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House Republicans Call for Removal of 'Safe Schools' Czar

Fifty-three House Republicans have called upon the Obama administration to dismiss Kevin Jennings as head of the Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools. In a letter authored by Rep. Steve King (R-Iowa), the lawmakers objected to Jennings's "integral role in promoting homosexuality and pushing a pro-homosexual agenda in America's schools." Mr. Jennings founded the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) as a local organization of gay teachers in 1990. The organization now claims more

than 4,000 student chapters across the country and enjoys partnerships with the National Education Association and the National Middle School Association.

Jennings wrote a foreword for *Queering Elementary Education*, wherein he asserted, "We must address anti-gay bigotry . . . as soon as students start going to school." In his own book, *Always My Child*, he calls for a "diversity policy that mandates including LGBT [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender] themes in the curriculum."

House Republicans also cite Jennings's "self-described history of ignoring the sexual abuse of a child." In *One Teacher in Ten*, Jennings

relates a conversation with a high-school sophomore in which the boy divulged a sexual relationship with a much older man he had met in a bus station bathroom. Jennings recalls that he responded to the admission by saying, "I hope you knew to use a condom." By the end of the conversation, Jennings had so reassured the student that the boy "left my office with a smile on his face that I would see every time I saw him on the campus for the next two years, until he graduated."

The former student has since defended Jennings, declaring he was 16 at the time of the conversation (16 is the legal age of consent in Massachusetts), and that he had "no sexual contact with anybody at the time." Jennings's various accounts of the incident are inconsistent with those



Kevin Jennings, 'Safe Schools' Czar



statements, however. As his documented comments indicate, Jennings believed that the boy was underage, and that he was indeed sexually involved with the older man. Critics charge that Jennings had a duty to notify authorities and the boy's parents under mandatory reporter laws. Mandatory reporters are professionals who have contact with children or other vulnerable populations in the ordinary course of their work. They include teachers, doctors, social workers, and others, and are legally required to report suspected abuse, including sexual abuse.

Jennings recently issued a statement expressing regret over the incident: "21 years later, I can see how I should have handled the situation differently. . . . I should have asked for more information and consulted medical or legal authorities." He added that he would like to see his agency "play a bigger role in helping to prepare teachers" to respond to such situations.

Another criticism leveled at Jennings in the letter to President Obama is that Jennings's memoir, *Mama's Boy, Preacher's Son*, describes his "use of illegal drugs without expressing regret or acknowledging the devastating effect illegal drug use can have." As the "safe schools czar," Jennings is charged with ensuring schools are drug-free, as well as gun-free and non-violent, and the Republicans argue he is "unfit to serve in this capacity, as well."

Jennings is one of about 40 so-called czars appointed by President Obama. Unlike Cabinet secretaries, these positions do not require Congressional approval. Czars report directly to the President and "have the power to shape national policy in their subject area," according to a February CBS News report.

Thus far, the Obama administration remains fully supportive of their appointee. Education Secretary Arne Duncan praised Jennings's devotion throughout his career to promoting school safety. In a statement reported by the *Associated Press* (10-30-09), Duncan said Jennings is "uniquely qualified for his job, and I am honored to have him on our team." (*New York Times*, 10-16-09; FoxNews.com, 10-03-09).

States Scramble to Apply for Stimulus Money

States are jockeying for position to win competitive grants from President Obama's Race to the Top funding initiative for K-12 schools. The program is part of the \$787 billion American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, better known as the Stimulus, and will split \$4.35 billion among 10-15 states. These discretionary funds are in addition to other federal monies slated for state education spending.

