

More Parents Track Children's Grades Online

At tens of thousands of schools, parents can now keep daily tabs on their children's academic performance through online programs that track grades and attendance. Some applaud this trend as a way to get parents more involved in their children's education, while others say it encourages "helicopter parenting" and an inappropriate emphasis on grades instead of on learning and effort.

The computer programs, with names such as ParentConnect, Edline, and PowerSchool, have opened up new lines of communication between parents and teachers.



Parents who frequently check in online often aren't surprised by sudden downturns in students' schoolwork, and they can often help their children catch back up or improve their work before it's too late. At least one school canceled parent-teacher conferences after a survey indicated parents were learning enough about their middle school children through PowerSchool and follow-up emails with teachers.

The programs also allow remote access for divorced parents or those called to other places. Omaha mom and Army staff sergeant India Harris used online grade tracking to learn of her son's troubles in math class while she was in Iraq. She was able to get him extra help that got him back on track.

One mom summarized the downside of online grades for the *New York Times*. "It can be hard to resist. It speaks to all your neuroses as a parent, all the need to control, that pressure to make sure everything is perfect. How are these kids going to learn to be responsible adults?"

Teenagers whose parents push them to perform better in school are not among PowerSchool's biggest fans, either. "Before, the screaming and disappointment only had to be endured four times a year. Now it can happen every night," wrote one unfortunate high schooler. (*New York Times*, 5-4-08)

Unapologetic Former Terrorist Teaches Teachers; Is Vice President for Curriculum

As a founding member of the Weather Underground, William Ayers bombed the New York City police headquarters, the U.S. Capitol Building, and the Pentagon in the early 1970s. Because of a procedural error in his trial, he was never punished for his crimes. "Guilty as hell, free as a bird — America is a great country," he later quipped.

Now, Ayers teaches teachers, as a tenured professor of education at the University of Illinois, Chicago. His wife and former Weather Underground associate, Bernadine Dohrn, teaches law at Northwestern University. The couple's friendship with Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama has brought them under scrutiny in recent months. Obama reminded critics that he was only eight years old at the time of Ayers's and Dohrn's terrorist activities with the Weather Underground. But as Ed Lasky pointed out in *American Thinker*, Obama "elided the fact that they have no remorse for their actions and Ayers publicly wished there had been more of them."

In a strange twist of fate, Ayers's memoirs appeared in the *New York Times* on September 11, 2001. "I don't regret setting bombs," he wrote. "I feel we didn't do enough."

Although he no longer sets bombs, Ayers's political views are as radical now as they were in the 1970s. "Viva Presidente Chavez!" he cried in a speech in Venezuela in 2006, in which he also declared, "education is the motor-force of revolution." Ayers speaks openly of his desire to use the classrooms of America's public schools to train up a generation of revolutionaries who will overturn the supposedly imperialist regime of capitalist America.

In a 2006 interview with *Revolution*, the magazine of the devotedly "Marxist-Leninist-Maoist" Revolutionary Communist Party, Ayers decried American conservatives as "the most reactionary cabal of ideologues I've ever seen." According to Ayers, these ideologues control "all three branches of the federal government, control many state governments, control the media — the kind of bought priesthood of the media that does nothing but bow down to them and kowtow to them."

Ayers accuses these ideologues of waging "a whole frontal attack on the very idea of public education . . . an attack on

the idea that there should be free common public education for all." He attributes to them the "zero tolerance" policies that have cropped up in schools across the nation. According to Ayers, we owe these irrational policies to conservatives who are relentlessly subverting democracy and working to create an authoritarian society.



William Ayers, "Guilty as hell, free as a bird . . ."

One might assume these notions would place Ayers on the outer fringe of the political left and of the education school establishment. Although he certainly is more radical than most of his peers, those peers recently elected him to an important position in the American

Education Research Association (AERA), the largest organization of education school professors and researchers. Ayers will serve as vice-president for curriculum. This post increases his already extensive influence; his books are already among the most widely used in America's 1,500 schools of education.

Sol Stern of the Manhattan Institute has written several articles exposing Ayers's radical ideas and plans for K-12 public education (*City Journal*, Summer 2006 and 4-23-08). "With Bill Ayers now part of [AERA]'s national leadership," predicts Stern, "you can be sure that it will encourage even more funding and support for research on how teachers can promote left-wing ideology in the nation's classrooms — and correspondingly less support for research on such mundane subjects as the best methods for teaching underprivileged children to read."

