S. House of Representatives passed the No Child Left Inside Act (NCLI) by a vote of 293 to 109 on September 18. The Senate has yet to consider NCLI, but the NCLI coalition of 830 state and national groups has high hopes for the bill's passage in the near future.

If passed, NCLI will promote "environmental education" in America's K-12 schools. It will reauthorize the National Environmental Education Act (NEEA) of 1990, and increase spending on that act by \$5 million. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that NCLI would increase discretionary spending by \$24 million over the next three years.

In the shadow of the \$7 billion bailout, \$24 million for environmental education may hardly seem worth bothering to protest. Yet critics object to the bill on a variety of grounds.

The most basic problem with NCLI for many conservatives is that it would require schools to comply with more federal mandates to receive government funds. These mandates have little to nothing to do with knowledge in core subjects, which is still what the vast majority of parents want public schools to provide for their children.

NCLI would give teachers and schools financial incentives to conduct environmental activities during class time,

and to promote such ill-defined aims as "environmental justice" and "improved self-esteem." The self-esteem movement has been thoroughly discredited, so it is disappointing to see this outmoded, circa-1990 idea crop up again in federal legislation.

Some critics object to the emphasis NCLI places on global warming — now renamed "climate change," apparently because most parts of the globe are no longer warming, and many are cooling. NCLI identifies climate change as a "major challenge" facing the United States, and promotes lessons on climate change in schools. The law makes no provision ensuring that lessons on climate change will be scientifically rigorous, non-ideological, or free from partisan propaganda.

'The Wrong Way'

The NCLI coalition of 830 groups says that children would be better off if they spent more time outside, and blames "nature deficit disorder" for some of the attention disorders observed in recent generations of students. There is good evidence to support both claims. But Dr. Peter Gray, a research professor of psychology who blogs for *Psychology Today*, called NCLI "an example of the wrong way to solve a national problem." Gray

(See *No Child Left Inside*, page 4)

Book of the Month



Under Pressure: Rescuing our Children from the Culture of Hyper-Parenting, by Carl Honoré, Harper One, 2008, 291 pages, \$24.95

Middle class, Western parents are trying harder than ever to make their children happy and successful, but all of that pressure and attention may be backfiring. Could "hyper-parenting" partly explain why almost two-thirds of American college students showed signs of "elevated narcissism" in 2006, up 30% since 1982? *Under Pressure* explores some of the trends that have led us to this point, and the reaction that is brewing in schools and homes worldwide. Carl Honoré interviewed hundreds of families who now enjoy a "less is more" approach to parenting: less pressure, less technology, fewer weekly activities, and less trying to keep kids happy with possessions or permissive parenting.

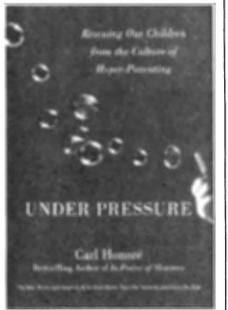
Honoré also visited dozens of schools that have actually created a more learning-friendly environment by taking children's need for free play into account. While some kindergartens are cutting out recess to gain more desk time, others are realizing that "hothousing" children to make them smarter, better, and more successful is actually harmful.

"The latest research suggests that reaching learning milestones early is no guarantee of future academic stardom," Honoré reveals. Children who attended high-pressure, academic preschools had no academic advantage by age eight, and were more anxious and less creative than their peers.

Under Pressure is a truly international book, and comparisons among nations prove helpful here. In Denmark and Finland, children begin formal schooling at ages six and seven. These children repeatedly top the charts on international tests, and they concentrate better than British children, who start school at five. Finland, which almost always tests at #1 worldwide, places little to no emphasis on testing.

Honoré shows how homeschooling, as well as play-based and child-led school philosophies such as Waldorf, Montessori, and Reggio Emilia, can restore to young children the time and freedom they need in order to play and explore. While a movement in the U.S. calls for longer school hours, Japan cut its hours by a third in 2002, and other Asian nations are also acting to relieve some of the enormous pressure on their students.

Under Pressure is an amazing piece of journalism. It is a valuable tool for parents and educators who want to understand what is distinctive about childhood today, and to fight against the trends that make it less rich and joyful, and less like childhood.