Final applications for the grants aren't yet available, but states are already scrambling to comply with preliminary requirements released over the summer. Grant criteria "reward States that have demonstrated their will and capacity" to meet Obama administration priorities of

expanding charter schools, developing national academic standards, and evaluating teachers based on student assessment scores. Grant criteria also include



President Obama and Arne Duncan

longitudinal data-collection of student and teacher performance, as well as specific interventions for the worst-performing schools. U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan made clear in July that many states have legal barriers that put them at a "competitive disadvantage" or even make them ineligible to compete for the money. In response, at least eight states have lifted regulations that limit the growth of charter schools, including Ohio, Tennes-

see and Illinois. California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger called a special legislative session to rescind laws that ban linking student test scores to teacher evaluation, and Wisconsin is poised to reverse a similar law. Nevada would also need to reverse a law banning the use of student test scores to evaluate teachers to compete for the grant funds, but Gov. Jim Gibbons is reluctant to call a special legislative session just to change the law. The special session would cost the state about \$100,000, and still there would be no guarantee Nevada would win any of the \$4.35 billion dollar Race to the Top pot.

Unsurprisingly, teachers unions have offered some of the loudest objections to Race to the Top directives. Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, voiced concerns about the initiative. "Data is important, and charter schools can be great incubators for instructional practice and labor relations" (See 'Top' Funds, page 4)

70 Protest Kids Singing Obama's Praises

Several incidents came to light earlier this fall in which public school teachers and officials asked schoolchildren to celebrate President Barack Obama in ways that some parents thought were inappropriate. (See *Education Reporter*, October 2009.) One such incident involved children at a New Jersey elementary school chanting Obama's name and singing of his accomplishments at a school assembly. About 70 people gathered outside the school on October 12 to protest what they viewed as a public school encouraging children to idolize the president.



2nd-graders at the B. Bernice Young School in Burlington Township, New Jersey learned two songs praising Obama last spring, and first sang them at a Black History Month assembly in February. They sang the songs again in March when Charisse Carney-Nunes, author of *I Am Barack Obama*, visited the school. Unbeknownst to school officials, the author's sister videotaped the students' performance and posted the video online. By September it had migrated to YouTube, where it is still available under the title "School Kids Taught to

Praise Obama."

The video shows the children chanting Obama's name and replacing the words of the old-fashioned hymn, "Jesus Loves the Little Children," to declare, "Red, yellow, black, or white/All are equal in his sight/Barack Hussein Obama." The same song also affirms that Obama will "make this country strong again," and argues unreflectively in favor of government controlling wages in private industry: "He said we must be fair today/Equal work means equal pay."

A second song, this one to the tune of the Battle Hymn of the Republic, conveys less content but even more enthusiasm. "Mr. President we honor you today!/For

(See *Kids Singing*, page 4)

EDUCATION BRIEFS

President Obama's Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, keynoted an education reform seminar in October at which William Ayers also spoke. Ayers co-founded the Weather Underground, a domestic terrorist group whose ideology Ayers has summarized this way: "Kill all the rich people. Break up their cars and apartments. Bring the revolution home. Kill your parents." Obama's ties to Ayers attracted national scrutiny during the 2008 presidential campaign. Michael Giovannetti of the Renaissance Group, which hosted the seminar, said Duncan had "no problem whatsoever" with Ayers's presence. (WorldNetDaily, 10-17-09)

At Robeson High in Chicago, 115 out of 800 female students are either pregnant or already have children. The school is not a school for young mothers but a normal neighborhood school. Students told local news reporters that their poor relationships with their own parents and the pursuit of public assistance were both factors in high rates of teen pregnancy. (CBS 2, 10-15-09)

A federal appeals court upheld the dismissal of the major union-backed legal challenge to the No Child Left Behind Act. Nine school districts in Michigan, Texas, and Vermont, with backing from the National Education Association, had charged that NCLB was an "unfunded mandate." (blogs.edweek.org, 10-17-09)

Antonio Peck, whose school censored his kindergarten project featuring Jesus ten years ago, returned to court last month. For an assigned poster illustrating ways to save the earth, Antonio drew a picture of Jesus with the words, "The only way to save the world." His teacher told him to start over. Antonio's second poster depicted children recycling and cleaning up litter, and again featured Jesus. The school folded the poster in half to conceal Jesus before displaying it. New York federal judge Norman Mordue has ruled for the school district three times, and the Second Circuit Court of Appeals has reversed Mordue's ruling twice. Antonio went before the same appeals court for the third time in October. (WorldNetDaily, 10-14-09)

