

## TeenScreen Expanding Despite Concerns

More and more public schools are using TeenScreen, a controversial mental health screening diagnostic, despite public protests, myriad problems, and known conflicts of interest. According to TeenScreen deputy director Leslie McGuire, the program has expanded from 30 sites in 2003 to 600 sites in 46 states today. Requests for their screening questionnaires have almost tripled to 426,000 in 2010, according to the group.

One school district in Wisconsin has subjected its students to this dubious diagnostic for almost a decade. “Since 2002, we have been implementing TeenScreen mental health checkups throughout our system of 7,300 students,” wrote Fond du Lac High School principal Jon Wiltzius and district superintendent James Sebert in a letter urging fellow administrators to adopt the program.

A report authored by TeenScreen officials and published by the *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* in August said that nearly 20% of participating students attending Fond du Lac district high schools between 2005 and 2009 were deemed “at risk” for mental illness or suicide. The computerized 52-item survey screens for social phobia, anxiety, depression and other mental health issues using questions like these:

1. Has there been a time when you felt you couldn’t do anything well or that you weren’t as good-looking or smart as other people?
2. Have you often felt very nervous or uncomfortable when you have been with a group of children or young people, like in the lunchroom at school, or at a party?
3. In the last year, has there been any situation when you had less energy than usual?

But what normal high-school student hasn’t experienced self-doubt or felt very nervous or been tired? Even TeenScreen creator David Shaffer of Columbia University conceded in a 2004 article that the test (also known as the Columbia SuicideScreen) “would result in 84 nonsuicidal teens being referred for further evaluation for every 16 youths correctly identified.” Still, maintained Shaffer, “many of these so-called false-positive cases may be experiencing painful depressive symptoms . . . and are likely to benefit from treatment.”

### No Child Left Unmedicated?

Allen Jones, former investigator with the Pennsylvania Office of the Inspector General, charges that the translation of normal human emotions into symptoms of mental illness is driven not by genuine concern for kids, but by a profit motive. “TeenScreen was developed and promoted by persons with deep financial ties to makers of psychiatric drugs,” said Jones. Indeed, a stated priority of the TeenScreen

program is to “connect” kids with mental health treatment — which all-too-often means prescribing psychotropic drugs. (Referrals to medical doctors who might diagnose physical problems are not part of the TeenScreen protocol.)

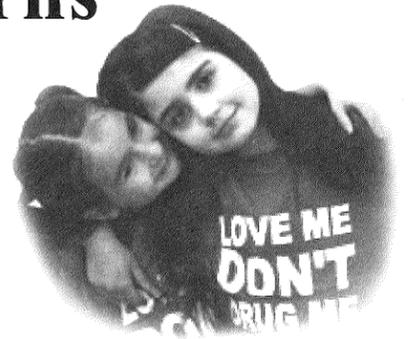
Jones’ claim is backed up by at least two watchdog groups who have noted TeenScreen leadership’s ties to pharmaceutical firms. David Shaffer has served as a paid consultant for Pfizer, GlaxoSmithKline, and numerous other manufacturers of psychiatric drugs. Laurie Flynn, TeenScreen Director, previously served as executive director of the National Alliance on Mental Illness, which receives about three quarters of its funding from drug companies, according to a 2009 investigation by *The New York Times*.

TeenScreen advisory board member Michael Hogan served in leadership roles for at least two entities that are heavily funded by drug company “educational grants.” As director of the Ohio Department of Mental Health, Hogan is largely

responsible for making Ohio one of the first states to roll out and fund TeenScreen in 2002. Under Hogan’s watch, nearly 40,000 kids on Medicaid were taking drugs for anxiety, depression, delusions, hyperactivity and violent behavior by July of 2004. The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services spent \$65.5 million for kids’ mental health drugs that year alone, according to the *Columbus Dispatch*.

Ohio is not alone in this record level of spending to medicate children. Nationally, the Medco 2010 Drug Trend Report found that the number of children taking antipsychotic drugs has doubled over the past nine years.

But the unnecessary expense isn’t the worst aspect of this trend. Antipsychotics can cause severe physiological and mental side effects, including apathy, obesity, diabetes and involuntary tremors. Robert Whitaker, author of *Anatomy of an Epidemic*, suggests that over-prescribed stimulants and antidepressants have contributed to the 40-fold increase in the num-



ber of children diagnosed as bipolar since 1995. Whitaker explains that stimulants can trigger periods of mania followed by sluggishness in children. These kids may then be re-diagnosed as bipolar, a disorder which only a few decades ago was considered to be an exclusively adult malady.