FOCUS: Evidence of Academic or Emotional Harm of Preschool Education or All-Day Kindergarten

By Karen R. Effrem, MD

2007 Study

A 2007 study funded by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development tracked 1,364 children who had participated in early childhood education. Preschool participants were more likely to score higher on factors of aggression and disobedience as reported by their teachers. This finding was true even for children who attended high-quality center-based care. The more time a child spent in center-based care, the more likely he or she was to be described by sixth grade teachers as one who “gets in many fights,” is “disobedient at school,” and “argues a lot.”

Quebec’s Universal Childcare Program

“Several measures we looked at suggest that children were worse off in the years following the introduction of the universal childcare program. We studied a wide range of measures of child well-being from anxiety and hyperactivity to social and motor skills. For almost every measure, we find that the increased use of childcare was associated with a decrease in their well-being relative to other children. For example, reported fighting and aggressive behavior increased substantially.” (Michael Baker, Jonathan Gruber, and Kevin Milligan, “What Can We Learn from Quebec’s Universal Childcare Program?” (C.D. Howe Institute, February 2006) at http://www.cdhowe.org/pdf/ebrief_25_english.pdf)

2002 NICHD STUDY

In a 2002 study, NICHD followed a group of more than 1,300 children in ten different states through their first seven years of life and found that children who spend more hours per week in non-parental childcare have more behavior problems, including aggressive, defiant and disobedient behavior in kindergarten.

“Attendance in preschool centers, even for short periods of time each week, hinders the rate at which young children develop social skills and display the motivation to engage classroom tasks, as reported by their kindergarten teachers. . . . Our findings are consistent with the negative effect of non-parental care on the single dimension of social development first detected by the NICHD research team [in 2002].” — Fuller, et. al. 11/05 (This references the study immediately above.)

Early Childhood Longitudinal Survey (ECLS)

Using data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Survey (ECLS), researchers concluded that preschool has a positive impact on reading and mathematics scores in the short term and a negative effect on behavior. While the positive academic impacts mostly fade away by the spring of the 1st grade, the negative effects persist into the later grades. (Katherine A. Magnuson, Christopher J. Ruhm, Jane Waldfogel, “Does Prekindergarten Improve School Preparation and Performance?” National

Bureau of Economic Research, April 2004)

Also using the ECLS data, Lisa Hickman at Ohio University compared children in center care with children who were taught at home. She found that center-care children had higher math and reading skills and poorer social skills prior to kindergarten entry. In 1st grade, however, preschool participants’ cognitive advantage disappeared and their social skills deteriorated. (Lisa N. Hickman, “Who Should Care for Our Children? The Effects of Home Versus Center Care on Child Cognition and Social Adjustment,” *Journal of Family Issues* 27 (May 2006): 652-684)

2001-2004 Georgia Early Childhood Study

“Students enrolled in the [Georgia] Head Start program consistently tested below the national norm and significantly behind their peers. Students enrolled in the Pre-K program exceeded the national norm by the end of kindergarten but fell slightly below it by the end of 1st grade. Students who either enrolled in a private preschool program or did not attend an all-day four-year-old program consistently performed at or above the national norm.” (Gary T. Henry, Dana K. Rickman, Bentley D. Ponder, Laura W. Henderson, Andrew Mashburn, Craig S. Gordon, “The Georgia Early Childhood Study 2001-2004 Final Report,” Georgia State University, 2005, at <http://aysps.gsu.edu/publications/2005/EarlyChildhoodReport.pdf>, p. 59)

Oklahoma preschool program

In the 2005-2006 school year, the Oklahoma state preschool program, which began in 1980 and became universal in 1988, had 33,296 participants and boasted the highest percentage of children in a government preschool program of any state, according to national surveys. 70% of Oklahoma’s four-year-olds are enrolled in the state preschool program, also according to a national survey.

In 1992, Oklahoma’s 4th-graders scored ahead of the national average in National Assessment of Educational Progress in reading and math. Today, average scale scores for Oklahoma fourth graders are behind the national average. Of all the states that took the 4th-grade reading test in 1992, Oklahoma is the only one that has seen its scores fall over a 15-year period. (See U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress at <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard>)

New Jersey

In 1996, the state began to provide preschool for four-year-olds in low-income school districts. Following the 1998 New Jersey Supreme Court decision *Abbott v. Burke*, the state has funded full-time, year round pre-kindergarten programs for all three- and four-year-olds in the state’s 31 lowest-income school districts. The state funds other public education programs in the Abbott districts as well. Through public schools, private preschools and Head Start centers, the pre-kindergarten program served

more than 40,500 children in the 2005-2006 school year.