Ayers has pioneered the expansion of "social justice education." "Social justice" sounds like something everyone could

(See *Terrorist*, page 4)

Study Overturns Math Education Assumptions

"Add up the number of lemons in the 'ones box.' If there are ten or more lemons, put ten of the lemons in the 'tens box' and leave the extra lemons in the 'ones box.'"

For some children, boxes of lemons make it easier to learn addition with carrying. A new study indicates, however, that for most children the lemons — and trains, pizza slices and other examples frequently used

to teach math — may just get in the way. Researchers from Ohio State University experimented with two different ways of teaching a new math concept: one method starting with abstract symbols, and one method starting with concrete examples involving tennis balls and measuring cups. Then they asked the two groups of students to apply what they had learned to a new situation, set up as a children's game. The students who had learned with abstract symbols were able to apply the new concept, while the other students performed no better than if they had been merely guessing.

"The motivation behind this research

was to examine a very widespread belief about the teaching of mathematics," said researcher Jennifer A. Kaminski, "namely that teaching students multiple concrete

examples will benefit learning. It was really just that, a belief." Kaminski explained that the tennis balls and measuring cups in the experiment did little for students' learning. "They tend to remember the superficial, the two

trains passing in the night. It's really a problem of our attention getting pulled to superficial information."

The study may mean that math teachers should save real-world examples for later in the learning process, and then help students to apply the abstract concepts to such examples once they have mastered the math. Although the study tested college students, the researchers expect to see the same results with younger students. Early experiments with 11-year-olds seemed to confirm their hypothesis, and the team is now conducting more extensive research with elementary school students. (*New York Times*, 4-25-08)

Which is greater: $\frac{3}{8}$ or $\frac{7}{8}$?

The denominators are both 8, so let's look at a pizza cut into 8 pieces:



You're SUPER hungry... Do you want 3 pieces? Or 7 pieces?

7 is WAY more!

So $\frac{3}{8} < \frac{7}{8}$

EDUCATION BRIEFS

Phyllis Schlafly, noted conservative activist and founder of Eagle Forum, received an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters from Washington University in St. Louis. The award aroused protest among some faculty members, and especially in the women's studies department. The Board of Trustees unanimously agreed to defend its decision to honor Mrs. Schlafly. "Alumna Phyllis Schlafly's articulation of her perspectives has been a significant part of American life . . . serving as a lightning rod for vigorous debate on difficult issues where differences of opinion are profound and passionate," wrote the board. Eagle Forum Executive Director Jessica Echard responded, "Eagle Forum applauds Washington University for upholding the ideal that real diversity includes everyone, even conservatives!" (PRNewswire, 5-16-08)

The mayor of Hammond, IN accused schools in Gary of "giving [students] a day off and telling them to vote for Obama." Gary school administrators bused about 200 high school students 16 miles to the election office for early in-person voting in advance of the May 6 Indiana primary. Hammond Mayor Thomas McDermott Jr., a Clinton supporter, called it "completely unethical." "These kids come from the worst performing schools in the state of Indiana and we are giving them a day off to go vote for Obama. They can vote on election day like everybody else," he said. (Northwest Indiana Times, 4-24-08)

Boston public schools have begun recruiting bilingual teachers in Puerto Rico. Massachusetts eliminated bilingual education in 2002, but recruiters hope that Spanish-speaking teachers in math, science, and special education classes can give extra help to students with limited English skills. 40% of Boston public school students are learning English as a second language, and the majority of those students speak Spanish. (Boston Globe, 3-18-08)

(See Briefs, page 3)

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Public Libraries Make Decisions about Technologies