### Many Problems, Few Benefits

There are still more problems with universal mental health screening. One of the major selling points for TeenScreen advocates is suicide prevention, but the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force found

(See TeenScreen, page 4)

## NCLB Waivers Come with Strings Attached

On September 22 the Obama Administration released a plan that will allow qualifying states to receive waivers exempting them from compliance with key components of the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

As it stands, NCLB requires all state schools to reach 100% proficiency in math and reading/language arts by 2014. Under NCLB, standards get higher and higher each year, yet many schools are not able to meet the deadlines. The schools that do not make “adequate yearly progress” (AYP) face costly sanctions. According to Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, more than 80% of schools will not make AYP this year and will be considered “failing” under NCLB.

Each state that wants a waiver must apply for it, and its application must prove that it will comply with the requirements set by the Department of Education. These requirements include: adopting college-and career-ready standards tied to state tests, adopting a differentiated accountability system that focuses on the bottom 15% of schools, and creating guidelines for a teachers-and principal-evaluation system based on student growth to be used for personnel decisions.

In order for states to get the waivers

by the end of this school year, they will have to meet one of two application deadlines, either November 14<sup>th</sup> or mid-February. Even if a state is too late to apply for a waiver, it can still request the permission of the Department of Education to maintain current year proficiency targets instead of raising them over the next several years as NCLB requires.

NCLB waivers are not a free “out” — strings are attached. One of the conditions is troublingly ambiguous. States must show that they will create new evaluation guidelines for teachers and principals to “inform personnel decisions,” but no explanation of exactly what that means is provided. It is unclear whether “personnel decisions” means hiring and firing, or something else.

The most problematic requirement is that schools must agree to apply “college-and-career-ready standards.” These standards employ the same structure and language used in the Common Core Initiative, which is an attempt to consolidate state curricula into one set of standards for every school in the nation.

States will be judged not only on whether or not they have adopted “college-and-career-readiness” standards, but also on their plans to implement those standards. States will be expected to train teachers how to teach the new standards, and to ensure that those standards become the main thrust of each lesson.

Senator Lamar Alexander, former Secretary of Education, sponsored a bill early in September that would have stopped the Department of Education

(See NCLB, page 4)

## Many Schools Don’t Teach About 9/11

Ten years after the tragedy of 9/11, many schools do not mention the terror-

ist attacks in their social studies classes. Schools are now filled with many children who were too young to remember 9/11 or who weren’t even born yet. If they are not taught in school, some of these children will grow up without an adequate understanding of one of the most significant events of the past decade.

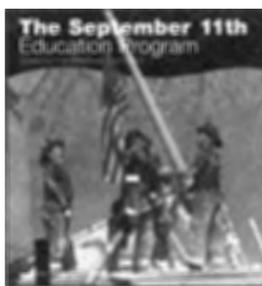
“It is, for better or worse, one of the defining moments of contemporary history,” said Clifford Chanin, acting education director for the National September 11 Memorial and Museum. “I think it is essential that the event be studied and understood. . . . It’s now a factor in what the world has become and what it will become. You’ve got to prepare students

for some relationship with 9/11 and its consequences.”

Diana Hess is a professor of curriculum and instruction at the University of Wisconsin-Madison who thinks that teachers largely overlook the subject of 9/11. “I think if we did a really good, large-scale study . . . we would find that 9/11 is not in most social studies classes.”

Many states leave the 9/11 terrorist attacks completely out of their state standards for high school social studies. Although 48 states and the District of Columbia have revised their standards since 2001, only 20 states made changes to include 9/11 specifically. Of those 20 states, some include 9/11 as a content standard while others include it only as a substandard or an example. Another 15

(See 9/11, page 4)



# EDUCATION BRIEFS

**The Thomas More Law Center plans to appeal a recent ruling by a three-judge panel of the 9<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals that banished a banner bearing the national motto, "In God We Trust," from a San Diego teacher's classroom. "Astonishingly, [school] officials left untouched classroom displays by other teachers that included Dalai Lama and Malcom X posters, Tibetan prayer flags, anti-religious song lyrics, and gay and lesbian promotional materials," the announcement from the law center said. (wnd.com, 9-19-11)**

New Jersey school superintendent Chuck Earling apologized to parents for including books that included drug use, a homosexual orgy, and graphic depictions of lesbian sex between a minor and an adult on a required summer reading list for middle school and high school students. Earling said the reading list was compiled by a committee made up of teachers, administrators, and librarians, and was ultimately approved by the board of education. Only about a dozen people actually complained, according to the superintendent. (FoxNews.com, 8-23-11)

Only 20% of University of Texas at Austin professors teach 57% of students, according to The Center for College Affordability. The same 20% of faculty also accounted for 18% of campus research funding, suggesting that greater teaching loads don't necessarily jeopardize research status. The study raises questions about efficiency and waste at public universities in Texas and around the nation as tuition costs continue to soar. "If the bottom 80% were half as productive in their teaching as the top 20%, tuition could be cut in half," said the announcement from the Center. (5-24-11)

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## Are R-Rated Movies 'Educational'?