Yet, according to researcher Lisa Snell, “more New Jersey children score below basic (which means they cannot read) on the NAEP [National Assessment of Educational Progress] 4th-grade reading test in 2005 than in 2003 or 1992. . . . In the case of disadvantaged students who qualify for the free lunch program, 52% scored below basic in 1992, 54% scored below basic in 2003, and 55% scored below basic in 2005 in 4th-grade reading.” (Lisa Snell, “Preschool reality check in New Jersey,” *The Record*, Monday, July 30, 2007 at www.reason.org/commentaries/snell_20070809.shtml)

Rand Institute Study

“In other words, after controlling for nonacademic readiness at kindergarten, children who had attended a full-day program at kindergarten showed poorer mathematics performance in 5th grade than did children who had attended a part-day kindergarten program.” (Le, Vi-Nhuan, et. al. (2006) *School Readiness, Full-Day Kindergarten, and Student Achievement: An Empirical Investigation* Rand Institute available at <http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG558>)

“Attendance in a full-day kindergarten program was negatively associated with attitudes toward learning, self-control, and interpersonal skills, and was positively related toward internalizing (measured by a scale indicating presence of anxiety, loneliness, low self-esteem, and sadness) and externalizing behaviors.” (Ibid.)

Abecedarian Project

A 1985 study found negative behavior impacts among participants of the Abecedarian Project, a program held up as a model intervention. Haskins investigated this aspect of the Abecedarian Project. He found treatment children were “more aggressive than children in the control group” in elementary school. (Ron Haskins, “Public School Aggression among Children with Varying Day-Care Experiences,” *Child Development*, Vol., 56, No. 3, June 1985, p. 695.)

Head Start

Other researchers have found negative impacts on social-emotional development among Head Start participants. In this case, participants had lower mean scores in communication, daily living skills, and social skills domains, and the total adaptive behavior score. (Yvonne B. Reedy, “A Comparison of Long Range Effects of Participation in Project Head Start and Impact of Three Differing Delivery Models,” Pennsylvania State University (State College, Penn.: 1991)

White House Conference on Early Childhood

“Most out of home child care cannot provide a number of [these] essential building blocks. . . . We need to gradually bring about social arrangements that maximize at-home care of young infants by their parents.” — Stanley Greenspan, MD, professor of pediatrics and psychiatry and speaker



for Bill Clinton’s White House Conference on Early Childhood, George Washington University School of Medicine.

The Harvard Guide to Psychiatry

“Since the 1960s a vast body of research has stressed the importance to the developing child of the physical presence and emotional accessibility of both parents. . . . The loss of a parent through death, divorce, illness, or a time-demanding job contributes to many forms of emotional disorder, especially the anger, the low self esteem, and the depression that accompany adolescent suicide.” — Armand Nicholi, MD, *The Harvard Guide to Psychiatry*, 3rd edition, Belknap/Harvard Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1999, p. 623

David Elkind

“There is no evidence that such early instruction has lasting benefits, and considerable evidence that it can do lasting harm. . . . If we do not wake up to the potential danger of these harmful practices, we may do serious damage to a large segment of the next generation. . . .” (David Elkind, *Miseducation: Preschoolers at Risk* (New York: Knopf, 1997): 4, as quoted in Olsen, 2005).

Edward Ziglar, co-founder of Head Start

“There is a large body of evidence indicating that there is little if anything to be gained by exposing middle-class children to early education. . . . Those who argue in favor of universal preschool education ignore evidence that indicates early schooling is inappropriate for many four-year-olds and that it may even be harmful to their development.” (Edward Ziglar, co-founder of Head Start and director of the Bush Center in Child Development and Social Policy at Yale University, “Formal Schooling for Four Year-Olds? No” in *Early Schooling: the National Debate*, ed. Sharon L. Kagan and Edward F. Zigler (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1987), as quoted in Olsen, 2005)

Dr. Karen Effrem is the mother of three children, a pediatrician and policy analyst who serves on the boards of EdWatch, the Alliance for Human Research Protection, International Center for the Study of Psychology and Psychiatry, and the National Physicians Center.

