

# EDUCATION REPORTER

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## Reform Advocates Unimpressed by 'Race To Top'

The U.S. Department of Education announced on August 24<sup>th</sup> that nine states and the District of Columbia will share the remaining \$3.4 billion of the \$4.35 billion Race to the Top (RTT) grant fund. The competition is meant to spur bold reforms to turn around failing schools, increase the number of charter schools, and overhaul the way teachers are evaluated, among other efforts.

Education Secretary Arne Duncan named Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Rhode Island, and the nation's capital as second round winners that will receive from \$75 million to \$700 million. Delaware was awarded \$100 million and Tennessee \$500 million as the only two winners of the first round of competition in March.

Many education analysts and reform advocates expressed surprise and dismay over the list of winners and losers. Mike Petrilli, vice president of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, noted the conspicu-

ous absence of Louisiana and Colorado as particularly "disastrous" for the Obama administration on the institute's Flypaper weblog.

A Fordham report released on the same day as the RTT winners deemed New Orleans to be the "most reform-minded city in the country," while Denver came in an impressive fourth place for "reform-friendliness." Petrilli suggested Secretary Duncan would have done better to fund losers Louisiana and Colorado than grant an award to Maryland, "which nobody in their right mind regards as an incubator of serious reform."

Frederick Hess, American Enterprise Institute director of education policy and lead author of the Fordham study, said he thought the exclusion of Louisiana and Colorado suggested "legitimate concern over the way the program was conceived, the criteria that was designed and the judging that was executed." Hess worries that RTT will not encourage innovation but

only reward states that embrace federal government-endorsed reform measures.

Another policy analyst, Neal McCluskey of the Cato Institute's Center for Educational Freedom, also questioned the selection process. "Who knows for sure how the winners were ultimately determined? But it's hard to be impressed by the list." McCluskey cited New York's "dumbed-down Regents exams," Hawaii's four-day school weeks, and Maryland's "constricting" charter law as reasons to suspect RTT may not be an effective driver of enduring reform.

Other reformers were also dismayed by the selection of three states with a track record of hostility toward charter schools, despite the fact that charter school expansion was explicitly stated as one aim of the RTT competition. "We are pleased to see five states that are strongly supportive of public charter schools among those awarded Race to the Top grants today," said Peter Groff, President and CEO of the national Alliance for Public Charter Schools. "However, we are concerned that the selection of Maryland, North Carolina and Ohio sends the wrong message. Maryland has the worst charter law in the country, North Carolina has a cap of 100 charters that it reached almost 10 years ago, and Ohio has some of the most arbitrary caps in the country."

Terry L. Stoops, director of education studies at the John Locke Foundation in Raleigh, characterized North Carolina's winning Race to the Top proposal as "make-believe school reform." Stoops explained how the state finessed the charter school issue in its pursuit of federal dollars. "Rather than raise our 100-school cap on charter schools, they pushed a bill through the General Assembly that created 'charter-like innovative, autonomous schools,' presumably to complement our 'charter-like schools without charters' and other 'charter-like school settings' in North Carolina," Stoops said. "Yes, those phrases do appear in our state's application."

Although Secretary Duncan had emphasized the adoption of Common Core



academic standards as an important factor in determining which states would receive grants, many states that rushed to meet Duncan's August 2<sup>nd</sup> deadline were not on the winners list. As of last week, 37 states and the District of Columbia had adopted the English and math standards, even in cases where their own state standards were considered superior.

California, for example, had highly-rated academic standards, but replaced them with the comparatively weaker Common Core framework in the hopes of bolstering its anemic state budget with up to \$700 million federal dollars. "Now that California has been passed over for this payday, what has the state gained except weaker standards and forfeiture of its control over its educational direction to Washington?" asked Lance Izumi, senior director of education studies at the Pacific Research Institute in California.

The adoption of Common Core standards may have boosted Massachusetts into the top-ten winners circle, but at the cost of forfeiting what many considered to be the most excellent standards in the nation. Lindsey Burke, an education policy analyst with the Heritage Foundation, cautioned that the temporary influx of funding might not prove worthwhile in the long-term. "The money they'll receive from this competition will certainly not cover the costs of throwing out their existing state standards and tests — which were developed at great taxpayer expense — and will not begin to cover the costs of implementing this new, behemoth national standards regime," she said.