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Libraries Celebrate 'Banned Books' Week

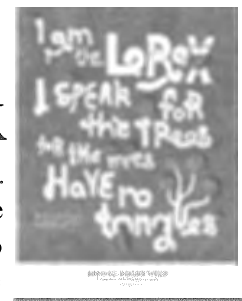
This year, the American Library Association (ALA) and cosponsors celebrated Banned Books Week with an inflammatory manifesto: "To you zealots and bigots and false patriots who live in fear of discourse. You screamers and banners and burners. . . ." Events and displays at libraries across the nation used the manifesto and other ALA materials to "draw attention to the problem of censorship."

ALA drums up its "banned books" numbers by crying "censorship" when library patrons and public school parents merely complain about books. The group's online "censorship map" plots 186 cases of supposed censorship nationwide between 2007 and 2009, but in only 10% of those cases was a book actually removed from a library. Writing in the *Wall Street Journal* (9-25-09), Mitchell Muncy of the Institute for American Values notes the difficulty of reconciling any reasonable definition of "censorship" with cases like these in which "ordinary people [lodge] complaints with school and library authorities." Such incidents are better described, according to Muncy, as "petitioning the government for a redress of grievances."

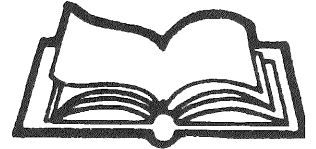
80% of the challenges to books and all but one of the book removals took

place at schools. Every other case of challenges to books on the "censorship map" dealt with books available in the youth or children's section of public libraries. This means that the "bigots" and "burners" the ALA Manifesto derides are in zero cases concerned with what any adult reads or accesses. Rather, these supposed book "banners" are ordinary parents who only want to limit their own children's exposure to material they consider harmful or obscene.

"There's something odd about a national organization with a \$54 million budget and 67,000 members reacting so zealously against a few unorganized, law-abiding parents," writes Muncy. "Is Banned Books Week a celebration of free speech, or is it a way for government employees to bully ordinary citizens by stigmatizing those who complain ('bigots,' 'false patriots,' 'screamers,' 'burners')? They clearly hope future challenges simply won't be brought. Does that make Banned Books Week an attempt at prior restraint on speech by the government — an act of censorship?"



Book of the Month



30 Ways in 30 Days to Save Your Family, Rebecca Hagelin, Regnery 2009, 256 pp., \$24.95



The 30 chapters of this book overflow not only with sobering statistics and information for parents, but also with encouragement, inspiration, and practical advice to equip parents to rescue their children from the rising tide of corruption in American culture. Rebecca Hagelin has two sons in college and a daughter in high school. She is a fellow of the Heritage Foundation, a Townhall.com columnist and the author of *Home Invasion: Protecting Your Family in a Culture That's Gone Stark Raving Mad*.

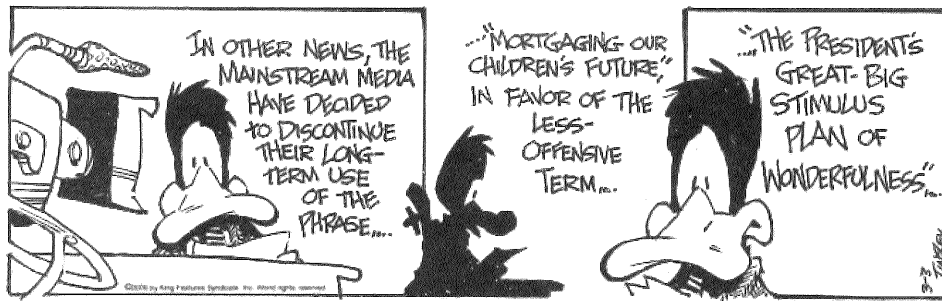
Hagelin brings to this book her wisdom as a seasoned parent, her wide and deep reading on culture and parenting, and a refreshingly positive attitude. Without ever minimizing the seriousness of modern threats to parental authority and beliefs, Hagelin expresses unflinching confidence in the power families have to love their children, strengthen them, and build their characters.

