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## Homework: Persuade Your Parents to Fill Out the Census

The U.S. Census Bureau has launched an aggressive campaign targeting school children in an effort to influence their parents to participate in the 2010 Census. The program is part of a \$13 billion national public information effort, and will reach about 56 million students in 118,000 schools.

The plan is to disseminate posters, maps, teaching guides and lesson plans to every school in the nation, Puerto Rico and U.S. island territories. The Bureau is also helping schools plan for a Census Week to be held sometime between January and March, before the Census questionnaires are delivered to residential addresses in mid-March.

During Census Week, teachers will spend 15 minutes each day addressing topics such as civic participation, confidentiality or geography. Extensive lesson plans for grades K-12 were designed with the help of Scholastic, Inc. to integrate census-related information into subjects such as history and math. The aim is to teach students and their families about the importance of the census in U.S. history and current events.

The 2010 theme, "It's About Us," is meant to emphasize the benefits of Census participation. Census population counts determine states' representation in Congress and how approximately \$435 billion in federal money will be divvied up for spending on schools, roads, and law enforcement.

"It's great to reach the children because children are such strong voices in their homes," said Renee Jefferson-Copeland, chief of the Census in Schools program. "In households that are linguistically isolated, they can express the information to their parents." Chicago alderman Toni Preckwinkle went even further, telling the *Chicago Defender* that "if a parent is unable to complete the census form, a student could fill it out since there are only 10 questions" (12-10-09).

Indeed the "linguistically isolated" and other "hard-to-count" populations such as low-income families are a special target of the Census information and promotion campaign. Major differences between the 2000 and 2010 Census in Schools program demonstrate the focus on persons who don't speak English well. They include take-home materials now translated into 28 languages, expansion of the program through 12<sup>th</sup> grade in Puerto Rico, and new materials prepared for English as Second Language programs.

Census officials are also providing Head Start directors with training on how to encourage parents who use their services to participate in the census. Head Start, a preschool program that promotes school readiness for low-income children, is federally-funded, so its providers have a vested interest in having more of its target population counted. "On a selfish note, it's going to affect the federal dollars for us," said Hidalgo County Head Start family services director Irma Peña in Texas. "If we're able to get an accurate count, we'll be able to provide more services to more children." (*The Monitor*, 1-15-10)



U.S. Census Bureau, Public Information Office

The campaign also explicitly urges children to be active agents in dispelling any uneasiness their parents may have in filling out the census forms. Children at Nova Blanche Forman Elementary in Florida performed a skit for their peers as part of a Census kick-off event. The skit portrayed a child who persuaded his wary family to allow a census worker into their home. Despite their apprehension, the parents sit with the census representative and allow her to help them fill out the form. (Households that do not return the forms in the mail can expect a visit from a census worker between April and July.)

Kids can't help but notice that the Census in Schools events are meant to be a big deal because guests often include government bureaucrats, census representatives, school officials, and even Sesame Street characters. Bancroft Elementary in Wilmington, Delaware recently hosted Governor Jack Markell, Senator Tom Carper (D-Del.), and U.S. Census Director Robert Groves, along with Count von Count and Rosita of Sesame Street at their launch event.

Mayor Richard Daley spoke to students at Chicago's King College Preparatory High School about the importance of their involvement in the census. King High School junior Shemiah Curry, 16, attended the event and took the message to heart. "We have a responsibility as students to make sure that everyone participates in the census because the results . . . will affect our future," she said. "As King students we are taught to be future leaders. So getting involved in something that will help shape our future is the first step in showing leadership." Curry suggested that students not only participate in the survey, but also volunteer for the census and encourage others to participate. (*Chicago Defender*, 12-10-09; *Sun Sentinel*, 12-16-09)

## Will the Real Bullies Please Rise?

A California judge has denied that parents are entitled to keep their kids out of pro-gay school lessons. Numerous Alameda school district parents claimed their right to have their children excused from such curriculum under a California "opt out" provision. Education Code section 51240 allows pupils to skip "health instruction" that conflicts with their parents' religious training or beliefs.