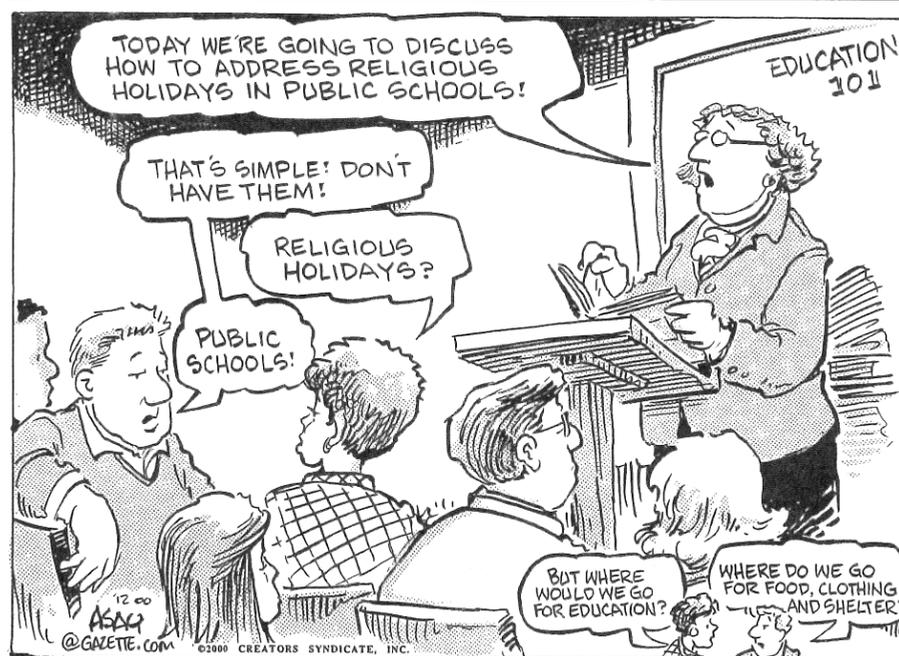
In an effort to draw more teens, libraries are stocking the shelves with more CDs, DVDs, and even video games. The Rochester Hills public library in Michigan now stocks 1,823 video games. The games, not surprisingly, are popular, with 1,300 checked out at any given time.

Branches in Rochester Hills host monthly video game events such as "Guitar Hero" and "Dance Dance Revolution" competitions. Library patrons and other taxpayers are debating the merits of such efforts to entice teens into the library. Some, believing that libraries should change with the times, point to the merits of many audiovisual materials libraries now showcase. Others say that video game events and loans stray too far from the educational purpose of local libraries. (Associated Press, 2-18-08)

Controversy also surrounds the use of search engine filters on library computers. The Sacramento, California library board recently divided 7-7 on

whether to expand or restrict access to pornography on library computer terminals. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) had urged the board to remove porn filters and purchase new computer desks that would allow users a more private screen view. The California Campaign for Children and Families (CCF), on the other hand, called for a zero tolerance policy on pornography in the library.

"People are shocked to learn that sex addicts are viewing pornography, violent rape images, and even child pornography every day at the library," CCF president Randy Thomasson told the board. Thomasson referred to the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in 2003 upholding the Children's Internet Protection Act. "You don't need battling attorneys to tell you what the law says. Just read the U.S. Supreme Court decision which says a library is not a public forum and that libraries don't have to provide any pornography unless they want to." (savecalifornia.com, 4-25-08)



Grand Theft Auto IV Reaches New Lows

In the four games in the Grand Theft Auto franchise, players win not by fighting bad guys, but by being bad guys. Players of the latest version of the game navigate the seedy underworld of Liberty City, a fictional version of New York City, and commit various crimes from robbery to murder. Since its April 29 release, GTA IV has made record sales and drawn sharp criticism for its violent and sexually explicit game sequences.

In perhaps the worst segment of the game, the player virtually has sex with a prostitute and then kills her either by shooting her or hitting her with a car. Graphic violence is prominent in all four GTA games, but the new version is by far the most sexually explicit. The third version, GTA: San Andreas, became the subject of scandal when an independent computer programmer discovered sex scenes

in the game that were not normally accessible to players. After the programmer created and began to sell a software patch allowing players to view the hidden scenes, the Federal Trade Commission forced a recall of the game, and rerated it from Mature to Adults Only.