The ultimate impact of RTT remains to be seen, but the \$4.35 billion grant is merely a drop in bucket of the \$100 billion allocated for education in the 2009 federal stimulus spending bill, of which it is a part. In addition, said Lisa Snell, director of education and child welfare programs at the Reason Foundation, "Taxpayers should remain skeptical that \$4.5 billion for education reform in the states through Race to the Top can make any difference when the Obama administration is giving states another \$10 billion bailout to maintain the status quo through an education jobs program. At best, these education dollars will lead to small changes at the margins." (*School Reform News*, 8-24-10; edweek.org, 8-24-10)

## College Profs Irked by New Texas 'Transparency' Law

When University of Texas at Austin junior Taurie Randermann complained to her boss that her course titled "Communication and Religion" was actually about fringe cults like Wiccans and Heaven's Gate, she kicked off a major change in how much information Texas colleges and universities provide students about course offerings.

Randermann's boss, Texas Republican State Representative Lois Kolkhorst, was already seeking ways to make state higher education more transparent, and Randermann's experience led her to draft a bill requiring public, online access to course information. Texas House Bill 2504 sailed through the Texas legislature with unanimous bipartisan support, and Governor Rick Perry signed it into law in June of 2009.

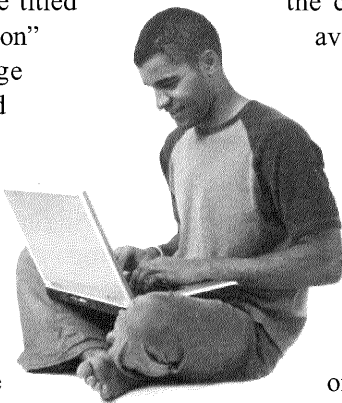
Starting this fall, all of the state's public universities must post a detailed syllabus for each undergraduate course that includes class requirements, required textbooks and lecture topics. Other information, including each professor's educational background, published works, salary, previous student evaluations, department budgets and the cost of attending classes must also be posted. All of this data must be searchable, no more than three clicks away from the institution's home page, and accessible without a login or password. In other words, access will

not be limited to students who have already paid tuition and committed to take the course, but will be freely available to the public.

Rep. Kolkhorst said the law is intended to help students and parents make better decisions as the cost of higher ed continues to climb. "If we can provide students and parents with more information before they pick a class, a major or a school, hopefully they will be able to spend their money more efficiently."

While the new law is popular with students and lawmakers, some professors decry it as an attempt to control

(See *Transparency Law*, page 4)



## Celebrate Constitution Day

In accordance with legislation passed in 2005, all federally funded schools and colleges must hold an education program about the United States Constitution on September 17<sup>th</sup>. It is perhaps a sign of our times that one of the most extensive and enthusiastic celebrations will occur at a school that accepts no federal or state funding. Hillsdale College will hold its first annual Constitution Day Colloquium over two days with eight lectures and panel discus-

sions. Topics will include civil liberties and Islamic terrorism, free market regulation, Howard Zinn's influence on civic education, and a debate on constitutional interpretation. The events feature prominent speakers such as Victor Davis Hanson, George Will, former U.S. Congressman

Bob Barr and Michigan Supreme Court justice Stephen Markman. The public is invited to participate via live webcast. Registration is free; visit [www.hillsdale.edu](http://www.hillsdale.edu) for more information.



## EDUCATION BRIEFS

**Kids who are the youngest in their grades are 60% more likely to be diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) than the oldest children, according to a study from Michigan State University.** About 4.5 million kids have been diagnosed with ADHD, but the researchers estimated that nearly a million of them were misdiagnosed. (*USA Today*, 8-17-10)

**America's first Muslim four-year liberal arts college opened its doors on August 23<sup>rd</sup> in Berkeley, CA.** Zaytuna College offers its inaugural class of 15 students two majors: Arabic language and Islamic law and theology. The school motto is "Where Islam meets America." Imam Zaid Shakir, one of the school's founders, said he wanted to establish the school because Islam has never become rooted in any land until that land had its own Islamic scholars. (*voanews.com*, 8-3-10)