Katherine Alberts, attorney for the district, claimed the controversial lesson is explicitly part of the Safe School Community Curriculum, which is separate from schools' "health instruction." Alberts said the lesson in question aims to teach safety and tolerance, and to prevent bullying and harassment, and asserted that the District's Board intentionally omitted an opt-out option when it approved the material.

Superior Court Judge Frank Roesch agreed and further ruled that "any opt-out right" is "outweighed by the policies against discrimination and harassment of students from LGBT [lesbian, gay, bi-

sexual, transgender] families." In an account of the proceedings, one sympathetic blogger reported the judge as saying, "You can't say, 'I'm a bigot, so I don't have to attend tolerance lessons!'" ([johnknoxwhite.com](http://johnknoxwhite.com), 12-1-09).

The judge also reasoned that allowing kids to be excused from tolerance lessons for gays would logically require allowing prejudiced parents to opt their kids out of tolerance lessons concerning people of other races, ethnicities, or religions as well.

Kevin Snider, attorney for the parents, emphasized that the parents who filed suit support anti-bullying lessons, but object to the current elementary curriculum that "focuses almost exclusively



(See *Bullies*, page 4)

## Arne Duncan's First Report Card

With an unprecedented \$100 billion in federal education funding to dole out, and a strong ally in President Obama, it would have been difficult for Arne Duncan not to make a significant impact during his first year as Secretary of Education. His Race to the Top (RTT) grant competition spurred a flurry of controversial state legislative changes including expanding charter schools, tying teacher pay to student performance, and moving towards common academic standards. Joe Williams, executive director of Democrats for Education Reform, characterized the impact of RTT on state education policy as "breathtaking."

But not everyone is impressed. "My report card is that he gets an A for being effective and a D-minus for the bad ideas," said Diane Ravitch, assistant education secretary under the first President Bush. She faults Duncan for an overemphasis on standardized tests and for extending George W. Bush's failed education policies.

Others have also raised questions about the efficacy of Duncan's policies, which are similar to those he implemented as chief executive officer of Chicago schools from 2001-2008. Multiple reports of inflated student test scores during his tenure in Illinois have surfaced. Additionally, his strategy of closing the worst schools did not lead to any academic gains because most students were transferred to similarly dismal schools.

U.S. Representative John Kline of Minnesota, the ranking Republican on the House Education and Labor Committee,

was initially cautiously optimistic about Mr. Duncan's agenda. He is now concerned that RTT "has the potential to become another top-down, heavy-handed program." Hundreds of school districts agree and refused to sign on to their state's RTT bids (see story on page 2).

Kline has also been troubled by Duncan's steadfast support of homosexual activist Kevin Jennings as the nations "Safe Schools" czar, despite multitudinous calls for his ouster. On another front, Rep. Kline demanded the Secretary provide documentation concerning his agency's part in the Obama administration's attempted takeover of the entire student loan industry. The proposal is not yet law, but that did not deter Duncan from sending a letter to 3,000 college administrators urging them to become "Direct-Loan Ready," because the continued participation of the private lenders "will be in question."

"The U.S. Department of Education must act as an impartial agent to assist colleges and universities, not as an advocate for its preferred legislative changes," wrote Kline in a letter addressed to Secretary Duncan. He expressed his concerns after an Oct. 5<sup>th</sup> *Inside Higher Ed* article reported Obama officials made calls to community colleges that were "part pep rally, part support group — and part lobbying effort." Federal law prohibits government agencies from lobbying on behalf of specific legislation.