States Experiment with Early Graduation

While deficiencies at the high school level cost taxpayers billions of dollars in remedial education at public universities, a countervailing trend has young, motivated students starting college coursework while still in high school — or even graduating from high school in less than four years. Dual enrollment and early graduation open up stimulating opportunities for especially bright and hardworking students, and could even save taxpayers money if these trends catch on.

Advanced Placement coursework is the most common way for high schoolers to get an early start on their college education. 406,000 seniors, or almost 15% of those who graduated in 2006, took an AP exam and scored at least a 3, out of a possible 5. A second option, dual enrollment, allows students to take classes at two- or four-year colleges while they are still in high school. In Florida, over 30,000 high school juniors and seniors earn college credit through dual enrollment. College classes they take over the summer can also count toward their high school course requirements.

Washington State and North Carolina also encourage dual enrollment. Washington juniors and seniors can take classes at state community colleges, and North Carolina students can graduate in five years with a high school diploma and an associate's degree, through the "Learn and Earn" program. Learn and Earn students take classes in person or online from state community colleges, earning college credit at no cost to themselves or their families.

In 1997, Leon Botstein, president of Bard College, suggested voluntary graduation after three years as a remedy for the boredom that besets fast learners in high school. Modern adolescents are physiologically mature, said Botstein, and the "out-of-date strategy and system" of the

traditional four-year high school structure fails to meet many students' maturity or capabilities. Botstein predicted that early graduation could take advantage of new learning technologies — which the North Carolina dual enrollment model certainly does, as it combines traditional schooling with community college classes and online coursework.

Connecticut's Yankee Institute for Public Policy recently took up Botstein's suggestion and examined how early graduation could benefit the state economically, as well. According to the think tank's report, if 25% of high school students accepted a full scholarship to community college, or \$5,000 cash equivalent, in place of a fourth year of high school, the state would save \$58 million a year.

Lewis Andrews of the Yankee Institute believes that early graduation has the potential to solve several problems at once. "While the national education debate focuses on such contentious issues as vouchers and national testing standards, a simple policy giving Connecticut high school students incentives to graduate early could expand educational opportunity, combat classroom boredom, and help the most disadvantaged afford at least two years of college — all while providing tax relief to hard-pressed homeowners," he writes. (*School Reform News*, October 2008)



First Graders Take Field Trip to Gay Wedding

Less than four weeks before California voters would consider a ballot initiative to determine the fate of same-sex marriage in that state, a class of 18 1st-graders took a field trip to San Francisco city hall to congratulate their teacher just after her same-sex wedding. The 1st-graders blew bubbles and tossed rose petals over their teacher and her partner, after a ceremony at which San Francisco mayor Gavin Newsome officiated.

Liz Jaroflow, interim director of the 18 Creative Arts Charter School, which the students attend, defended the field trip as a "teachable moment," in view of the historical significance of same-sex weddings now taking place in California. "I think I'm well within the parameters," said Jaroflow. She denied that the field trip was controversial, and said she would gladly put her job on the line for this issue if necessary.

"It's just utterly unreasonable that a



public school field trip would be to a same-sex wedding," said Chip White of the Yes on 8 campaign, which has sought to preserve traditional heterosexual marriage. "This is overt indoctrination of children who are too young to have an understanding of its purpose."

The campaign in favor of Proposition 8 has argued that if the ballot measure failed, children would have to learn about same-sex marriage in schools. The same week as the city hall field trip, the No on 8 campaign aired a commercial calling the claim about same-sex education in schools a "lie." The field trip certainly told a different story from the commercial. "It shows that not only can it happen, but it has already happened," said Chip White. (*San Francisco Chronicle*, 10-11-08)

Story Time

By Andrew Klavan

I visited a fourth-grade class in a slum school recently. Since I'm a storyteller by trade, the teacher asked me if I'd tell the kids a story. Now I'm a good storyteller and an all-around charming guy, no doubt, but I wasn't prepared for the degree of fascination I inspired. Rambunctious mischief ceased on the instant and resolved itself into riveted attention and awestruck stares. I was awfully pleased with myself by the time I was done.

