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46 States Join New Push for National Standards

46 states announced in June that they would work together to draft a set of national standards for K-12 education. The National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers are the parties responsible for the effort, which they are calling the Common Core State Standards Initiative. The District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands also joined the initiative.

The coalition of governors and chief school officers has appointed a secret panel of experts who are now at work creating the common standards. The panel will reveal in July the standards it has created for high school graduates in reading and math. By the end of the summer, the panel plans to break up the steps necessary to get high school seniors ready to graduate, and announce grade-by-grade skills and standards in reading and math from kindergarten on up. Standards in other subjects will follow.

Later, a separate national panel, composed of experts nominated by the participating states, will review the standards proposed by the first panel. States will be free to opt out of the standards once they are created, but Gene Wilhoit, executive director of the Council of Chief State School Officers, says he does not expect them to do so. According to Wilhoit, the standards will be ready for implementation by 2010.

The initiative's leaders have promised that the standards will avoid directives on controversial issues such as exactly how reading or math should be taught. Nor will the standards mandate specific books that children at different grade levels must read. There will still, however, be scope for argument. "All the groups, the math educators and the English professors and the liberals and the conservatives will want to weigh in," warned Michael J. Petrilli of the Thomas B. Fordham Institution, which favors national standards. "There are fundamental disagreements in our society about what kids should learn."

In May, *U.S. News & World Report* described testimony that various groups gave before the House Committee on Education and Labor. "All of the witnesses appearing before the committee seemed to agree" about the need for national standards, reported writer Zach Miners. It does not appear to have occurred to Miners that the unanimity of the testimony might indicate that the committee only sought the opinions of witnesses who favored national standards.

Other reporters took a similar tone toward the national standards initiative following the June 1st announcement. It seemed that every news outlet found a voice to loudly proclaim that there was no resistance or opposition to national standards. Governors and superintendents repeatedly pointed to the "global economy" and the pressure on the United States to produce internationally competi-

tive workers. No one, however, bothered to explain exactly how national standards would take American education where it needs to go. A few mentioned that students who moved from one state to another would stay on track in school, but this is probably one of the smallest problems confronting American public school students.

This comment from Virginia Gov. Timothy Kaine was typical. "Measuring our students against international benchmarks is an important step. Today, we live in a world without borders. It not only matters how Virginia students compare to those in surrounding states — it matters how we compete with countries across the world." Vermont Gov. Jim Douglas and Arkansas Commissioner of Education Ken James also waxed eloquent on the

need to "internationally benchmark" American students, but were silent on the topic of how devising "benchmarks" to compare American students to others would make students better educated or more skilled.

Former Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings did comment mildly on the possibility that ever-more-refined standards might be little more than a distraction. "We have a speedometer, and it says we're going too slow," said Spellings. "Should we get a more precise speedometer? Sure. But the most important thing is speeding up."

The four states that declined to join the standards initiative were Alaska, Mis-

souri, South Carolina, and Texas. No major national news story bothered to address these four states' reasons for sitting the initiative out.

In a statement, Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin pointed out that Alaska would be free to incorporate anything useful that Common Core created into its own standards. "The standards are not the education problem we face," said Palin. "The major challenges are persistently low achievement among some stu-



Governor Sarah Palin

dents and a low graduation rate." Palin does not believe that federal standards will necessarily raise student achievement. "The State of Alaska fully believes that schools must have high expectations of students. But high expectations are not always created by new, mandated federal standards written on paper. They are created in the home, the community and the classroom."

Texas Education Commissioner Robert Scott, in an email message to the TEA teachers union, said there were "many reasons" he did not sign on to the initiative. "First, I do not have authority over state standards as that is the role of the SBOE [State Board of Education]. Second, I do not think it is wise to sign up for standards that have not been written yet and I am worried that in order to get consensus among states they will not be that rigorous."

The Obama administration and the largest teachers unions have been exerting pressure in the direction of national standards whenever they have had the chance. Randi Weingarten, president of

(See *National Standards*, page 4)

Through Grade Inflation, B+ is the New Average

Prof. Stuart Rojstaczer of Duke University tracks the history of grade inflation in American higher education on his website, gradeinflation.org. From 1991 to 2007, the average GPA at American private universities rose from 3.09 to 3.30. The average GPA at public institutions rose from 2.93 to 3.11. Of course, there was a lot of inflation before 1991, as well. Rojstaczer estimates that the average GPA across all institutions of higher education in the 1930s was 2.35.