Every chapter presents readers with a tangible, practical step they can take that very day to build up and protect their children. "Committing to the daily battle isn't about being confrontational all the time," Hagelin writes. "It's about upholding standards and morality in such a way that all of the children who come into your home feel as if they are truly loved — as if they are part of a family that cares about them enough to challenge the status quo." Each chapter also contains a wonderful list of resources that readers can turn to for further help.

Hagelin has filled the book with inspiring stories from parents who have improved their relationships with their teenagers and stood firm against the cultural forces endeavoring to pit parents and teens against each other. She also frequently quotes young people who relate how much similar efforts by their parents have meant to them.

One of the best such passages is the alternate introduction to the book, written by Hagelin's own 16-year-old daughter, Kristin. Kristin Hagelin writes movingly of her parents' character, faith, and dedication to their family: "The most important thing my parents gave us is their example. They showed us how to live, how to love, and what it means to have faith." While Kristin's mother freely admits her imperfections and her regrets over mistakes she has made while raising her children, it is obvious that she lives the principles she writes about in this book.

MALLARD FILLMORE / by Jeff Tinsley



Yale Censors Images from Book About Danish Cartoons

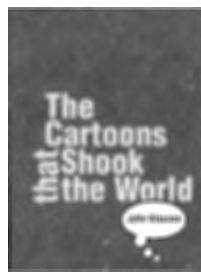
In September 2005, the Dutch *Jyllands-Posten* newspaper published 12 cartoons describing various aspects of Islam, which ignited a series of violent protests across the Muslim world. The cartoons, including one of Muhammad with a bomb in his turban, offended many radical Muslims. At least 139 people died and many more were injured in the resulting protests.

The violent reactions to the cartoons between 2005 and 2008 gave rise to serious debate in the Western world about how newspapers and other media should respond. Some argued that reprinting the cartoons in articles on the topic would be culturally insensitive and needlessly offensive. Others countered that not reprinting the cartoons was a concession to terrorism, allowing violent men to hold free speech hostage.

As Hoover Institution fellow Peter Berkowitz relates, this argument is ongoing. Berkowitz charges that a recent development in the controversy, at Yale University, suggests that "lessons in the fundamentals of liberty of thought and

discussion may be lacking on campus."

Yale University Press just published *The Cartoons that Shook the World*, by Prof.



Jytte Klausen of Brandeis University. Klausen's book analyzes the worldwide reaction to the Danish cartoons. But in a last-minute prepublication decision in August, Yale officials removed the 12 cartoons from the book. Officials also decided to remove all other images of Muhammad from the book, including those by respected artists. Radical Muslims oppose depictions of Muhammad.

Peter Berkowitz points out that Yale's distinguished academic faculty appeared to take no notice of the censorship of Klausen's book. A few other groups did object to the surprising decision to censor the cartoons: the American Association of University Professors, for example, accused Yale of caving in to the "anticipatory demands" of terrorists. A group of alumni organized themselves into the Yale Committee for a Free Press and called on Yale to reprint the book, including the cartoons and other images. In a public letter,

(See *Yale Censors*, page 4)

FOCUS: Keep Uncle Sam Away from Toddlers!

The Case Against Government Funding for Preschool

by Carrie Lukas

Among President Obama's campaign promises was his promise to increase the federal government's commitment to early childhood education. Specifically, on their campaign website, candidates Obama and Biden describe their "Zero to Five Plan," which would emphasize not only expanding educational opportunities to three- and four-year-olds, who are typically not yet eligible for public kindergarten, but also "early care and education for infants." Specifically, President Obama pledged to create "Early Learning Challenge Grants" that would be given to states to support their efforts providing educational opportunities for those under age five and to help move states toward "voluntary, universal preschool."