**Two tests given to 2,600 Springfield, Massachusetts 11<sup>th</sup>- and 12<sup>th</sup>-graders contained about 100 spelling, grammatical and factual errors.** Mistakes included the phrases "truning around" and "For God's skae," and a note that read "This is the end of the Test," when there were two more pages. Superintendent Alan Ingram said he would ensure district proofreaders do a better job in the future. (*Associated Press*, 6-29-10)

**After a three-year fight and gathering more than 700 signatures, Arlington High School senior Sean Harrington can finally recite the pledge of allegiance at school.** Six weeks after deadlocking on a proposal that would have required each school to daily recite the pledge over the intercom, the School Committee unanimously agreed each Arlington district principal will determine the pledge protocol for their school. After the vote, Harrington said his principal told him he could lead the pledge over the intercom on the first day of class in September. (*The Boston Globe*, 8-4-10)

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## California Teachers Union Diverts \$2M in Dues to PAC

The California Teachers Association (CTA) is anxious to see Jerry Brown elected governor and Tom Torlakson elected state superintendent of public instruction in November 2010. Jerry Brown supports Proposition 98, the state's minimum school funding law, as "a floor and not a ceiling." In contrast, his opponent Meg Whitman wants to immediately cut \$7 billion from California's education budget and supports reining in teacher retirement benefits. Tom Torlakson is a former CTA member, and no doubt endeared himself to the union by promising to bring California back into the top five states for education spending.

The stakes are high enough this election cycle that the CTA decided the usual PAC allocation of member dues used to support and defeat specific candidates would not get the job done. So, the union's board of directors voted to increase the PAC allocation from \$18 to \$26 per member for one year — and they didn't need to ask permission from anyone. This tactic will generate an additional \$2 million or more for the union PAC fund. (Dues money can be spent on issue campaigns and ballot initiatives, but only PAC funds can go towards candidates.)

This sleight-of-hand would not be legal at the federal level, because dues must be collected separately from voluntary PAC contributions. However, in California and some other states, unions are permitted to collect PAC contributions along with dues in one lump sum, primarily through payroll deduction. The contribution must still be voluntary, however. In the case of the CTA, teachers signal



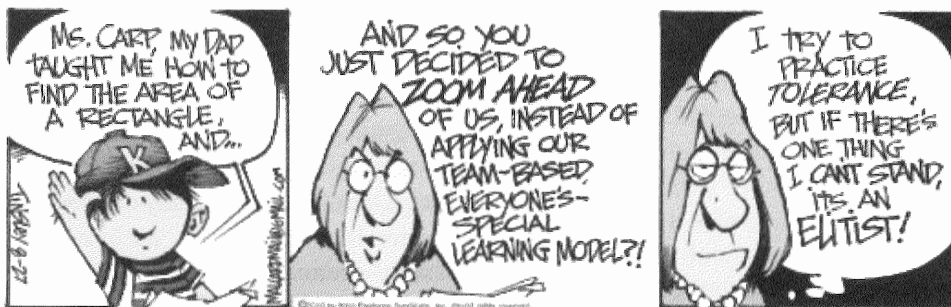
their consent by failing to fill in the opt-out bubble on their union enrollment form.

The relevant text reads: "A designated portion of CTA dues is normally allocated to . . . a bipartisan political fund through which CTA provides financial support . . . for candidates for local and state offices. Please fill in if you choose not to allocate a portion of your dues . . . and want all of your dues to remain in the General Fund." Note that members who fill in the opt-out bubble don't get their money back. That money simply remains in the general fund instead of being diverted to the PAC fund.

It is also significant that the membership form specifies only "a designated portion" of membership dues rather than any specific amount or formula. According to Mike Antonucci, author of the Education Intelligence Agency blog, "there is nothing to stop CTA from raising the PAC allocation to \$200 per member with no additional authorization from the individual."

Antonucci also questions whether the PAC box on the membership form constitutes informed consent, because the CTA membership is "something you fill out once in your career." Some California teachers filled out that form 20 or 30 years ago and have not been asked their PAC contribution preference since. "Are they to be PAC contributors in perpetuity, at whatever level the union decides, without further authorization or even notification?" asked Antonucci. ([www.eiaonline.com](http://www.eiaonline.com), 7-17-10)

### MALLARD FILLMORE / by Bruce Tinsley



## Closing the 'Digital Divide' Widens Achievement Gap

Politicians and education activists spent millions of taxpayer and private donor dollars closing the "digital divide" in American classrooms in the last decade; as a result, black and white students reached parity in classroom computer access by 2003. Some insist the racial and socioeconomic academic achievement gap cannot be bridged until all children have access to a computer at home as well, but a new National Bureau of Economic Research paper challenges that assumption.