Time-use surveys confirm the impression that many college students today do very little work for those high GPAs. Gone is the expectation that students will do two or three hours of outside work for every hour they spend in class; this may still hold at certain schools or for certain classes, but on average, full-time seniors at four-year colleges spend just 14 hours a week studying. Students 40 years ago studied about twice as much as students today. A study earlier this year from *Outside the Classroom* shows that among the 69% of freshmen who drink alcohol, nearly half spend more time drinking than they do studying. Freshmen who drink spend an average of 10.2 hours a week drinking, and 8.4 hours studying.

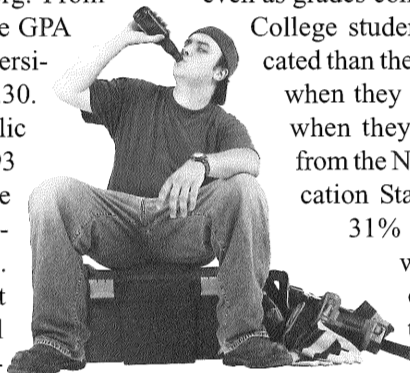
Some administrators and others have argued that students today are actually smarter, and deserve the higher grades they receive. This may be partially true at particular institutions that have become much more selective in admissions in recent years, with a corresponding rise in student achievement. Rojstaczer, however, believes that even at those specific institutions, the rise in SAT scores fails to account for the larger part of the rise in

GPAs. Furthermore, the average SAT score for all incoming college students has declined steadily over the past 30 years, even as grades continue to rise.

College students are less well educated than they were in the past both when they arrive on campus and when they leave. A 2005 study from the National Center for Education Statistics found that just 31% of college graduates were able to "read a complex book and extrapolate from it."

Prof. Thomas C. Reeves, writing in the *Journal of the National Association of Scholars* (4-16-09),

(See *B+ New Average*, page 4)



Doctors Rethink Psychotropic Drug Scripts for Kids

Doctors today are more aware of the potential for serious side effects when young children take powerful psychotropic drugs. Doctors and consumers have also become more suspicious of the companies selling psychotropics, as several have been accused of improperly marketing these profitable drugs. Prescriptions of the drugs to young children are still on the rise, but the rates are rising much more slowly than they were just a few years ago.

Between 2002 and 2007, prescriptions of all psychotropic drugs to children under ten increased 44.6%. Last year, prescription rates increased only 3.5%. The rate for prescriptions to children under age seven actually decreased, by an estimated 1%.

Antipsychotics, one class of psychotropic drugs, have especially come under suspicion in recent years. There are six main atypical antipsychotics on the mar-

ket, and only one was approved for children under age ten before this year. Doctors are free to prescribe such drugs to unapproved age groups in a practice known as "off-label" use. Between 2002 and 2007, prescriptions of antipsychotics to children under ten rose 85%. But in 2008, that rate fell 4%.

The drop in prescriptions of antipsychotics to children results partly from re-

(See *Drugs for Kids*, page 4)



EDUCATION BRIEFS

Higher education may be “the next bubble to burst.” Credit is tighter, and the private student-loan industry is a shadow of its 1990s self. “Consumers who have questioned whether it is worth spending \$1,000 a square foot for a home are now asking whether it is worth spending \$1,000 a week to send their kids to college,” write Joseph Marr Cronin and Howard E. Horton. “There is a growing sense among the public that higher education might be overpriced and under-delivering.” (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, 5-22-09)

U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan appointed Kevin Jennings as the Assistant Deputy Secretary in the Office of Safe Schools. Jennings founded the Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network (GLSEN), a homosexual activist group that now has thousands of chapters at high schools across the nation. GLSEN chapters and materials have promoted sex between young teens and adults and sponsored “field trips” to gay pride parades. Jennings was the keynote speaker at a notorious GLSEN conference at Tufts University in 2000 at which HIV/AIDS coordinators discussed in detail, before an audience including area high school students, how to perform various homosexual acts.