The President and Democratic Congress have already begun to expand federal government support for early learning initiatives. The \$787 billion economic stimulus package (officially entitled the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act) included more than \$1 billion over two years for the federal Head Start program, which supports educational opportunities for three- and four-year-olds from low-income families, and \$1.1 billion over two years for the Early Head Start program, which supports initiatives for infants, toddlers, and pregnant women. Other money included in the stimulus package for education programs (such as funding for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and Title I) will also be used by states to bolster early learning programs.

Supporters of these programs believe they will better prepare young children for school, improve students' education, and lead to better life outcomes. For example, during a speech to the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, President Obama argued:

Studies show that children in early childhood education programs are more likely to score higher in reading and math, more likely to graduate from high school and attend college, more likely to hold a job, and more likely to earn more in that job. For every dollar we invest in these programs, we get nearly \$10 back in reduced welfare rolls, fewer health care costs, and less crime.

Yet as this policy brief highlights, policymakers shouldn't assume that such results will attend expanded government support of preschool, especially as government's support expands beyond the low-income or "at risk" student population.

Does Preschool Improve Student Outcomes?

Those supporting increased government provision of preschool typically suggest that the money invested in such programs pays off by creating much larger benefits for individuals and society at large. They claim that high-quality preschool programs lead to improved student

outcomes and ultimately a more educated, productive workforce and expanded tax base. Yet a balanced look at the available research on the effects of preschool should give policymakers pause.

Most evaluations of preschool programs which are cited as evidence of their great potential benefits have analyzed programs that serve low-income children and those considered at risk of failing to thrive in traditional public school. And even when studies are focused on disadvantaged populations, the research is far from a slam dunk in proving preschool's long-term efficacy. As Darcy Olsen, an education analyst and president of the Goldwater Institute, writes:

Taken as a whole, a review of the research shows that some early interventions have had meaningful short-term effects on disadvantaged students' cognitive ability, grade-level retention, and special education placement.

However, most research also indicates that the effects of early interventions disappear after children leave the programs.

The program that is most frequently touted as evidence of the great potential benefits of universal preschool is the High/Scope Perry Preschool Project. And indeed, this study, which began in the 1960s and has followed an experimental and control group for 40 years, has found meaningful benefits enjoyed by those who participated in the program on a range of outcomes, including high-school graduation rates, adult crime, and earnings. Yet as education analysts from the Lexington Institute explain:

It's important to note that there were only 58 preschoolers in the experimental group (and 123 in all, including the control group), and all were not only disadvantaged but deemed at risk for "retarded intellectual functioning and eventual school failure." They received one or two years of half-day preschool and home visitations. This was certainly not a large or representative group, not even of the disadvantaged populations, and it is a real stretch to generalize results into a rationale for pouring billions of dollars into public pre-K for all, including the children of affluent families.

Evaluations done on Head Start, the federal program dedicated to providing preschool opportunities for low-income families, are also not encouraging. Generally, studies show initial modest gains in terms of student abilities and outcomes, but those gains quickly dissipate. By early elementary school, researchers could find no differences between the test scores of those who had participated in Head

Start and those of their peers from similar socioeconomic backgrounds who hadn't participated in a preschool program.

Even many proponents of preschool programs for those in the low-income or at-risk population have cautioned against assuming that the benefits enjoyed by that population would translate into similar benefits for the general population. James Heckman, a Nobel prize-winning economist, makes the case for increased investment in early education programs for disadvantaged populations because

of his belief in its potential for significant payoffs. However, when asked about universal preschool programs, he reiterated the case for targeted programs, explaining, "Functioning middle-class homes are producing healthy, productive kids. . . . It is foolish to try to substitute for what the middle-

class and upper-middle-class parents are already doing."