Two Duke University researchers looked at 5<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> graders enrolled in North Carolina schools between 2000 and 2005 to determine whether home computer and Internet access improved basic academic

performance. The study improved upon previous research in that it drew from a much larger sample size, and its longitudinal nature permitted comparison of test scores before and after students gained access to a home computer.

The data revealed that students who obtained a computer and/or Internet access in the home between 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade showed a statistically significant decline in standardized math and reading test scores that persisted throughout the four-year study. Furthermore, black students and those receiving free or reduced-price lunches experienced a greater decline in test scores than did their peers with equivalent computer and Internet access. (*See Digital Divide*, page 4)

## Book of the Month



**10 Truths About Socialism**, Robert Knight *et al.*, Coral Ridge Ministries 2010, 157 pages, \$15.00.

"We're All Socialists Now," declared the cover of the February 16, 2009 issue of *Newsweek*.

While that is quite a stretch, young Americans in particular are susceptible to the notion that economic disparities are immoral and government has a legitimate role in redistributing wealth.

In a recent Pew Research Center survey, a full 43 percent of 18- to 29-year-olds, more than any other age group, had a positive reaction to the word socialism.

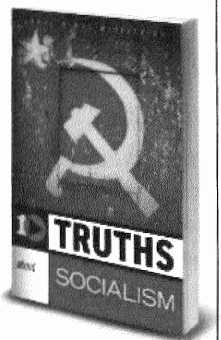
Socialism was supposed to be dead, or at least in the throes of death, when the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics dissolved on Christmas Day in 1991. That's why it was a shocker when the cover of *Newsweek* boldly proclaimed, "We're All Socialists Now." There is plenty of cause for concern, particularly among American youth.

Perhaps it is the infiltration of "social justice" teaching into our schools, or perhaps it's because they weren't aware of the world's rejoicing when the Berlin Wall collapsed on November 9, 1989. Whatever the reason, 18- to 29-year-olds had a positive reaction to the word "socialism." If you know one of them, consider giving them a copy of *10 Truths About Socialism*.

This pocket-sized book explains why socialism has failed every time it has been tried, from the ardently Christian Pilgrims at Plymouth Rock in 1620 to today's Venezuela under Hugo Chavez. Early chapters concisely explain how the philosophies of Rousseau, Marx and others paved the way for both the Nazi-Fascist and Communist versions of socialism that are responsible for the deaths of more than 110 million people in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The authors also demonstrate how socialism's insistence on the primacy of the state over individuals, families and churches is at odds with man's very nature. As the Jamestown and Plymouth Rock settlers each learned and recorded for posterity, people work much harder when they get to keep the fruit of their labors, and they resent providing for those who refuse to work diligently.

The truths about Socialism that young people need to learn include: Socialism and tyranny go hand in hand, Envy is the driving engine of Socialism, Socialism impoverishes nations, Socialism is at war with the family and the church, Socialism was the wrong response to real problems, and Socialism's founding fathers rejected God.



# FOCUS: End Them, Don't Mend Them: It's Time to Shutter America's Bloated Schools

by P.J. O'Rourke

Time to balance the educational accounts and see what's been learned. Though not by my kids. I don't worry about them. They're geniuses like your kids and soak up knowledge the way a sponge (or a SpongeBob) does. Muffin, in sixth grade, has learned that Justin Bieber is very talented and doesn't — really, Dad — sing like a girl. Poppet, third grade, has learned how the Plains Indians made tepees. (They waited until after dinner to announce that their "Lifestyles of the Cheyenne" project was due tomorrow so that all the Cheyenne dads were up until one in the morning gluing dowels and brown wrapping paper to a piece of AstroTurf.) And Buster, kindergarten, has learned he can make himself giggle hysterically by adding "poop" to any phrase. The Little Engine That Could *Poop*.