College students who use Facebook earn lower grades than those who don't. Facebook users studied an average of one to five hours each week and earned GPAs averaging between 3.0 and 3.5. Students who weren't on Facebook studied an average of eleven to 15 hours per week and earned GPAs in the 3.5 to 4.0 range. (researchnews.osu.edu, 4-16-09)

The Baltimore City Public School System is using \$200,000 in grant money from the Federal Highway Administration to nudge 4th- and 5th-graders toward careers in transportation technology. *Washington Examiner* columnist Marta Mossburg cries foul: “Wouldn't it be better to give [Baltimore children] the tools to succeed in any career before fast-tracking them into transportation?” (*Washington Examiner*, 3-30-09)

(See Briefs, page 4)

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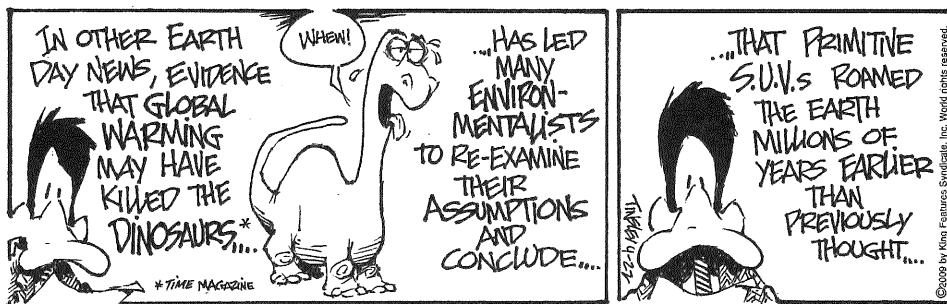
American Children Take the Most Drugs By Far

A study in *Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Mental Health* compared how doctors in the United States, Germany, and the Netherlands tend to prescribe psychotropic drugs to children. This was one of the first studies to rigorously compare prescription rates in different nations. Germany and the Netherlands both have socialized medicine, which often means that prescription rates for both necessary and unnecessary drugs will be lower. But the differences were too extreme to be attributed solely to socialized health care. Between 1999 and 2000, 6.7% of Americans under the age of 20 took at least one psychotropic drug, while just 2.9% of Germans and 2% of Dutch in that age group took one of the drugs.

Over 8% of American children ages five to nine took at least one psychotropic drug — more than four times the percentage in either Germany or the Netherlands. Prescriptions of antidepressants and stimulants to American children were especially out of proportion when compared to prescription rates in Europe. Prescription rates in other industrialized nations appear to resemble those of Germany and the Netherlands, and not those of the United States. France, for example, banned the practice of prescribing stimulant drugs to children while the study was underway. (*Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Mental Health*, Sept. 2008)



MALLARD FILLMORE / by Jeff Tinsley



Getting Paid for Volunteering?

In March, Congress passed the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act, which will triple the number of Americans serving in AmeriCorps and similar programs in the next eight years. The act reauthorizes the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993 and creates several new programs directed at schoolchildren, at a cost of \$6 billion between 2010 and 2015.

President Obama called the Serve America Act “the boldest expansion of opportunities to serve our communities and our country since the creation of AmeriCorps.” He further said the law was “just the beginning of a sustained, collaborative, and focused effort to involve our greatest resource — our citizens — in the work of remaking this nation.”

The bill creates a new Education Corps, modeled after AmeriCorps, for full-time volunteers to work in schools. Other programs, including the Youth Engagement Zone program, make grants available for schools and community organizations to involve high school students and high school dropouts in community service.

The Summer of Service program will award \$500 for college tuition or loans to middle or high school students who spend 100 hours volunteering. These programs will be administered by the Learn and Serve America Arm of the Corporation for National and Community Service.

AmeriCorps workers have repeatedly been caught lobbying and working for the political goals of the left, often in ways that violate federal law. Sen. David Vitter (R-LA) tried unsuccessfully to insert an

amendment into the Serve America Act to prohibit the infamous and corrupt community-organizing group ACORN from receiving funds through AmeriCorps.