And indeed, if more preschool were a surefire way to improve student outcomes among the general population, one would expect to find ample evidence of that dynamic already occurring. Several states have implemented aggressive preschool programs and there is little to suggest that it is paying off in terms of improving the states' overall education climate. As education analysts from the Reason Foundation wrote in the *Wall Street Journal*:

[T]he results from Oklahoma and Georgia — both of which implemented universal preschool a decade or more ago — paint an equally dismal picture. A 2006 analysis by *Education Week* found that Oklahoma and Georgia were among the ten states that had made the least progress on NAEP. Oklahoma, in fact, lost ground after it embraced universal preschool: in 1992 its 4th- and 8th-graders tested one point above the national average in math. Now they are several points below. Ditto for reading. Georgia's universal preschool program has made virtually no difference to its 4th-grade reading scores.

Rates of preschool attendance have soared during recent decades. The Department of Education estimated that, in 1965, 5% of three-year-olds and 16% of four-year-olds attended preschool. By the beginning of this decade, 42% of three-year-olds and 68% of four-year-olds were enrolled in preschool. Yet the data on important educational outcomes — from performance on nationalized tests to graduation rates — has shown no significant gains during this period, and in some cases have declined.

There is also cause for concern that encouraging greater enrollment in preschool may not just fail to produce positive results, but it could lead to some ad-

verse outcomes. Some research has suggested that increased enrollment in preschool programs could lead to problem behaviors. For example, one study conducted by researchers at Stanford University and University of California, Berkeley concluded that kindergartners who had attended more than 15 hours of preschool each week were more likely to exhibit aggressive behavior in class.

Negative behavioral effects would likely be particularly pronounced if the government moves in the direction of President Obama's "Zero to 5" proposal to encourage the enrollment of babies and young toddlers. There is significant evidence to suggest that there is a link between the amount of time young children spend outside of their parents' care and behavioral problems. The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, for example, conducted a study of children in ten geographic sites who were followed from birth to kindergarten, and found an association between greater amount of non-maternal care and behavioral problems:

The more time children spend in any of a variety of non-maternal care arrangements across the first 4.5 years of life, the more externalizing problems and conflict with adults they manifest at 54 months of age and in kindergarten, as reported by mothers, caregivers, and teachers. . . . More time in care not only predicts problem behavior measured on a continuous scale but at-risk (though not clinical) levels of problem behavior, as well as assertiveness, disobedience, and aggression. It should also be noted that these correctional findings also imply that lower levels of problems were associated with less time in child care.

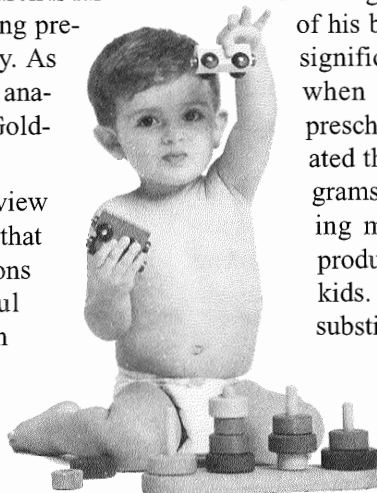
In summary, the evidence simply does not support the claims of universal preschool proponents that an investment in early education will pay off in terms of improving the educational and life prospects of the general population.

Problems with Existing Government-Run Schools

Before lawmakers extend the responsibilities of the public education system to include three- and four-year-olds, it would be prudent to examine how it is performing its existing duties in serving students eligible for kindergarten through 12th grade.

President Obama himself has been critical of the performance of many public schools, and indeed, a look at the statistics on our public school system's performance is sobering. The National Assessment of Educational Progress regularly shows that the system is failing too many of its students: in 2007, one-third of 4th-graders and one-quarter of 8th-graders scored "below basic" in reading, and

(See Focus, page 4)



School District Claims Authority Over How Kids Get to School

Janette Kaddo Marino and her 12-year-old son Adam regularly pedal the four-mile



route to Maple Avenue Middle School and back home together. But earlier this year, school officials confronted Marino with a school policy prohibiting elementary and middle school children from biking or walking to the school. Marino is challenging the school district over the policy. At issue is whether public schools can dictate how parents get their children to school.