No, the accounts that I'm balancing — and it's quite educational — are bank accounts. What's been learned is that it costs a fortune to send kids to school. Figures in the *Statistical Abstract of the United States* show that we are spending \$11,749 per pupil per year in the U.S. public schools, grades pre-K through 12. That's an average. And you, like me, don't have average children. So we pay the \$11,749 in school taxes for the children who are average and then we pay private school tuition for our own outstanding children or we move to a suburb we can't afford and pay even more property taxes for schools in the belief that this makes every child outstanding.

Parents of average students believe it too. According to an annual Gallup poll conducted from 2004 through 2007, Americans think insufficient funding is the top problem with the public schools in their communities. But if throwing money is what's needed, American school kids are getting smacked in the head with gobs of cash aplenty. That \$11,749 is a lot more than the \$7,848 private school pre-K through 12 national spending norm. It's also a lot more than the \$7,171 median tuition at four-year public colleges. Plus \$11,749 is much less than what's really being spent.

In March the Cato Institute issued a report on the cost of public schools. Policy analyst Adam Schaeffer made a detailed examination of the budgets of 18 school districts in the five largest U.S. metro areas and the District of Columbia. He found that school districts were understating their per-pupil spending by between 23 and 90 percent. The school districts cried poor by excluding various categories of spending from their budgets — debt service, employee benefits, transportation costs, capital costs, and, presumably, those cans of aerosol spray used to give all public schools that special public school smell.

Schaeffer calculated that Los Ange-

les, which claims \$19,000 per-pupil spending, actually spends \$25,000. The New York metropolitan area admits to a per-pupil average of \$18,700, but the true cost is about \$26,900. The District of Columbia's per-pupil outlay is claimed to be \$17,542. The real number is an astonishing \$28,170 — 155 percent more than the average tuition at the famously pricey private academies of the capital region.

School districts also cheat by simple slowness in publishing their budgets. The \$11,749 is from 2007, the most recent figure available. It's certainly grown. The *Digest of Educational Statistics* (read by Monday, there will be a quiz) says inflation-adjusted per-pupil spending increased by 49 percent from 1984 to 2004 and by more than 100 percent from 1970 to 2005.

Bell bottoms and Jerry Rubin hair versus piercings and tattoos — are kids getting smarter? No. National Assessment of Educational Progress reading test scores remained essentially the same from 1970 to 2004. SAT scores in 1970 averaged 537 in reading and 512 in math, and 38 years later the scores were 502 and 515. (More kids are taking SATs, but the nitwit factor can be discounted — scores below 400 have decreased slightly.) American College Testing (ACT) composite scores have increased only slightly from 20.6 (out of 36) in 1990 to 21.1 in 2008. And the extraordinary expense of the D.C. public school system produced a 2007 class of eighth graders in which, according to the NAEP, 12 percent of the students were at or above proficiency in reading and 8 percent were at or above proficiency in math. Many of these young people are now entering the work force. Count your change in D.C.

The average IQ in America is — and this can be proven mathematically — average. Logic therefore dictates that National Assessment of Educational Progress eighth grade "at or above proficient" reading and math levels should average 50. This is true in only one of the 50 states. National averages are 29 and 31 percent. Either logic has nothing to do with public education or that NAEP test is a bear. Which I doubt. I have been told by the third grade teacher that my daughter Poppet is reading at middle school level. Yet if I leave Poppet a note in block letters telling her to feed the dogs I will come home to find the dogs have been . . . given a swim in the above-ground pool, dressed in tutus, provided with hair weaves. What I will not find is that the dogs have been fed. "I thought you wanted me to *free* the dogs," says Poppet whose school district is not spending quite what D.C.'s is, thanks to voter rejection of the last school bond referendum.

The District of Columbia is an extreme example of disconnect between financial input and educational outcome. Unfortunately extreme is not the same as abnormal. Comparing the *Statistical*

*Abstract's* 2007 ranking of states according to per-pupil public education spending with state-by-state NAEP 2007 eighth grade proficiency levels is an exercise that produces little information about the relationship between money and learning. In fact, if you stare at the figures long enough you will find information being sucked out of your brain.