In 2000 in the *American Spectator*, James Bovard dismantled AmeriCorps as ineffective and bureaucratic, and showed that AmeriCorps “volunteers” were actually paid almost \$12 an hour when all of the government benefits, including a stipend, free child care, health insurance, and more, which they received were taken into account. Bovard warned, “In the future, all



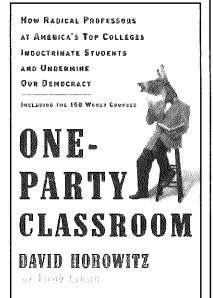
high school students could be forced to ‘serve their country’ the AmeriCorps way; many of the program’s supporters hope that AmeriCorps will be a stepping stone to laws compelling all young Americans to surrender their time in government-approved ‘service’ activities.”

Nick Gillespie, editor-in-chief of Reason.com, directed searing criticism at the expansion of federalized community service. He called attention to the fact that AmeriCorps and other Serve America “volunteers” perform “paid service while those participating and spending your tax dollars luxuriate in the silky-smooth language of altruism. Which, last time I checked, was supposed to be free. Jesus rendered unto Caesar; he didn’t ask for a block grant from Pontius Pilate in return. That Obama pushes national service and voluntarism even as he works to limit tax breaks for charitable giving that drives all sorts of philanthropy is a classic screw-you, my-way-or-the-highway move.” (Reason.com, 4-22-09)

Book of the Month



One-Party Classroom: How Radical Professors at America's Top Colleges Indoctrinate Students and Undermine our Democracy, by David Horowitz and Jacob Laksin, Crown Forum, 2009, 321 pp., \$26.95



One-Party Classroom presents detailed investigations of 12 representative American institutions of higher education. The authors depict each school’s general academic climate and then describe in detail about a dozen courses at that school: courses in which students learn not *how* to think, but *what* to think. These descriptions quote liberally from course catalogues, syllabi, and professors’ own writings.

At Columbia Teachers College’s Peace Education Center, students learn, among other things, that “structurally violent societies that deny [poor people] economic and social security” — in other words, non-socialist societies — are the root cause of all violence.

A course description at UC-Santa Cruz declares, “The goal of this seminar is to learn how to organize a revolution. We will learn what communities past and present have done and are doing to resist, challenge, and overcome systems of power including (but not limited to) global capitalism, state oppression, and racism.”

“Here it is, activism for credit,” announces an official University of Arizona course description. “Give four hours to a social movement organization and I’ll give you 200 points.” The instructions suggested “great organizations that could use your help,” all of them on the far political left. Another course asserts that not only race, class, and gender, but even “religion, physical ability, age, etc.” all “constitute significant forms of oppression.”

At Temple University, the mandatory, two-year Intellectual Heritage course sequence devotes much time and energy to Marx, while rationalizing away the devastation Marxism has wreaked. One professor writes on a list of study questions, “Marx presents an astute understanding and critique of Capitalism. Is it convincing?” Horowitz and Laksin paraphrase that question: “*Marx wrote a wise critique of capitalism. Are you stupid enough to disagree with him?*” All 12 schools under examination were rife with Marxist ideologue professors eager to convert students to the cause.

The common themes at these colleges are one-sided indoctrination into leftist political ideologies and an appalling lowering of academic standards. Students learn about Communism from English professors, and about American history from women’s studies professors. Horowitz and Laksin blow the whistle on professors who believe that their political convictions both equip them to teach on any subject and excuse them from rigorous standards of academic inquiry.

FOCUS: Slow the Preschool Bandwagon

by Chester E. Finn, Jr.

President Obama has pledged to spend \$10 billion more a year on “zero to five” education, and his 2010 budget makes a \$2 billion “down payment” on that commitment. (Billions more are already in the “stimulus” package.) Any number of congressional leaders want more preschool, as do dozens of governors. Not to mention the National Education Association and the megabucks Pew Charitable Trusts, which is underwriting national and state-level advocacy campaigns on behalf of universal pre-kindergarten. At least three states are already on board.



Underlying all this activity and interest is the proposition that government — state and federal — should pay for at least a year of preschool for every American four-year-old. One rationale is to boost overall educational achievement. Another is to close school-readiness gaps between the haves and have-nots.