Neither has Duncan been bashful about involving himself in state and local



Arne Duncan

(See *Arne Duncan*, page 4)

## EDUCATION BRIEFS

**Patrick Henry College earned bragging rights as the only school to win the American Collegiate Moot Court Association championship more than once.**

The 10-year old college, founded by home-schooling advocate Michael Farris, beat out well-respected schools including Harvard, Syracuse and Baylor University at the annual competition last month. (wnd.com, 1-19-10)



**Congressional Democrats voted to phase out a popular voucher program in Washington, D.C. that provides 1,700 disadvantaged kids with up to \$7,500 a year to attend private schools.** A federal evaluation found that the primarily black and Hispanic students participating in the program have made substantial academic gains, but Democratic senators caved to demands from the National Education Association to kill the program. (Wall Street Journal, 12-19-09)

**Home-schooling parents Richard and Margie Cressy of Montgomery, NY were arrested on child endangerment charges.** District superintendent Richard Hoffman said, "From what I can gather, it sounds like there was education going on . . . [but] they didn't fulfill their legal responsibility to file with the school district to be home-schooled." The Cressys have since submitted curriculum to the district, but still face legal charges. (cbs6albany.com, 1-04-10)

**Fall 2009 marks the first semester in many years in which male enrollment at community colleges equaled or surpassed female enrollment.** The surge of men only changed their total enrollment proportion to 42.9%, up from 41.7% in 2007. College officials surmise more men are enrolling due to poor economic conditions and new GI Bill benefits. (insidehighered.com, 1-13-10)

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## Story Hour for Teenagers

Many adults have fond memories of sitting on a cozy rug in an elementary classroom, delighting in the tale of *Charlotte's Web* or the wacky adventures of *The Phantom Tollbooth*. These days, you might see a similar sight in a middle or high school. Reading aloud to older students is gaining favor with increasing numbers of teachers. Some education experts are also recommending the practice, largely because so many adolescents lack the necessary comprehension skills to tackle higher-level texts on their own. A recent Carnegie Corporation report on literacy noted that although American 4th-graders have some of the highest reading scores in the world, by the 10th grade they score among the lowest in the world.

"The days are passing by rather rapidly of middle and high school teachers' being able to say, 'Either you get the content or you don't.' I think we are starting to see a greater acceptance of the need for this," said Karen Wood, professor of literacy education at University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

Most research on the efficacy of read-

ing aloud has involved elementary school students and little is yet known about its value for adolescents. One 1,350-student high school in Alabama is in the vanguard, though. Teachers and administrators at Buckhorn High School have made their school an experimental laboratory for increasing student literacy levels for the past decade.

The school decided drastic measures were in order ten years ago when entering freshman were found to be reading at or below the 7th grade level. In fact, many were reading only at the 4th or 5th grade level.

Buckhorn staff found little expertise on which they could draw in their quest to infuse literacy skills into every subject. Over time, teachers adopted a smorgasbord of approaches previously used only with younger children. Now they incorporate art projects and wordless picture books in an attempt to engage students. The goal is to use these easily accessible materials to introduce more complex subject matter.

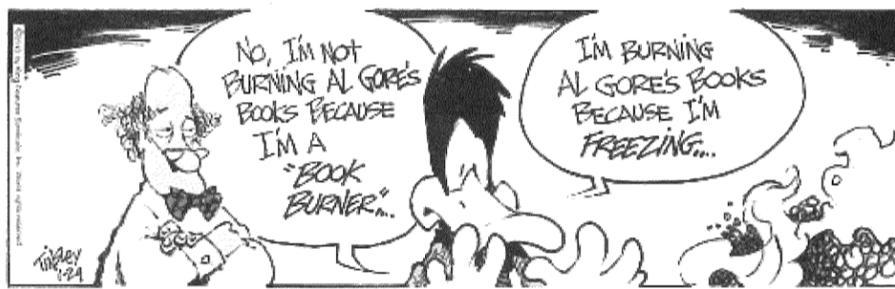
Tommy Ledbetter, principal of the high school for the past 28 years, acknowl-

(See Story Hour, page 4)



—Richard W. Rodriguez for Education Week

### MALLARD FILLMORE / by Jeff Tinsley



## Districts Spurn Race to Top Funding

Race to the Top (RTT) is a competitive grant program that will award more than \$4 billion to schools that agree to implement elements of the Obama administration's comprehensive reform proposal. Despite the potential for federal dollar infusions into schools coping with painful budget cuts, hundreds of school districts and charter schools refused to support their states in the application process.