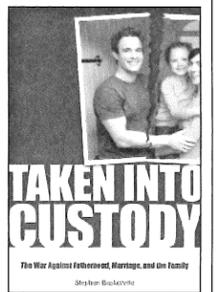
Gavin McKiernan of the Parents Television Council criticized the rating of GTA IV as Mature. "This needs to be treated as an adult product," he said. "An R-rated movie is a two-hour passive experience. With this we're talking about 71 to 80 hours of game play where you're practicing and completing these [violent] acts." GTA IV sold 3.6 million copies on its release day, making it the biggest video game release ever. It also broke the previous record for video game sales in its first week, selling about 6 million copies and bringing in over \$500 million.



Book of the Month



Taken into Custody: The War Against Fathers, Marriage, and the Family, Stephen Baskerville, Cumberland House 2007, 368 pages, \$24.95



Until it happens to them, very few people realize the power family courts have to ruin their lives and their relationships with their children. In *Taken into Custody*, sociologist Stephen Baskerville exposes increasingly out-of-control bureaucratic machinery that functions without accountability or oversight. "The separation of children from their parents for reasons that have nothing to do with the children's wishes, safety, health, or welfare is now routine," as Baskerville proves.

When fathers "lose custody" of their children, most people assume the fathers did something wrong. But women actually initiate at least two-thirds of divorces. "No-fault" divorce usually means divorce against one spouse's will. Since judges give custody to mothers over 93% of the time, fathers now routinely lose access to their children through literally "no fault" of their own.

Baskerville shows that policies intended to protect abandoned low-income wives and mothers have actually created huge financial incentives for middle- and upper-class women to divorce their husbands. With the near-certainty of child custody, and of gaining control of most of their husband's income through child support payments, divorce becomes a power play, and for many women a much more attractive option than making the marriage work. The government deplores the divorce epidemic at the same time that it perpetuates it.

The book carefully and exhaustively documents the extent of abuses against fathers' and parents' rights. In most states, a mother can get a restraining order against a father without demonstrating that he has done anything wrong. As months go by and it is illegal for the father to come near his own children, the already small likelihood of joint custody steadily decreases. Family courts subvert due process by punishing fathers who have not broken any law.

What Baskerville describes as a "war against fathers" is also a massive expansion of state power. "The criminalization of the father is, quite simply, unavoidable so long as we are willing to enforce unilateral divorce with children," he says. "With the father an outlaw, the children may be in the 'custody' of the mother . . . but it is more accurate to say that ultimately they have become wards of the state, which establishes what amounts to a puppet government within the family." Every American needs to know about the horrifying abuses of power this book exposes.

FOCUS: The Real Co\$ of Public Schools

by Andrew Coulson

We're often told that public schools are underfunded. In the District of Columbia, the spending figure cited most commonly is \$8,322 per child, but total spending is close to \$25,000 per child — on a par with tuition at Sidwell Friends, the private school Chelsea Clinton attended in the 1990s.

What accounts for the nearly threefold difference in these numbers? The commonly cited figure counts only part of the local operating budget. To calculate total spending, we have to add up all sources of funding for education from kindergarten through 12th grade, excluding spending on charter schools and higher education. For the current school year, the local operating budget is \$831 million, including relevant expenses such as the teacher retirement fund. The capital budget is \$218 million. The District receives about \$85.5 million in federal funding. And the D.C. Council contributes an extra \$81 million. Divide



Sidwell Friends School

all that by the 49,422 students enrolled (for the 2007-08 year) and you end up with about \$24,600 per child.

For comparison, total per pupil spending at D.C. area private schools — among the most upscale in the nation — averages about \$10,000 less. For most private schools, the difference is even greater.

So why force most D.C. children into often dilapidated and underperforming public schools when we could easily offer them a choice of private schools?

Some would argue that private schools couldn't or wouldn't serve the District's special education students, at least not affordably. Not so.

Consider Florida's McKay Scholarship program, which allows parents to pull their special-needs children out of the public schools and place them in private schools of their choosing. Parental satisfaction with McKay is stratospheric, the program serves twice as many children with disabilities as the D.C. pub-

lic schools do, and the average scholarship offered in 2006-07 was just \$7,206.

The biggest scholarship awarded was \$21,907 — still less than the average per-pupil spending in D.C. public schools. If Florida can satisfy the parents of special-needs children at such a reasonable cost, why can't the District?

The answer, of course, is that it could.