Almost nobody is against it. Yet every-

body should pause before embracing it.

For all its surface appeal, universal preschool is an unwise use of tax dollars. In a time of ballooning deficits, expansion of preschool programs would use large sums on behalf of families that don't need this subsidy while not providing nearly enough help to the smaller number of children who need it most. It fails to overhaul expensive but woefully ineffectual efforts such as Head Start. And it dumps five-year-olds, ready or not, into public-school classrooms that today are unable even to make and sustain their own achievement gains, much less to capitalize on any advances these youngsters bring from preschool. (Part of the energy behind universal pre-K is school systems — and teachers unions — maneuvering to expand their own mandates, revenue and membership rolls.)

Versions of universal preschool are under way in Florida, Oklahoma and Georgia, with participation rates for four-year-

olds between 60 and 70%. If advocates have their way, dozens of states will expand their more limited pre-K offerings — typically aimed at poor or disabled youngsters — to include all four-year-olds and, soon after, three-year-olds, in government-funded programs that most often are run by public school systems. Washington will kick in billions to help.

Yet this campaign rests on four myths:

- *Everybody needs it.* In fact, about 85% of four-year-olds already take part in preschool or child care outside their homes, paid for with a mix of public and private dollars. And fewer than 20% of five-year-olds are seriously unready for the cognitive challenges of kindergarten in the No Child Left Behind era.
- *Preschool is educationally effective.* On the contrary, while a few tiny, costly programs targeting very poor children have shown some lasting positive effects, the overwhelming majority of studies show that most pre-K programs have little to no educational impact (particularly on middle-class kids) and/or have effects that fade within the first few

years of school.

- *Existing programs are shoddy.* Quality control is indeed patchy, and some operators do a lousy job. But experts, leaders and providers in the field of early-childhood education cannot agree on how to define and judge quality. Most often, antiquated measures of spending, staff credentials and adult-child ratios — *i.e.*, “input” gauges — are used, rather than appraising the kindergarten-readiness of these programs’ graduates or sending qualified observers to crouch in classrooms to assess the quality of teacher-child interactions.
- *Head Start is terrific but doesn't serve enough kids.* If only. This iconic, much-loved federal program, now costing more than \$7 billion annually, has spent four decades denying that it's an education program, refusing to embrace a pre-K curriculum and being staffed by people — now a major interest group — many of whom are themselves ill-educated (and ill-paid). Though its statute pays lip service to “school readiness,” Congress has forbidden Head Start to use readiness measures to evaluate program effectiveness.

Instead of launching vast new pre-K programs for all, policymakers would better serve American children by focusing on three genuine problems:

- Delivering intensive, targeted education services — preferably starting at birth and including parents as well as children — to the relative handful of children (one or two of every ten babies) who would truly be unready to succeed in school without heavy-duty interventions. Most are children of poor, young, single mothers, often of color, who themselves have little education.
- Redeploying pre-K funds and re-vamping existing programs, beginning with Head Start, to emphasize the cognitive side of kindergarten preparation (e.g., pre-literacy skills such as letters, sounds and shapes) and judging the effectiveness of such programs by the readiness of their graduates.
- Beefing up school-reform efforts so that the classrooms poor children enter have high standards, knowledgeable teachers, coherent curriculums and the ability to tailor instruction to children's readiness levels — and to cumulate gains from year to year rather than dissipate and squander them.

Done right, preschool programs can help America address its urgent education challenges. But today's push for universalism gets it almost entirely wrong.

*Chester E. Finn, Jr., a former assistant secretary of education, is most recently the author of *Reroute the Preschool Juggernaut*. He is a senior fellow at Stanford's Hoover Institution and president of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute.*

Genuine Change Won't Come this Way

by Neal McCluskey

If you “genuinely” intend to fix a problem you probably want to know its true causes, right? Not so Vice President Joe Biden, or at least his Middle Class Task Force, which recently released a report on college affordability that essentially ignored possibly the biggest of all tuition inflators: ever-growing student aid. With the Obama administration promising to greatly expand federal assistance, this omission could be disastrous.

“The growth of college tuition is far outpacing that of family income,” Biden said at the report's unveiling. “This is something we are genuinely, genuinely committed to changing.”