Massachusetts (fifth in spending per student) and Vermont (first) do lead the reading proficiency list with 43 and 42 percent respectively. But there's not much to choose between that and 25th-biggest spender Montana's 39 percent. Montana, in turn, is tied with third-most-expensive New Jersey. And the four states with 37 percent proficiencies on the NAEP are sixth-in-spending hyper-literate Connecticut, 19th-in-spending rube Minnesota, eighth-in-spending canny Yankee Maine, and 43rd-in-spending hayseed South Dakota.

The NAEP math proficiencies are no more illuminating. Massachusetts leads with 51 percent. Second is Minnesota at 43 percent. Third place, with 41 percent, is shared by North Dakota (37th-in-spending) and champion spender Vermont. And both lavish New Jersey and 23rd-ranked middling Kansas have math proficiencies of 40 percent.

Looking at the bottom of the heap is just as confusing. Perhaps it's possible to spend too little on public education, and 47th-ranked Mississippi is trying to prove it. The District of Columbia aside, Mississippi's proficiency levels are the worst in the nation — 17 percent in reading; 14 percent in math. However, the state that spends the least, Utah, slightly exceeds national averages. Meanwhile the second-worst state, New Mexico, is completely average in its school spending, ranked at 24. Tenth-in-spending Hawaii, with 20 percent in reading and 21 percent in math, is marginally inferior to 31st-in-spending California with 20 and 24 percent. And 49th-in-spending Arizona is a few points better than either. The only thing that can be said for sure is that the illiterate kids who have to take off their Crocs to add six and five have mostly been out in the sun too long.

There are other numbers that make better sense. As of 2006 — of course the numbers are out of date — 4,615,000 people were employed full-time by some 13,000 school districts (although if school districts used the same definition of "full-time" as the rest of us the number we're talking about would be zero). Of these 4,615,000 there are 300,000 "clerkal and

secretarial staff" filling out No Child Left Behind paperwork and wondering why 64,000 "officials, administrators" aren't doing it themselves, which they aren't because they're busy doing the jobs that 125,000 "principals and assistant principals" can't because they're supervising 383,000 "other professional staff" who are flirting with the 483,000 "teachers' aides" who are spilling trail mix and low-fat yogurt in the teacher's lounge making a mess for the 726,000 "service workers" to clean up, never mind that the students should be pushing the



P.J. O'Rourke

brooms and swinging the Johnny mops so at least they'd come home with a practical skill and clean the bathroom instead of sitting around comprehending 29 percent of their iPhone text messages and staying awake all night because they can only count 31 percent of sheep.

"Classroom teachers" number 2,534,000. That makes for a nationwide student/teacher ratio of 15.4:1, which compares reasonably with the 13.3:1 ratio in private schools and is an improvement over the 22.3:1 public school ratio in 1970, when kids still occasionally learned something. But the people-doing-who-knows-what/teacher ratio is getting close to 1:1.

Enough, however, of outrageous statistics. Let's generate some pure outrage. Here's my proposal: Close all the public schools. Send the kids home. Fire the teachers. Sell the buildings. Raze the U.S. Department of Education, leaving not one brick standing upon another and plow the land where it stood with salt.

"Wait a minute," the earnest liberal says, "we've got swell public schools here in Flourishing Heights. The kids take yoga. We just brought in a law school placement coordinator at the junior high. The gym has solar panels on the roof. Our Girls Ultimate Frisbee team is third in the state. The food in the cafeteria is locally grown. And the vending machines dispense carrots and kiwi juice."

Close them anyway. I've got 11,749 reasons. Or, given the Cato report, call it 15,000. Abandon the schools. Gather the kids together in groups of 15.4. Sit them down at your house, or the Moose Lodge, or the VFW Hall or — gasp — a church. Multiply 15.4 by \$15,000. That's \$231,000. Subtract a few grand for snacks and cleaning your carpet. What remains is a pay and benefit package of a quarter of a million dollars. Average 2008 public school classroom teacher salary: \$51,391. For a quarter of a million dollars you could hire Aristotle. The kids

(See *Bloated Schools*, page 4)

## Transparency Law (Cont. from page 1)

curriculum and prevent open class discussion of controversial topics. One faculty organization, the Texas Conference of the American Association of University Professors, adopted a resolution this summer requesting the repeal of the bill. A newsletter published by the group characterized the law as “an attempt by cultural conservatives to identify course content they might view as undesirable, and thus clearly an attack upon academic freedom.”