Louisiana, widely considered a leading contender for the grant money, only nailed down firm commitments from 28 of its more than 65 districts. California has more than 1,800 school districts and charter schools; only 790 of its local education agencies had signed on to the grant bid shortly before the January 18th deadline.

Texas Governor Rick Perry completely withdrew his state from the application process, declaring that the program "smacks of a federal takeover of our public schools." Perry and Education Commissioner Robert Scott said taking the money would require adherence to na-

tional education and testing standards, and would result in Texas losing its autonomy in educating children.

(Associated Press, 1-14-09)

States vying for RTT funding are judged in part on buy-in from local school officials, including school superintendents, school board presidents, and teachers' union leaders. Out of a total of 500 possible application points, 45 are specifically tied to the breadth of support states have secured from local education leaders.

School officials who declined to back their states' applications for RTT funding named various reasons for their opposition, including excessive federal intrusion and program requirements that would cost more to implement than the grant would cover. "We just don't agree that there is a one-size-fits-all approach

(See Race to Top Funding, page 4)



## Book of the Month



**The War on Children: How Pop Culture and Public Schools Put Our Kids at Risk**, Karen L. Gushta, Ph.D., Coral Ridge Ministries 2009, 222 pages, \$15.



Christian parents are generally aware of the torrent of crass language, promiscuous sexuality and secular humanism coming at their kids from the media and pop culture. But most are in the dark concerning the daily indoctrination occurring in their local schools, believing instead that "my kid's school is fine."

Drawing from 17 years of teaching and teacher training experience, Karen Gushta exposes the dangers of modern American public education to children's moral, intellectual and spiritual development. Her research is wide-ranging and well-documented, taking the reader on a tour from the earliest days of colonization, to 20th century court cases and social changes, to laws and programs passed under the Bush, Clinton and Obama administrations that now dictate the form and substance of K-12 curriculum.

As Gushta explains, the earliest American schools were formed to teach children to read the Bible and to learn about the Christian faith. In the 1840s, secularist and Unitarian Horace Mann set in motion a movement that would eventually remake America's schools into the compulsory, government-funded institutions we have today, which are designed to shape students into global citizens, "agents for social change," and secularists whose highest virtue is tolerance.

The book enables parents to understand and fight against the further damage that will be done if national standards, universal pre-school, United Nations prescriptives, and mandatory youth service are enacted. These are not idle worries, but the explicit goals of politicians and administrators currently in office.

Gushta hopes parents and churches will rise up and defend their children from the multi-front attacks on their hearts and minds, and join together to take on their covenant responsibility to shield kids from a "predatory culture." Adults also need to be actively modeling Christian discipleship, acting as kingdom citizens, and teaching kids to resist the alternative worldviews inherent in media and pop culture.

"This is not the time to despair," declares Gushta. "Neither is it the time to follow the Australian motto, 'She'll be right,' which is just a glib and unfounded confidence that things will somehow work out okay. If ever there were a time for concerted action and continued effort . . . now is that time."

# FOCUS: Head Start Earns an 'F'

## *No Lasting Impact for Children by First Grade*

by David B. Muhlhausen, Ph.D.  
and Dan Lips

The federal government spent at least \$25 billion on federal preschool and child care programs in 2009, but President Obama has pressed for significant increases in preschool spending. The Administration approved \$5 billion in new early education and child care spending in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (better known as the Stimulus). Congress may soon approve \$8 billion in new spending on the Early Learning Challenge Fund in the Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act (H.R. 3221), which has already passed the House of Representatives.