In fairness to the Veep, the possibility that aid would drive tuition inflation might be something he's never heard before. After all, the higher education community has long denied that growing aid, especially from government, fuels inflation by letting schools raise prices without consumers feeling much of the pain. But it makes perfect sense.

Suppose I'm willing to buy a hotdog for one dollar, but then get a dime in frankfurter assistance. Now I'll happily pay \$1.10. And then suppose my local wiener retailer, from whom I've always bought one-dollar dogs, knows I've got that aid. By charging \$1.10 he can make himself richer without making me any worse off. It's tuition inflation in a nutshell or bun, as the case might be.

College pricing and aid data strongly suggest this dynamic is at work. For instance, between 1986 and 2006, published

tuition, fees, room and board prices at four-year private colleges rose an inflation-adjusted 68%. But students didn't cover most of the increase with their own money. They got grants, cheap loans, and other forms of assistance that made their perceived increase only about half that of the published amount. That big difference gives strong reason to believe that “sticker prices” were only able to rise so high because consumers felt just a fraction of the pain, and schools knew it.

Of course, college pricing isn't driven only by student aid. There are several variables in play. Unfortunately, the Middle Class Task Force failed to acknowledge this, largely glossing over the potentially inflationary effect of aid, and piling blame primarily on one, all-too-popular scapegoat: cheap state and local governments.

“The majority of the rise in tuition in recent years is increasingly attributable to cost-shifting,” the report asserts. “The use of increased tuition to offset lost revenue from elsewhere is particularly pronounced in public higher education, as falling state and local appropriations have forced institutions to increase tuitions in order to maintain their revenues.”

This theory is popular with ivory tower folks and politicians, giving the former cover to cry poverty when lobbying state legislatures, and the latter a tremendous opportunity to buy votes by increasing aid. But the theory is seriously flawed.

For one thing, stingy state and local spending can't explain tuition inflation in private schools, which the task force itself puts at 154% between 1979 and today.

In addition, total taxpayer burdens for

public institutions haven't fallen. According to the federal Digest of Education Statistics, between 1990 and 2005 (the latest year with available data), real state and local appropriations to public degree-granting institutions rose almost 15%, hitting nearly \$67 billion.

The only way state and local funding has dropped has been on a per-pupil basis thanks to growing enrollment, which the report ultimately notes. Even on that score, though, one can't lay most of the blame for tuition inflation on state and local governments — tuition revenue per-student has risen much faster than government allocations have dropped.

Between 1987 and 2007, according to data from the State Higher Education Executive Officers, inflation-adjusted state and local outlays per student decreased about \$33 a year. Per-pupil revenue from tuition, however, increased almost \$67 — a \$2 increase for every \$1 in lost public funding. And a lot depends on what years you start and end the trend: between 1982 and 2007, the public funding trend was essentially flat, while per-pupil tuition revenues increased about \$72 per-year.

Which brings us back to the Vice President. If you “genuinely, genuinely” want to change something for the better, you first have to be honest about the problem. But Biden's Middle-Class Task Force was far from that in its analysis of college affordability, rendering any change it might support — especially vastly increasing student aid — almost certain to make matters worse.

Neal McCluskey is associate director of the Cato Institute's Center for Educational Freedom. This article first appeared at www.EducationNews.org, and is reprinted with permission.

Conservative Faculty and Staff Group Organizes at MSU

Like many universities, Michigan State University (MSU) in East Lansing has gone through a number of skirmishes over free speech on campus in recent years. The Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE), which promotes first amendment rights on campus, gives MSU a speech code rating of "red" (the three ratings are green, yellow, and red). The school's anti-discrimination policy makes students punishable if they engage in behavior that "alters the terms or conditions of a person's employment or educational experience." This vague, subjective criterion means that students can be punished for expressing unpopular opinions that offend the people around them.