"This just doesn't seem right to me that the school district would have that kind of authority over a parent," objected Marino in an interview with FoxNews.com. The New York state mother also emphasized that she always rides with her son, and that she is "very safety-oriented."

School superintendent Janice White has granted that the policy was not intended to address any liability concerns, as the school bears no responsibility for incidents on public roadways around the school. She said the measure was "strictly about the

intention to keep children safe." White added that administrators have always permitted Maple Avenue High School students to ride their bikes to campus, and bike racks are provided for their use. Marino contends that the "beautiful, wide shoulders" of Route 9 are suitably navigable for her seventh-grade son, an experienced rider who has biked the 300 miles between Buffalo and Albany twice.

At an October 13th meeting, the school board approved a revised policy allowing elementary and middle school kids to ride bikes or walk to school if a parent or guardian files a registration note with the school and accompanies the child, and if school administrators and planning committees have "determined that the conditions exist under which bikes may safely access school property." Furthermore, the policy states, school administrators will "develop regulations to specify locations, conditions and requirements for such access and modify them as circumstances change."

Marino called the newly adopted measure "jargon" and maintains the school board is "still involving themselves in something they have no right to be involved with." (FoxNews.com, 10-03-09; *The Times Union*, 10-14-09)

Focus (Continued from page 3)

nearly 20% of 4th-graders and 30% of 8th-graders scored "below basic" in math. More than one-quarter of American children don't graduate from high school. And, as President Obama noted, the United States often lags behind other developed nations on academic tests despite spending more on education.

The disheartening performance of the public school system should caution those who would believe that greater government involvement in the lives and education of our youngest children will necessarily improve their prospects. Lawmakers would be better off focusing on identifying why the public school system regularly fails so many of its charges instead of expanding its mandate in education.

Conclusion

While lawmakers rarely seem concerned about the Founders' intentions, it is worth noting that there is nothing in the

Constitution to suggest that using taxpayer money to support preschool programs is a proper role for the federal government. Policymakers claim that using taxpayer money to fund more access to preschool enhances the greater good, but there is little evidence to suggest that this holds true for the general population. There is also reason for concern that there would be unintended consequences to pushing greater enrollment in publicly-supported preschool programs, both for individual students and for the education system as a whole. Lawmakers would do better to focus on improving the existing K-12 education system, instead of seeking to expand it; and on helping families provide for their children by reducing their tax burden.

Carrie Lukas is the vice president for policy and economics at the Independent Women's Forum and author of The Politically Incorrect Guide to Women, Sex, and Feminism.

Kids Singing (Continued from page 1)

all your great accomplishments, we all doth say 'hooray.'/Hooray, Mr. President! You're number one!/Hooray, Mr. President, we're really proud of you!/So continue, Mr. President, we know you'll do the trick/So here's a hearty hip hooray, Hip, hip hooray!"

School principal Dr. Denise King defended the songs publicly and told parents she would allow the performance again if she could. Superintendent Christopher Manno of the Burlington Township schools is similarly unapologetic about the songs or the performance — though he is "deeply disturbed" that the video is on the internet. District policy states that students

cannot be photographed or videotaped without their parents' permission. Manno did admit that he also responded to the video's publicity by sending a memo to all teachers asking them to be "extra vigilant . . . so as not to give the impression of promoting" a political ideology in the classroom.

At the October protest, about 70 parents and community members gathered near the school carrying signs and chanting slogans such as "Free children, free minds" and "Education, not indoctrination." "Consider this a protest to squelch this trend to politicize our youth," said the protest's organizers in a statement. "We

'Top' Funds (Continued from page 1)

practice, but if it ends up just becoming measurement and some charter schools, that's not public education," she said, adding, "that's what the previous administrations pushed."

In a 26-page response to the initial guidelines of the program, the National Education Association said it found the "top-down approach disturbing." The union also stated, "We have been down that road before with the failures of No Child Left Behind, and we cannot support yet another layer of federal mandates that have little or no research base of success, and that usurp state and local governments' responsibilities for public education."