Before Congress creates a new preschool program and increases spending on preschool and child care, it should evaluate whether the current programs are working. Topping the list of programs to review should be Head Start, which serves approximately 900,000 low-income children at a cost of \$9 billion per year. A recently released experimental evaluation by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services found that Head Start has had little to no effect on cognitive, socio-emotional, health, and parenting outcomes of participating children. For the four-year-old cohort, access to Head Start had a beneficial effect on only two outcomes (1.8 percent) out of 112 measures. For the three-year-old cohort, access to Head Start had one harmful impact (0.9 percent) and five (4.5 percent) beneficial impacts out of 112 measures.

Rather than create a new federal preschool program, Congress should focus on terminating, consolidating, and reforming existing programs to serve children's needs better and to improve efficiency for taxpayers.

### Head Start, 1965-Present

Created as part of the War on Poverty in 1965, Head Start is a preschool community-based program funded by the federal government. By providing education, nutrition, and health services, Head Start is intended to provide a boost to disadvantaged children before they enter elementary school. Its goal is to help disadvantaged children catch up to children living in more fortunate circumstances. From fiscal year (FY) 1965 to FY 2009, Congress spent \$167.5 billion in 2009 dollars on Head Start. From FY 2000 to FY 2009, the average annual appropriation for Head Start was \$7.6 billion. Despite Head Start's long life, the program had never undergone a thorough, scientifically rigorous evaluation of its effectiveness until Congress mandated an evaluation in 1998. The Head Start Impact Study began in 2002, and the results released in 2010 are disappointing.

### The 2010 Head Start Impact Study

Is Head Start worth more than \$7 billion per year? The 2010 Head Start Impact Study found that Head Start largely

failed to improve the cognitive, socio-emotional, health, and parenting outcomes compared to the outcomes of similar children. The authors disappointingly concluded: "In sum, this report finds that providing access to Head Start has benefits for both 3-year-olds and 4-year-olds in the cognitive, health, and parenting domains, and for 3-year-olds in the social-emotional domain. However, the benefits of access to Head Start at age four are largely absent by 1st grade for the program population as a whole."

While the results of the 2010 study have been known to officials within the Department of Health and Human Services since the end of the Bush Administration, Congress added \$1 billion to the original \$7.5 billion in FY 2009 funding for Head Start with the passage of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.

### Attempts to Undercut the Study Findings

Some may argue that other research that directly assessed the Head Start performance shows that the program is effective. Research based on the Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES) found that Head Start children made gains in vocabulary, math, and writing skills during the Head Start program year. However, the research design of FACES is inadequate for determining the program's effectiveness.

Without a control group, FACES assesses the academic skills of Head Start children at the start and end of the program year. In the scientific literature, this evaluation design is called the one-group pretest-posttest design. This design has poor internal validity because of its inability to rule out rival hypotheses that may have caused the gains.

On the other hand, the use of random assignment and a control group in the 2010 Head Start Impact Study equally distributes potential influences between the intervention group and control group.

Another argument offered to undercut the 2010 study's kindergarten and first-grade findings is that the program produces gains, but those gains fade out due to Head Start students attending poorly performing elementary and middle schools. This assumption is based on research by Professors Valerie E. Lee of the University of Michigan and Susanna Loeb of Stanford University. Using a nationally representative sample of all eighth graders, Professors Lee and Loeb found that former Head Start participants attended lower-quality schools compared to the schools attended by students who had attended other preschool programs or did not attend preschool programs. However, the finding that Head Start students go on to attend worse schools than other students is not surprising. Children living in impoverished, socially disorganized neighborhoods are more likely than children in wealthier neighborhoods to attend lower-performing schools.

The potential suggestion that this

finding explains why the 2010 Head Start Impact Study found no effect on kindergarten and first-grade academic achievement is dubious. The fact that former Head Start students attend poorly performing schools should not affect the results of the experimental evaluation because the evaluation assembled similarly situated children and randomly assigned them to intervention and control groups. Random assignment establishes equivalency on pre-existing differences between the intervention and control groups (the groups have similar socioeconomic backgrounds). Because the intervention and control groups are equal on pre-existing differences, it is highly unlikely that the schools attended by the intervention group after participation in Head Start were systematically worse than the schools attended by the control group. For this argument to hold any credence, one must assume that children in the intervention group were systematically sorted into worse schools than members of the similarly situated control group.