D.C. Schools Chancellor Michelle Rhee is energetic and motivated, and State Superintendent of Education Deborah Gist offers helpful answers to work e-mails at 10 p.m. on Sundays. These are dedicated leaders, and as long as there are government-operated schools in Washington, we're lucky to have them at the helm. But we are squandering their talent by asking them to manage a bureaucracy so Byzantine it would give

Rube Goldberg an aneurysm.

The purpose of public education is to ensure universal access to good schools, to prepare children for success in private life and participation in public life, and, we hope, to build tolerant, harmonious communities.

Empowering every parent with a choice of independent schools would advance all those goals. Does anyone worry that Chelsea Clinton will become a threat to society because she attended a private school? Was Barack Obama unprepared for public life because of his time in a Catholic school?

The District should give every child the educational opportunities now enjoyed only by the elite.

Andrew J. Coulson is director of Cato Institute's Center for Educational Freedom. This article is reprinted with permission from Cato Institute.

When is a Nonprofit Not a Nonprofit?

Daycares, universities, group homes, and other service providers that now qualify as nonprofits face an uncertain future as multiple levels of government question their tax-exempt status. The *New York Times* reports (5-26-08) that the Minnesota Supreme Court recently ruled a small daycare in Red Wing, Minnesota

must pay property taxes because it is not a true nonprofit. According to the court, the daycare cannot qualify as a charity because it charges all families, rich or poor, the same rates for child care, and because its rates are no lower than those of its competitors. 95% of the center's budget comes from fees paid by families or by the government on families' behalf. "The extent to which the recipients of the charity are required to pay for the assistance received tests for a value that is fundamental to the concept of charity — that is, whether the organization gives away anything," the court's decision declared. According to the court's definition of what it means to "give away anything," 300 to 500 of Minnesota's 3,400 nonprofits could lose their tax-exempt status, said the director of the state's Council of Nonprofits.

Governments have also challenged the nonprofit status of some universities, especially those with large endowments. Massachusetts is considering a 2.5% annual tax on universities with endowments over \$1 billion. The proposed tax primarily targets Harvard University's \$35 billion endowment, the nation's largest by far.



Also in Massachusetts, local assessors attempted to tax Smith College in Northampton because it is a women's college. By the assessor's reasoning, the school should not qualify as a nonprofit because it practices sex discrimination against men.

The federal government has also raised questions about the tax-exempt status of some nonprofit organizations, especially hospitals, universities, and churches. Federal tax exemption means nonprofits pay no federal tax on incoming funds. The Senate Finance Committee is now investigating six evangelical ministries to reevaluate whether they qualify as tax-exempt nonprofits. Congress has also considered laws that would require universities to make minimum payouts from their endowments, in the form of scholarships or other charitable donations. (*New York Times*, 5-26-08)

Secretary of Education Attempts Changes to No Child Left Behind

As Congress continued to debate a new version of the 2001 law, Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings announced several changes of her own to the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). "This is the boldest sidestep around the Congress that I've ever seen," said Bruce Hunter of the American Association of School Administrators. "She's trying to rewrite the law without the benefit of congressional action. I'd be surprised if lawmakers let this go."

Spellings's proposals include standardizing how states report graduation rates and tightening some of the law's requirements on failing schools. NCLB requires failing schools to notify parents that their children's school is failing and that they may choose to transfer to a better one. Many parents, however, say they received that notice weeks or even months into the school year, or didn't receive it at all. Spellings wants to require schools to notify parents by two weeks before the

school year begins. She also proposes a number of new regulations on the law's mandate for after-school tutoring for students who remain in failing schools.

While it remains to be seen whether they will submit to Spellings's changes if Congress does not confirm them, states will no doubt welcome the changes she proposes that would make consequences for failing schools more flexible. Many states have complained that the law punishes all failing schools equally, whether their failure is a near miss or an all-out disaster. Spellings has now invited states to propose a more flexible and targeted set of consequences, and says she will allow ten states to implement such proposals.