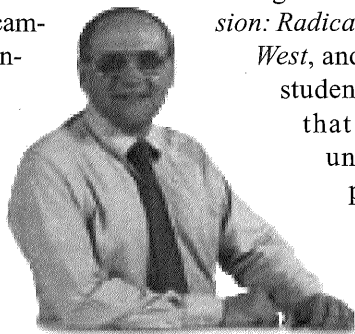
MSU became infamous for its Student Accountability in Community (SAC) program, which served to reeducate students who had offended others. Offending students were forced to attend the sessions and to conform to the program leaders' opinions and beliefs. FIRE called the program "Orwellian," "immoral," and "unconstitutional." Largely in response to FIRE's persistent criticism, MSU dismantled SAC in 2007.

The school has also made headlines

for attempting to charge a conservative student group an exorbitant fee for screening the controversial film *Obsession: Radical Islam's War Against the West*, and for trying to suspend a student for sending an email that was critical of the university's scheduling policies to a group of faculty members.

In response to these and other happenings, and the generally menacing atmosphere toward free thought and free speech that such occurrences have created at MSU, a Conservative Faculty and Staff group has organized on campus. The group's mission statement is "to protect and defend the values articulated in the Declaration of Independence here at Michigan State University."

The Conservative Faculty and Staff at MSU have announced they will fight against the administration's attempts to silence dissenting views and squelch freedom of inquiry at the university. The group pledges to advocate for students and faculty whose first amendment rights are under fire, and to educate the university community on the importance of free speech and on other issues. (Townhall.com, 5-13-09, www.thefire.org)



Prof. Fred Fico, founder of Conservative Faculty and Staff at MSU

Drugs for Kids (Continued from page 1)

ports of serious and even fatal side effects. Rebecca Riley, a Massachusetts girl who was diagnosed with bipolar disorder at the age of three, died of an overdose of psychiatric drugs in 2006. Many Americans were shocked to learn that toddlers were being diagnosed with bipolar disorder and taking cocktails of multiple psychiatric drugs.

Additional stories of side effects and deaths spurred a number of states to action, and in 2007 a group of 16 states initiated an investigation of the pediatric use of psychotropics, under the slogan "too many, too much, too young." Washington, California, and Florida have taken steps to regulate or flag prescriptions of the drugs to children who are on Medicaid.

"I was never a big prescriber to begin with," Maryland child psychiatrist Michael Houston told the *Wall Street Journal*, "but I have definitely been more careful as information has come to light about the serious side effects being downplayed in the marketing of these drugs." Bristol-Myers Squibb and Eli Lilly, creators of the antipsychotics Abilify and Zyprexa, have paid large settlements over allegations they marketed the drugs inappropriately for "off-label" use in young children. Bristol-Myers Squibb paid out a \$515 million settlement in 2007. Eli Lilly paid \$1.4 billion and pleaded guilty to the charge of illegally promoting the unapproved use of Zyprexa.

American children are by far the most medicated with psychiatric drugs in the world. (See article, page 2.) The trend toward greater caution with antipsychotic

and other psychotropic drugs for children may continue to grow, but if so, it will be in spite of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). In June, an FDA advisory committee told the FDA to approve three more antipsychotics, including Zyprexa, for pediatric use. If the FDA accepts the recommendation, as it is expected to do, prescriptions of these drugs to children will no longer be "off-label," and drug companies will legally market the products for use in young children. The three drugs already draw in more than \$10 billion a year for Eli Lilly, AstraZeneca, and Pfizer.

Critics of this new recommendation claim that the advisory committee examined studies that followed too few patients. Some of the studies tracked patients for just three to six weeks, but children who are prescribed antipsychotics could take the drugs for years or even decades. (Reuters, 6-9-09)

Briefs (Cont. from page 2)

Teens who listen to "sexually degrading" song lyrics become sexually active at younger ages, a study showed. Researchers ranked popular songs according to how sexually degrading the lyrics were, and then polled teens ages 15 to 16 about their musical tastes and sexual history. 44.6% of the teens who listened to sexually degrading music most often had had sex, while just 20.6% of those least exposed to such music had had sex. Lyrics identified as "sexually degrading" described sex in purely physical, graphic, and often aggressive and demeaning ways. (Breitbart.com, 3-4-09)