Murray Leaf, speaker of the Faculty Senate at the University of Texas at Dallas, said the directive indicates “an insulting mistrust of higher education faculty.” He said the law “really isn’t primarily about giving students better information, but about giving people who want to attack higher education better information. We’re not against transparency. We’re against being attacked by our enemies.”

Rep. Kolkhorst maintains that the law isn’t intended to be “a ‘gotcha’ system,” but a “great tool” to help students choose colleges on more than general reputation, distance from home, and the popularity of the football team. “All other major investments made by young people allow some level of transparency about what is being delivered for payment,” and education should be no exception, said the lawmaker.

Conservative writer Charlotte Allen called the reaction of some Texas faculty “hysterical,” and noted that many universities and their faculty already voluntarily post much of the same information on the Internet. She said it is difficult to take seriously the claims of some Texas professors that the new requirement places an unfair or prohibitively expensive burden on them and their institutions.

Indeed, many schools across the nation do post similar information on their websites, but not to the extent mandated by the Texas law, which is the first of its kind in the nation. The University of Florida website lists required texts and course tuition, but only a few sentences

describing course topics. Some departments at the University of Michigan provide current syllabi, but only to enrolled students. Even within the state of Texas, some schools will only have to tweak current policies. University of Texas at Arlington spokeswoman Kristin Sullivan said the school has been posting detailed professor profiles online since 2005.

John Curtis, director of research and public policy for the American Association of University Professors, agrees that the legislation doesn’t place any “burden” on faculty, but says the mechanics of providing the extra information isn’t really the problem. “Really, this bill is about control,” he said. “It is a way to target professors who may get ‘out of line’ or deviate from the rigid syllabus.”

It is telling that the primary objection voiced by Texas professors concerns the posting of course textbooks and lecture topics rather than salary information or student evaluations. Even some supporters think posting student course evaluations is a questionable component of the law, since college students have a notorious affinity for entertaining, lenient professors, and may use the information to choose easier courses and bash professors who demand academic rigor.

At least one former Texas professor is pleased with the new law. Marvin Olasky taught at the University of Texas at Austin for two decades and noted on his *WORLD Magazine* blog last year that “Humanities and social sciences students still have to major in fields that typically offer two competing points of view: liberal and radical.” When asked his opinion of HB 2504, Olasky offered his congratulations to the Texas legislature. “Taxpayers should know where their money is going. If propagandistic state-paid professors become fearful enough to add a bit of balance to their reading lists, that’s terrific,” he said. (*Dallas Morning News*, 7-10-10; abcnews.go.com, 8-14-10; popecenter.org, 10-30-09)

## Digital Divide (Continued from page 2)

In other words, said the researchers, “access is in practice more detrimental for some students than others.”

Study authors and professors Jacob Vigdor and Helen Ladd hypothesized that parental monitoring is a key factor in whether students use the computer for educational purposes or to play games and surf the Internet recreationally. More time on the computer generally translates into less time reading or doing homework. Vigdor noted that his team cut off data at the end of 2005 before Facebook and Twitter made it easy for kids to spend hours socializing online; it is possible more recent data would show students logging even more unproductive time online.

The professors said they chose middle school students for their study because many existing laptop initiatives target that age group. For example, the Maine Learning Technology Initiative spent \$50 million

in 2003 to provide Apple iBook laptops to each 6<sup>th</sup>-grader; the Texas Technology Immersion Project has provided laptops to students in 22 pilot middle schools since 2004.

While acknowledging that home computers may provide benefits such as increasing computer literacy, Vigdor and Ladd do not recommend government provision of home computers to early secondary school students. “For school administrators interested in maximizing achievement test scores, or reducing racial and socioeconomic disparities in test scores, all evidence suggests that a program of broadening home computer access would be counterproductive.”



## Bloated Schools (Cont. from page 3)

wouldn’t have band practice, but they’d have Aristotle. (Incidentally this worked for Philip of Macedon. His son did very well.)

“But what about the world class facilities to which every American public school student is entitled as soon as we get that bond issue through?” America spent more than \$83 billion on elementary and high school construction in 2008. If you think kids care the slightest about their physical surroundings, take a look at my daughter Muffin’s bedroom.