Although nearly everyone agrees that NCLB's long-term goal — to make every child proficient in grade-level math and reading by 2014 — is impossibly unrealistic, Spellings affirmed that the goal remains the same. (*Associated Press*, 3-18-08; *New York Times*, 4-23-08)

Briefs (Continued from page 2)



and more cell phones are linked to the web. (*Wall Street Journal*, 4-23-08)

72% of teens between the ages of 13 and 17 now have cell phones, a recent survey showed. Phones enable parents to stay in touch with their teens through phone calls and text messages, but can also make it more difficult for parents to supervise young teens' internet use and access as more

More employers are turning to "mommy SWAT teams" to fill temporary positions and handle crash projects. The mother who coined the "SWAT team" label says it stands for "smart women with available time" — moms who stay home with their children but enjoy going out to work on an occasional, per-project basis. Several firms, such as MomCorps in Atlanta, now help employers to draw on the skills of stay-at-home moms with experience in the corporate world or in other fields. (*Wall Street Journal*, 4-30-08)

Experts Predict 50% of High School Courses Will Be Online

An important new book posits that the internet is just beginning to transform K-12 education. If online learning follows the trend set by major innovations in other industries, it will take a sharp upturn in popularity in about four years. By the year 2019, half of all high school course enrollment will be online, the authors predict.



The book, *Disrupting Class: How Disruptive Innovation will Change the Way the World Learns*, analyzes similar “disruptive innovations” in the worlds of computers, electronics, retail, and other industries. Lead author Clayton M. Christensen teaches in the business school of Harvard University and has published two other bestselling books on innovation. Disruptive innovations, says Christensen, tend to displace the industry frontrunners and allow upstart companies to become the new leaders. The upstarts have more freedom to experiment with the innovation and to find new markets for new products and services. Industry leaders, on the other hand, are more locked into the infrastructure that was in place before the innovation.

In the case of online learning, traditional public schooling is the established leader in the field of education, while companies providing online curriculum, private tutoring, and online opportunities for homeschooled and other students are the upstarts.

According to the authors, industry leaders typically “cram down” innovations

onto what they are already doing. Rather than reinventing what they do based on the new technology, they attempt to add the new technology without changing their basic approach. Traditional schools have “crammed down” online learning and computer technology onto what they already do, but Christensen doesn’t think they can reinvent themselves thoroughly enough to stay far ahead of the upstarts.

“The schools as they are now structured cannot do it,” said Christensen in an interview with *Education Week*. “Even the best managers in the world, if they were heads of departments in schools and the administrators of schools, could not do it.”

As traditional schools fail to adapt, the authors predict that upstart companies will offer more and better educational options, attracting greater numbers of students from traditional schools.

The book also suggests that public schools or other established school organizations could adapt by spinning off subsystems that would build themselves upon the foundation of the disruptive innovation of online learning. “Whenever an industry gets disrupted,” says Christensen, “people always consume more, because it’s more affordable, it’s simpler, easier to access, to customize what they need. What a wonderful thing, that we would consume more education.”

Perhaps online learning will broaden opportunities for students of a variety of backgrounds and interests, and stimulate growth and improvement across the entire system of American education. (*Education Week*, 5-7-08)

British Teachers Call for a Less Knowledge-Based Curriculum

Just months after a majority of British teenagers revealed in a survey that they believed Robin Hood, Sherlock Holmes, and King Arthur were real people, the United Kingdom’s largest teachers union called for a new curriculum that would emphasize “life skills” rather than “rote learning.”

Dr. Mary Bousted, the union’s general secretary, named teamwork and the ability to research as skills the new curriculum would teach. These are the skills that employers need their future workers to have, said Bousted. “Is the world going to collapse if they don’t know ‘To be, or not to be?’? Our national curriculum should be far more focused on the development of life skills and ways of working than whether or not we teach the Battle of Hastings. The skills of historical un-

derstanding are far more important than whether or not we teach a particular battle.”

Bousted also criticized the UK’s national exams, currently administered to students ages seven, eleven, and 14. According to Bousted, this amount of testing is one of the highest in the world, and causes mental illness in English schoolchildren. “Children suffer stress and anxiety as the test looms, and the rise in children’s mental health problems cannot be divorced from their status as the most tested in the world,” she said. (*The Telegraph*, 3-22-08)



Terrorist (Continued from page 1)

agree on, but almost always become a highly politicized exercise in teaching children that our nation is oppressive and unjust, and that only socialism can solve these problems.

In Ayers’s own classes, students seem to learn more about how resources should be redistributed than about “urban education” or “improving learning environments” (two of Ayers’s course titles). “The readings that Ayers assigns are as intel-

lectually stimulating and diverse as a political commissar’s indoctrination session in one of his favorite communist tyrannies,” writes Stern.