### The Forthcoming Third-Grade Impact Study

Following this new impact evaluation of Head Start's effect on kindergarten and first-grade students, the national evaluation is designed to continue following students' performance through the end of third grade. The results of the forthcoming third-grade impact evaluation will shed further light on the question of whether Head Start is effective and provides lasting benefits.

Members of Congress should request that the Department of Health and Human Services complete this third-grade evaluation in a timely fashion and present the findings to Congress and the public immediately upon completion. There is reason to believe that the 2010 study of first-grade students was not completed or published in a timely fashion. According to the report, data collection for the kindergarten and first-grade evaluation was completed in 2006 — nearly four years before its results were made public. For the national impact evaluation of third-grade students, data collection was conducted during the springs of 2007 and 2008. Results from this evaluation should be published as soon as possible.

Taxpayers are spending considerable sums on Head Start and other early childhood education programs. Policymakers should be basing their decisions about Head Start and other preschool programs on the most useful and up-to-date empirical evidence possible.

### What Members of Congress and the Administration Should Do

President Barack Obama has declared that he is willing to eliminate "government programs shown to be wasteful or ineffective." Further, he has asserted that "there will be no sacred cows, and no pet projects. All across America, families are making hard choices, and it's time their government did the same." President



Obama was correct to call for placing wasteful and ineffective programs on the chopping block. Given that scientifically rigorous research demonstrates that Head Start is ineffective, Head Start is an ideal candidate for the budget chopping block.

If Head Start is not terminated, Congress and the Obama Administration should reform the program (and other federal early childhood education programs) to improve their impact for targeted students and to increase efficiency for federal and state taxpayers. In 2005, the Government Accountability Office identified 69 federal programs that provide support for pre-kindergarten and child care. According to a conservative estimate, the federal government will spend more than \$25 billion on these programs in FY 2009.

Despite these existing programs and the new empirical evidence confirming Head Start's ineffectiveness, Congress and the Obama Administration may soon authorize \$8 billion in new funding for the Early Learning Challenge Fund, which is included in the Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act, which passed the U.S. House of Representatives in September. This Early Learning Challenge Fund would award competitive grants to states that expand early childhood education programs.

Rather than create a new federal preschool program, Congress should focus on reforming and improving the existing federal programs for early childhood education. Congress should:

1. **End ineffective programs and consolidate duplicative programs.**
2. **Reform the remaining federal early child education and child care programs to serve children better.** Congress could accomplish this in a number of ways. For example, the Head Start program could be reformed to grant families greater ability to use their children's \$7,300 share of Head Start funding to enroll in a preschool program of choice. In addition, states should be granted more autonomy in how they use funding for Head Start and other federal early childhood education and child care programs to benefit students. Across the country, many states are enacting early childhood education programs. States should be granted the flexibility and autonomy to consolidate and coordinate federal and state programs to best meet students' needs.

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## More Youth Depressed Now than During Great Depression

A new study found that five times more American high school and college students struggle with mental health issues today than young adults who were the same age during the Great Depression era. Researchers at five universities analyzed more than 77,000 respondents to the popular Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory from 1938 to 2007.

Two mental health categories showed almost a six-fold increase. Hypomania, a measure of anxiety and unrealistic optimism, was detected in 31% of students in 2007 as compared to 5% of students in 1938. Depression was noted in 6% of students in 2007, versus only 1% in 1938.

The study also found a significant increase in “psychopathic deviation,” which is defined as having difficulties relating to authority figures and feeling as though the rules don’t apply to you. The number of youth who scored high in that mental health category rose from 5% in 1938 to 24% in 2007.

Jean Twenge, Ph.D., lead author of the study, suggested the current numbers may even be low, given the prevalence of antidepressant and psychotropic medications prescribed to youth today.