“Wouldn’t having just one teacher — without even a qualified teacher’s aide — narrow the scope of curriculum being offered to students especially at the secondary education level?” Maybe. But our public schools seem to have addressed this issue already. In the article on Education in the 1911 edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, I found this quaint description of the subjects studied at a typical American high school: “Latin, Greek, French, German, algebra, geometry, physics, chemistry, physical geography, physiology, rhetoric, English literature, civics and history.” Or, as we call them nowadays, a smattering of Spanish, Fun With Numbers, Earth in the Balance, computer skills, Toni Morrison, safe sex, and multicultural studies.

“Don’t kids need to experience the full range of human diversity that public schools provide?” No. And if you don’t understand the process by which modern kids become socialized, you seriously need to update your Facebook page. Also, let the *Statistical Abstract* tell you something about the diverse experience provided by public schools. During the 2005-2006 school year 78 percent of public schools reported “violent incidents,” more than one in six schools reported “serious violent incidents” (robbery, rape, sexual battery, or a fight or attack with a weapon), and 46 percent of schools reported thefts or larcenies. More than 10 percent of high school boys admitted to carrying a weapon to school during the previous 30 days. Among middle schools, 8.6 percent reported daily sexual harassment, 30.5 percent reported daily disrespect shown to teachers, and 43 percent reported daily bullying. Operating on the assumption that adults notice only about a third of what goes on among kids, this means that daily bullying occurs at 129 percent of middle schools. Furthermore 31.5 percent of middle schools and 38.7 percent of high schools reported “undesirable gang activities.” As opposed to the desirable kind.

“Wouldn’t closing the public schools eliminate valuable programs targeted for disabled students?” Yes. As of 2007, there were 6,007,800 children and young people with disabilities in the United States. But, also as of 2007, the Department of Education’s budget was \$66 billion. Those funds have been freed up. That’s about \$11,000 per disabled child plus the \$15,000 each will receive as his or her pro rata share of the nation’s education spending. A yearly benefit of \$26,000

should provide some tutoring and therapy — or a pocket full of Ritalin.

“But some of America’s disadvantaged regions may not have the financial resources to provide \$15,000 per school age child.” Yes they do. The 2007 per capita income in America’s poorest state, Mississippi, was \$28,845. The 2007 per capita GDP of South Korea was \$27,400. Ever heard anyone say Korean kids are dumb as a bowl of kimchi?

“But some of America’s disadvantaged persons may not have the cultural resources to utilize privatized educational disbursements. Some disadvantaged children may not receive any education at all.” Fifteen grand per kid buys a lot of culture. And the possibility that someone’s child may not receive any education is an improvement on a certainty that the child won’t. Also, why are liberals so convinced that poor people are stupid? Is it because poor people vote for liberals? That is a fair point. But if smart liberals want to find out if poor people are stupid, I suggest that smart liberals go to the worst neighborhood they can find and get in a craps game.

“And this \$15,000, is it just going to be available with no strings attached? Won’t there be all sorts of exploitative scams cheating people who are seeking to educate their children?” Unfortunately there will be scams. What’s to keep the District of Columbia Board of Education from going private?

America’s public schools have served their purpose. Free and compulsory education was good for a somewhat unpromising young nation. The country was half turnip-head hillbilly and half slum trash from foreign refuse heaps. Public schools were supposed to take this mob of no-account pea pickers and bumbling greaseballs and turn them into a half-bright national citizenry. It worked, causing six or eight generations of public school kids to rush home to their shanties or tenements shouting, “Everything’s up-to-date in Kansas City!” or “Mom, Dad, this is America, quit boiling cabbage!”

Public schools helped create the idea of America and inculcate Americans with a few rudiments of knowledge. To judge by that very American item, the Internet, a few rudiments is all anyone cares to have. As for the idea of America, everybody’s got it now, all over the world. I’ve had a cab driver in New York who got the idea of America in a country so remote that not only had I never heard of it, neither had he. I don’t know if this cab driver’s reading level was at or above proficient, but his math skills were well-displayed on the taxi meter after he took me from JFK to Manhattan by way of the Brooklyn Belt Parkway. I’ll bet he sends his kids to private school.

*Political satirist P.J. O’Rourke has more citations in The Penguin Dictionary of Humorous Quotations than any living writer. This article is reprinted with permission of The Weekly Standard, where it first appeared on 7-21-10.*