It is relatively rare for a professor of education to openly favor instruction that transforms students’ political views rather than informing students on subjects such as history, science, or math. Ayers, however, seems to strongly prefer the former to the latter.

ACLU Challenges Single-Sex Education

In May, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) filed a lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of single-sex classes in public schools. Single-sex education has grown in popularity in recent years, and at least 392 public schools now offer some all-girl and all-boy academic classes. Proponents say that many boys and girls flourish in such settings, freed from gender stereotypes and the pressure to impress the opposite sex. For example, girls in single-sex settings are more likely to explore and enjoy math and science than they would be in a co-ed setting, while boys are more willing to explore foreign languages and the arts.

Proponents of single-sex education also cite research that shows some broad differences in how boys and girls learn — differences that appear to be physiological rather than social or learned. Most classroom environments cater more to girls’ learning styles and comfort, leaving many boys bored. Those who favor single-sex education hope tailoring classrooms to each sex will help both to excel and become more enthusiastic about school.

The ACLU, however, does not believe that single-sex learning is beneficial or even constitutional. The recently filed lawsuit accuses Breckinridge County

Middle School in Kentucky of offering unequal options to boys and girls and of placing students in single-sex classrooms without input from parents or students. Both actions are out of compliance with the federal Department of Education’s 2006 regulations for single-sex education. The lawsuit also challenges the Department’s regulations, saying that they violate Title IX of the 1972 Education Amendments and the 14th Amendment’s equal protection clause.

Leonard Sax, author of *Why Gender Matters* and director of the National Association for Single Sex Public Education (NASSPE), says the ACLU has been carefully preparing a challenge to the legality of public single-sex schooling for three years. According to Sax, the group has been looking for a school that was violating Department of Education policy, in order to convince a court that the policy is inadequate and should be overturned. “Now they think they’ve found it,” said Sax. (*Washington Times*, 5-24-08)



Union Contracts Cover up Teachers’ Indecent Behavior

Because teachers union contracts make it so difficult for school districts to discipline teachers accused of sexual or other misconduct, many districts are tempted to let abusive teachers go unpunished. They skip the long, arduous process of firing a union teacher and allow the teacher to resign instead. He can then move to another district, sometimes even with a positive recommendation from the school he left.

The *Oregonian* recently reviewed hundreds of cases of teacher misconduct to study the way this dynamic is at work in Oregon. Reporters found 47 cases over ten years in which districts had made confidential settlements with teachers accused of abuse.

Middle school teacher Kenneth John Cushing, for example, allegedly touched at least eight female students inappropriately. Through public records requests, the *Oregonian* obtained a copy of the agreement Salem-Keizer Public Schools made with Cushing in 2004. The district promised to cite “personal reasons” if potential employers called to check Cushing’s references, and to make “no reference to this agreement.” In return, Cushing resigned quietly without dragging the district through a formal inquiry. Three years later, Cushing left a job teaching at a charter school in Tucson, Arizona, apparently also for “personal reasons.” Administrators at that school said that Cushing’s

record there was clean.

Other private agreements unearthed by the *Oregonian* resembled Cushing’s in persuading accused teachers to resign, except that some also provided cash settlements, health insurance benefits, or recommendation letters. According to the paper, this practice “is so widespread, school officials across the country call it ‘passing the trash.’” (*The Oregonian*, 2-18-08)

In New York City, union contracts make it “just about impossible” to fire a bad teacher, School Chancellor Joel Klein complained in John Stossel’s 2006 exposé, *Stupid in America*. One teacher received \$300,000 in pay during the six years of litigation it took to fire him for sending sexually suggestive e-mails to a 16-year-old student. “Most principals have just given up,” Stossel concluded, “or gotten bad teachers to transfer to another school. They even have a name for it: ‘the dance of lemons.’” (*ABC news*, 1-13-06)

In 2007, the *Associated Press* reviewed five years’ worth of school districts’ disciplinary records and tabulated 2,570 cases of sexual misconduct by public school teachers. About 1,800 of the cases involved young people. It is impossible to know how many other teachers went unpunished for similar offenses. (*Associated Press*, 10-21-07)