"Don't take it personally," the teacher told me brusquely. "It's just that they've never seen anyone like you before. A man — obviously tough — who's not a gangster."

I don't know how tough I am — they were fourth-graders; I guess I could've taken most of them in a fair fight one-on-one — but that's not what she was getting at. Her point was that you have to take just one look at me to see what, in fact, I am: an unapologetic, because-I-said-so, head-of-household male. They used to call us "husbands" and "fathers" back in the day. That's what these kids had never seen.

The teacher told me that she once had to explain to the class why her last name was the same as her father's. She dusted off the whole ancient ritual of legitimacy for them — marriages, maiden names, and so on. When she was done, there was a short silence. Then one child piped up softly: "Yeah . . . I've heard of that." I've heard of that. It would break a heart of stone.

Beating poverty in America nowadays is largely a matter of personal behavior. Get a high school diploma, don't have kids until you're married, don't get married until you're 21, and you probably won't be poor. It also helps if you work hard, show up on time, act courteously, and avoid anything felonious.

But where are these kids going to learn such things? It's the stuff you just sort of absorb in a healthy, traditional, two-parent home, and that's exactly what they're missing. If they learn what they've lived, they're done for — the girls too likely to "come out pregnant" like their mothers, the boys to be underemployed and maybe even do time.

You can't legislate responsibility, ei-



ther. Personal behavior in a free society has to be a matter of choice — choice without which there is no virtue — virtue without which a society can't be free.

It seems to me that leaves these kids only one recourse: the culture. Where the institution of family is broken, only the surrounding culture can teach people the inner structures required for a life of liberty.

Many conservatives often seem to have given up on culture or not to care. There's a strong strain of philistinism on the right. When we talk about "culture wars," we usually mean preventing the courts from redefining marriage or promoting abstinence instead of birth control: culture, in other words, as the behavioral branch of politics.

Culture, in the true sense, is more than that. It's the whole engulfing narrative of our values. It's the stories we tell. Leftists know this. These kids get an earful from the Left every day. Their schools serve up black history in a way guaranteed to alienate them from the American enterprise. Their sanctioned reading list denies boys the natural fantasies of battling villains and protecting women from harm. Any instinct the girls might have that their bodies and their self-respect are interrelated is negated by the ubiquitous parable of celebrity lives. And I hardly need mention the movies and TV shows that endlessly undermine notions of manly self-discipline, feminine modesty, patriotism, and all the rest.

Conservatives respond to this mostly with finger-wagging. But creativity has to be answered with creativity. We need stories, histories, movies of our own. That requires a structure of support — publishing houses, movie studios, review space, awards, almost all of which we've ceded to the Left.

There may be more profitable businesses in the short run. The long run, as always, depends on the young. If you want to win their hearts, you have to tell them stories. I have reason to believe they'll listen.

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No Child Left Inside (Continued from page 2)

believes NCLI exemplifies the way of thinking that has caused the very problems the law attempts to solve. "Schools suck the fun out of everything they teach. Do we want schools now to suck the fun out of outdoor adventure?" he asks.

At Playborhood.com, an online community of parents who want to restore free, unstructured play to the lives of American children (not by government mandate), parents' voices second Dr. Gray's objections to NCLI. Playborhood founder (and "Chief Play Officer") Mike Lanza blames schools — the lengthening school year, the lengthening school day, and the emphasis on organized sports at the expense of free play — for children's alienation from nature and a number of other problems. Bans on tag and other traditional games on school playgrounds, and frequently the elimination of recess itself,

fit right in with these trends.

Lanza cites a recent study from Cornell University that examined what kinds of activities inspire "environmental behaviors" (spending time outside) and "environmental attitudes" (caring about nature) as children grow up. Environmental education in school, scouts, or other settings did not significantly predict children's behaviors or attitudes as adults, but time they spent actually outside in nature did.

"This Act feels a lot like the 'pork' that our elected officials are supposed to be targeting to get our federal budget in control," concludes Lanza. If passed, NCLI, which Lanza dubs "No Child Left Alone," will put more federal dollars toward school activities of questionable value and toward what Playborhood identifies as the "ultra-structured, adult-mediated" approach to American childhood today.