Schools around the nation are incorporating film features and clips — including some R-rated movies — into all kinds of classes in the name of "visual literacy." Broadly defined, visual literacy is the idea that kids need to be able to interpret the images and sounds prevalent in our multimedia society and to communicate with others using those tools.

In many schools, however, it seems that "visual literacy" is also a handy term to justify showing films that include nudity, gratuitous violence, sex, drug use, misogyny and extremely foul language. "The world kids are now being educated in is very different from the 1960s/70s," said Joy McClendon, director of elementary education and curriculum services for the Council Rock School District (CRSD) in southeastern Pennsylvania. "The educational value is worth more than the violence or brief nudity."

But Council Rock parent Diana Nolan strongly disagrees. "I want to raise my son to be a gentleman, and that's far more important than watching a movie in a classroom," said Nolan. She first became aware of the issue in 2006 when her son brought home a permission slip to watch *The Merchant of Venice* in his sophomore English class.

The consent form stated that the film contained mild violence and partial nudity, and the teacher explicitly told Nolan there was nudity in the background of only one scene. Upon viewing the film herself, Nolan counted ten nude scenes, including two in a brothel. Much to her son's embarrassment, Nolan did not sign the permission slip. She eventually started Parents Active in Responsible Education (PARE) when district officials refused to stop showing R-rated films that Nolan says include rape, incest, suicide, and excessive profanity.

Another member of PARE, William Winkeler, cited the CRSD's choice of Roman Polanski's 1972 adaptation of *Macbeth* as an example of "visual literacy gone wild." He said there are at least 13 screen performances of *Macbeth* available, yet the district approved the version that contains the most graphic nudity and violence.

The district has approved about 50 R-

rated movies for classroom viewing, including *Garden State* (drug use and sexuality), *Elizabeth* (violence and sexuality), and *V for Vendetta* (violence, strong language, and contemptuous portrayal of Christian faith).

A Studies in Sexuality class in the CRSD uses movies with graphic portrayals of sex, drug use, violence and nudity, including *Kids*, *Requiem for a Dream*, and *Crash*. According to PARE, students must have special permission to take this class, but the district policy of obtaining parental permission to view R-rated films has not always been sought.

Council Rock superintendent Mark J. Klein and school board member Jerold S. Grupp continue to support the use of R-rated movies as an appropriate education aid. Grupp

said that "Choosing to ban [all the R-rated movies approved for use in CRSD] would be like banning the artwork of Michelangelo . . . or Rembrandt."

Parents in other states have also gotten wise to the cinematic filth being passed off as "educational" in their local schools. Last year, Marysville Exempted Village School District in Ohio responded to parental complaints by temporarily suspending the showing of PG-13 and R-rated films. Later, the district revised its policy to require parental permission.

In 2008, parent protests prompted Wisconsin's Brookfield East High School to strengthen the notification policy the following year. Parental notification was extended to two weeks, and parents are now asked to sign a permission slip.

Recently the head of the Republic School District in Missouri, Vern Minor, suggested that the district review the appropriateness of movies shown in classrooms there. He may want to take a look at research released last year by Dartmouth Medical School as part of the district's evaluation.

Dartmouth researchers surveyed more than 6,000 youth several times over two years, and found that kids who regularly watch R-rated movies take risks ranging from violence to alcohol abuse. "The message to parents is clear," said researcher and pediatrician James D. Sargent, "Under 17 should not be permit-

(See *R-Rated Movies*, page 4)



## Book of the Month



**How to Raise an American Patriot**, Marijo N. Tinlin, Morgan James Publishing 2011, 160 pages, \$17.95.



Kids used to learn civics and even patriotism in school.

Now they are more likely to be taught that America conquers and steals from other nations and victimizes and oppresses her own people. Mother and author Marijo Tinlin offers parents an antidote to make it "okay for our kids to be proud to be an American."

Tinlin shares the stories of 13 modern-day patriots, including how they came to love America and how they have taught their own kids to cherish being citizens of the greatest nation on Earth. Some of these patriots are well-known, such as former Attorney General Edwin Meese III, actress Janine Turner, and Hillsdale College president Dr. Larry Arnn.