The study did not offer definitive reasons for the increase in mental health issues, but Twenge and other experts suspect cultural influences that emphasize

external measures of success such as looks, status and wealth. Twenge is the author of *Generation Me: Why Today's Young Americans are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled — and More Miserable Than Ever Before*. The book, published in 2006, makes the case that pop culture creates unhealthy pressures that negatively impact youth.

Other mental health professionals have chronicled the mistakes of so-called “helicopter” parents, who hover over their children to protect them from every perceived slight and failure. Such children don’t develop the real-life coping skills needed to stick to a budget or accept criticism from a boss.

“If you don’t have these skills, then it’s very normal to become anxious,” says Dr. Elizabeth Alderman, adolescent medicine specialist at Montefiore Medical Center in New York City. Dr. Alderman hopes the new study will sound the alarm for well-meaning but overprotective parents.

More research is needed to pinpoint the causes for the upswing, but the study does provide hard numbers for the perception among practitioners that a growing number of students have mental health concerns. “It actually provides some support to the observations,” says Scott Hunter, who has counseled students at the University of Virginia.



## Race to Top Funding (Continued from page 2)

to improving our schools,” said David Britten, superintendent of a lower-income district near Grand Rapids, Michigan. “And frankly,” he added, “for \$50,000 a year for four years, . . . we’d have to do an awful lot of funny things for just a little bit of money.”

Some California education leaders who refused to get on board with their state’s plan complained that they were left out of planning sessions and lacked sufficient details about the proposal they were being asked to sign. “The state hadn’t completed its plan, and we didn’t know how much we might be getting from the grant, so we couldn’t do any real cost-benefit analysis,” said Bernie Rhinerson, spokesman for the 117,000-student San Diego Unified system. “The district just decided that we couldn’t sign a blank check,” he said.

Other school boards simply disagreed with policies promoted in the state plans, as did many unions. In Michigan, only 42 locals out of approximately 600 agreed to support the state’s plan, according to Martin Ackley, spokesman for the state’s education department. Florida had substantial district support (59 out of 67), but only five local unions backed the state’s proposal.

In contrast, all of Kentucky’s 174 districts committed their support. Andy Smarick, distinguished visiting fellow

with the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, believes that is because the state’s reform plan was less aggressive than other states. Kentucky education commissioner Terry Holliday made considerable efforts to get feedback from stakeholders across Kentucky, according to spokeswoman Lisa Gross. Incorporating all of that input from state education leaders, particularly those who oppose charter schools, resulted in a watered-down plan that everyone could support.

“The state passed a weak legislative ‘reform’ package in the last several days, hoping to position itself for an RTT grant,” wrote Mr. Smarick in a January 13th blog post. “But the state, one of the few left without a charter law, considered and rejected an amendment that would have authorized charters.” Expansion of charter schools is one of RTT’s primary reform strategies, and states will be awarded application points accordingly.

It remains to be seen whether the Obama administration will respond more favorably to states promising to implement more aggressive reforms or to states that have greater levels of support from districts, school boards and unions. RTT funds will be awarded in two phases; first-round grant winners are expected to be named in April. (*Education Week*, 1-20-2010)

## Bullies (Continued from page 1)

on homosexuality.”

A press release from Snider’s law firm, the Pacific Justice Institute (PJI), characterized Roesch as an “activist judge,” and noted his repeated insinuations that the parents who filed the suit were bigots. PJI also cited Roesch’s declaration that homosexual indoctrination is impossible because “people are born that way.” The judge also allowed school district attorneys to aggressively interrogate the parents about their religious beliefs, sermons they had heard against homosexuality, and whether they were aware the Bible had been used to justify racism and oppression. (*pacificjustice.org*, 12-1-09)

This case is only one example of the latest tactic homosexual advocates are using to promote homosexuality in public schools, warns Candi Cushman, education analyst at Focus on the Family.