Some education policy researchers are likewise disappointed with Race to the Top's emphases. Diane Ravitch, former assistant secretary for educational research under George H.W. Bush, commented, "What is extraordinary about these regulations is that they have no credible basis in research. They just happen to be the programs and approaches favored by the people in power."

Education scholars singled out two core aspects of the initiative as lacking research evidence: promoting the expansion of charter schools and evaluating teacher performance based on students' standardized test scores. While some recent research found that charter school students outperform their public school peers of like socioeconomic standing, other studies have indicated that charter schools vary widely in academic effectiveness. A Stanford University project headed by Margaret E. Raymond examined 2,403 charters in 15 states and the District of Columbia. That study concluded that 80% of students in charter schools performed the same as or worse than students in regular public schools on mathematics tests.

Caroline Hoxby, author of a different Stanford study that showed significant positive gains for charter school students in New York City, has suggested a possible explanation for the very different results. She believes Raymond's findings suffer from a "serious mathematical mistake." Hoxby explained that Raymond's study compared individual charter students' achievements with groups of students from nearby regular public schools, but failed to make the necessary statistical adjustments to account for natural downward

biases inherent in that type of calculation. Jeffrey Henig, a professor of political science and education at Teachers College, Columbia University said the reason for the different study results "could just be that New York's charter schools are better." (*Education Week*, 9-30-09)

Likewise, there is no consensus on whether teachers can be fairly evaluated by students' standardized test scores, and the teachers unions vehemently oppose this proposal. Helen Ladd, Duke University professor of public policy and education, is not convinced that "holding teachers accountable for their students' test scores will induce them to become better teachers." She said she was unaware of "any credible support of that proposition." Other education experts disagree. Thomas J. Kane submitted a comment letter on behalf of eight academics strongly supporting "the focus of the Race to the Top program on teacher effectiveness and achieving equity in distribution of effective teachers," though the letter also recommended some additions to the proposed criteria of the program.

The core reform themes of the Race to the Top proposal are unlikely to change much as the Department of Education finalizes the grant application, and unions are adjusting, even as they criticize the criteria. The AFT recently awarded its own innovation grants to encourage schools to develop new teacher compensation models that are tied to performance. National NEA leaders have directed local affiliates to allow high-need schools to hire top-notch teachers even when contract language prohibits such action. In October, a local teachers union in New Haven, Connecticut agreed almost unanimously to tougher job evaluations and more flexibility for firing substandard teachers. "This shows a willingness to go into areas that used to be seen as untouchable," remarked Secretary Duncan. (*Wall Street Journal*, 10-17-09)

Amy Wilkins, principal of the independent think tank Education Trust, explained the newly accommodating stance of some union members this way: "What we have now is a Democratic president who is using the words 'fire bad teachers,' so the labor movement is starting to say they want to get on the bus and help steer, rather than get run over by it." (*Education Week*, 10-7-09; *Politico.com*, 10-17-09)

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these alumni condemned Yale's "surrender to potential unknown belligerents."

Berkowitz likens the politically-correct silence of Yale's faculty on the suppression of the cartoons to similar failures by the faculty at Duke during the lacrosse team scandal, and at Harvard when Lawrence Summers was forced to resign. "This silence represents a collective failure of America's professors of colossal proportions," Berkowitz writes. "What could be a clearer sign of our professors' loss of understanding of the requirements of liberal education than their failure to defend liberty of thought and discussion where it touches them most directly?" (*Wall Street Journal*, 10-17-09)

are supporting the constitutional rights of our children and protest against the progressive social agenda promoted by the New Jersey Education Association and the National Education Association."

"I felt this was reminiscent of 1930s Germany, and the indoctrination of children to worship their leader," said one shocked parent. In fact, the video shows the teacher leading her class in raising their right hands, on cue and in unison, in a sort of Heil Obama gesture. Another parent commented: "I can't believe it's our school. We don't want to praise this guy like he's a god or an idol or a king." (*Education Week*, 10-12-09, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 10-13-09)