National Standards (Continued from page 1)

the American Federation of Teachers, wrote an op-ed in the *Washington Post* in February calling for national standards. Around the same time, Obama's Secretary of Education Arne Duncan said on C-Span that he wanted to be "the catalyst" for national standards. "I want to take all of the hard work and make it happen,"

he declared. Duncan responded enthusiastically to the Common Core announcement, saying it was "a giant first step in the right direction," and "a step that would have been unimaginable just a year or two ago." Duncan also declared it "the beginning of a new day for education in our country." (*Washington Post*, 6-1-09)

B+ New Average (Continued from page 1)

says he believes the ideological bent of the modern academy is partly to blame. "Contemporary college and university faculties, especially in the humanities, are overwhelmingly on the Left, politically and culturally," writes Reeves. "These politically correct professors routinely see the classroom as an opportunity to win converts to pacifism, socialism, feminism, moral relativism, and an assortment of racial theories." When a political agenda drives the syllabus, acquiring and demonstrating knowledge take a back seat.

In his article, titled "The Happy Classroom: Grade Inflation Works," Reeves relates that he retired in 2001 after 40 years in the college classroom. "What hastened my departure was the fact that my students . . . would

quickly drop a survey course in American history if a single book, other than the textbook, was assigned." Students seemed to expect to pass the class if they merely showed up, without even reading the textbook. This appearance is borne out by hard data: researchers at UC-Irvine found that a third of students believed they deserved a B just for attending class. 40% believed they deserved at least a B if they did the required reading.

Reeves blames several factors for the steady upward climb of GPAs and the downward descent of standards. Student evaluations increasingly affect professors' tenure status and salaries. Then, too, if too many students drop a course because it requires them to read real books, the course could be cancelled and the professor could lose his job or the opportunity for advancement. Polls show that fewer students today are interested in high ideals such as education or changing the world. Instead, they want to advance in lucrative careers. "Obtaining a degree with the least possible effort is a

common goal," writes Reeves.

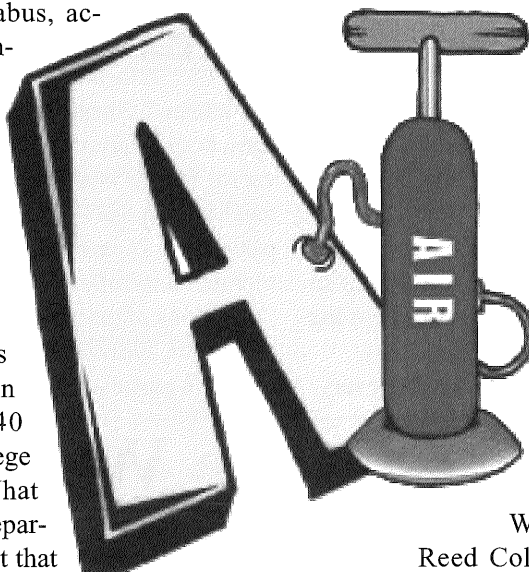
Some of the nation's most prestigious universities are among the worst offenders when it comes to grade inflation. 91% of Harvard students graduated with honors in 2008. While 22% of grades given at Harvard in 1966 were A or A-, last year 50% of grades were A or A-. Brown University professors award A grades two-thirds of the time.

A few universities are holding a firm line against grade inflation, or taking steps to reverse the damage already done. Princeton University is the most notable example: in 2003, Princeton's administration mandated that no more than 35% of students in a class could receive a grade of A. Wellesley College and

Reed College have also successfully fought grade inflation.

Prof. Rojstaczer asked Princeton's Dean Nancy Malkiel why, in the six years since Princeton initiated its grade deflation effort, more schools haven't followed suit. "Because it's hard work," Malkiel replied. "Because you have to persuade the faculty that it's important to do the work." But degrees from schools with less grade inflation are more meaningful, as are any honors received upon graduation.

Writing in the *Christian Science Monitor*, Rojstaczer strongly encourages faculty members and administrators to do the hard work of making college meaningful. "The alternative is a student body that barely studies and drinks out of boredom. That's not acceptable. Colleges and universities must roll up their sleeves, bring down inflated grades, and encourage real learning. It's not an impossible task. There are successful examples that can be followed. I'm looking forward to the day when we can return to being proud of the education that the nation's colleges and universities provide." (3-29-09)



MALLARD FILLMORE / by Jeff Tinsley