Cushman notes that activists are pushing so-called anti-harassment or anti-bullying policies that include references to sexual orientation or gender identity as a way to enforce pro-homosexual curricula for young children. The ostensible concern with a safe, non-threatening school atmosphere is being “used to skirt parental rights,” she said. Cushman also noted that religious freedom rights are increasingly being undermined in favor of pro-gay “nondiscrimination” laws, just as in the Alameda Unified School District case. (*citizenlinkblog.com*, 12-3-09)

PJI President Brad Dacus remarked, “Most parents do not want their first through fifth graders bombarded with pro-homosexual messages at school. If LGBT advocates really want to stop name-calling and bullying, they should start with themselves.”

## Arne Duncan (Continued from page 1)

issues. For example, last June the secretary sent a letter to Pennsylvania Governor Edward Rendell, warning him that cutting K-12 spending in favor of other priorities could mean the loss of federal stimulus dollars for the state.

Diane Ravitch believes the Secretary is overstepping his role. She related a conversation in which Duncan asked her what he should do about Detroit’s notoriously low student achievement scores and plethora of scandals. “That’s a strange question,” she said, “because he’s not in charge of Detroit. One of the prob-

lems is his conception of the role of the secretary of education — how he thinks he’s the national superintendent of schools. He’s not.”

Though he may not hold such a title, the secretary is unabashedly eager to use all resources at his disposal to push for what he calls “dramatic” change in the public schools. Only a quarter into his tenure, Duncan is poised to become one of the most influential secretaries in his department’s 30-year history, for better or for worse. (*Education Week*, 1-6-10; 1-20-10)

## Story Hour (Continued from page 2)

edges that the result is a high school that “looks more like an elementary school.” He said that is because letting the students sketch, make cut-outs, or fold their ideas seems to help them.

To strengthen reading skills, English teacher Tracy Wilson uses shorter articles or excerpts to help students gain confidence before tackling word-dense textbooks. She also stops frequently as the class reads a fiction passage to discuss what is happening in the story, a practice she calls “talk-alouds.” Her students make colorful “foldables,” with sections for a word’s meaning, context, origin and usage to learn new vocabulary.

The school has adopted the work of education author Kelly Gallagher who warns teachers not to commit “assumicide,” or assuming that students possess the skills they need to understand the content of what they read. Instead, Buckhorn teachers explicitly teach comprehension skills such as contextual clues. Students are also taught the usefulness of the table of contents, and the significance of photographs and captions.

Buckhorn librarian Wendy Stephens has revamped the school’s book collection in support of the strategies used in the classrooms. She is building a collection with more picture books, magazines and comic books. Boys particularly like the manga, or Japanese cartoons, and girls are currently crazy about the *Twilight Saga* by Stephenie Meyer.

Other schools are increasing their use of picture books for high school courses

too. Debra Schneider, a history teacher at Merrill West High School in Tracy, California uses picture books to supplement the U.S. history curriculum for 11<sup>th</sup> graders. She has also read students excerpts from the 1987 book, *Dear America: Letters Home from Vietnam*; students told her that was much better than having to read from a textbook.

English teacher Paul Hankins teaches 11<sup>th</sup> graders at Silver Creek High School in Sellersburg, Indiana. He has read John Steinbeck’s *Of Mice and Men* to his students every year for 36 years. He said he often faked having read a book when he was a student, and reading the book aloud ensures his students won’t get away with that.

Some educators are concerned that too much reading aloud won’t help students. Angelia Greiner sometimes reads aloud over the Internet for her distance-learning English and speech students at the Arkansas School of Mathematics, Sciences and the Arts in Hot Springs, Arkansas. Still, she emphasizes, “They’ve got to learn to read on their own, what we call close reading.” Teachers who read too much class content to students do them a “grave injustice,” she said.

The communications director for the Core Knowledge Foundation, Robert Pondiscio, also has serious concerns about teachers reading aloud to adolescents. “The need to do this at all seems to be a way of glossing over poor reading skills and poor content knowledge that should have been addressed in elementary school.” (*Education Week*, 11-4-09; 1-6-10)