Others contributors are not famous, but are active spokesmen for all that makes America exceptional. For example, Reverend Steven Craft is a black American who grew up during Jim Crow segregation, but still recognized that, despite her flaws, America is the best nation on Earth. He is the executive director of Christian Citizenship Ministries, and he speaks nationally about the need to retain American sovereignty. Contributor Debbie Lee is the founder of America's Mighty Warriors, an organization that cares for our troops and their families, and is a spokesperson for the Tea Party Express.

Each chapter has a theme — truth, history, character, debate, faith, duty, sovereignty, etc. — and ends with key points and practical action items for parents. Suggestions include visiting interesting historical sites with your kids, joining Junior Statesman programs, learning about the Founding Fathers, reading historical fiction and nonfiction, and modeling civic participation for your kids. All of these activities provide a solid foundation for instilling what Tinlin calls the five pillars of patriotism: learn our history, have faith, be good citizens, do your duty, and pass it on.

The book also highlights some heroes whose stories will motivate you and your kids to learn more about our remarkable national history. Your kids have no doubt heard of George Washington. But do they know that during the Revolutionary War his horse was shot out from underneath him and that bullets tore through his clothes but did not hit him? Kids will also be interested to learn that James Madison was an ambassador to Russia when he was only 14 years old!

More information is available at [www.RaisingAnAmericanPatriot.com](http://www.RaisingAnAmericanPatriot.com).



# FOCUS: Sizing Up Classrooms



*It's time to expose the "smaller-is-better" myth*

By Larry Sand

This past July, a few thousand union activists and their progressive allies held a "Save Our Schools March and Call to Action" rally in Washington, D.C. Attendees went to conferences and workshops, and writers like Jonathan Kozol and Diane Ravitch spoke about the indignities schools have purportedly been forced to endure in the wake of the economic



downturn. One of the pervasive themes of the event was the "class-size crisis."

Teachers like smaller classes, and understandably so. The advantages include fewer papers to grade, students to manage, and parents to deal with. The teachers' union likes smaller classes, too. Smaller classes mean more teachers — and more union dues. And parents like smaller classes because they believe that their children benefit from more individual attention. Everyone agrees that smaller classes are better, right?

In a word: no. Much of the rhetoric supporting small classes is demagogic and runs afoul of the research. Let's begin with the oft-heard union claim that classes are getting larger. Not quite. A U.S. Department of Labor chart, courtesy of teacher-union watchdog Mike Antonucci, tells the tale. Since the mid-1950s, the number of public-education employees — including teachers — has risen steadily and inexorably nationwide. Brief hiring disruptions occur only during recessionary times, which result in a minor diminution in personnel. Immediately following the downturn, however, the hiring resumes with gusto. The result is that since the mid-1950s, the U.S. student population has increased by 60%, while the number of public education workers, including teachers, administrators, and other non-certificated staff, has exploded by 300%. (For every new member in California, the union pockets more than \$600 a year in dues.) Antonucci has reported on this phenomenon for years. When the economy inevitably contracts, the bellyaching and the hand-wringing about laying educators off begin anew.

What's more, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, teacher-pupil ratios across the nation have diminished steadily since 1955, when the ratio of public school teachers to students was 26.9 to one. By 1970, the ratio was 22.3 to one. And by 2007, the last year for which federal government statistics are available, the ratio came down to 15.5 to one. In California, going back to 1999, the average class size across all elementary and secondary schools was 20.9 pupils. Today it is 21.3 — a paltry 1.9 percent increase, hardly indicative of a crisis.

Does class size matter to education outcomes? According to Jay Greene, chairman of the Department of Education Reform at the University of Arkansas, most of the evidence on which the "smaller-is-better" crowd relies comes from Tennessee's STAR project, an experiment conducted in the 1980s, the methodology of which has been questioned by researchers. Other studies tell a different story. In a 1998 study, for example, Stanford's Caroline Hoxby found that "reductions in class size from a base of 15 to 30 students have no effect on student achievement." In 1998, Hoover Institution senior fellow and economist Eric Hanushek released the results of his impressive review of class-size studies. Examining 277 separate studies on the effect of teacher-pupil ratios and class-size averages on student achievement, he found that 15% of the studies found an improvement in achievement, while 72% found no effect at all — and 13% found that reducing class size had a *negative* effect on achievement. While Hanushek admits that in some cases, children might benefit from a small-class environment, there is no way "to describe a priori situations where reduced class size will be beneficial."

For many, the possibility that reducing class sizes may have negative effects on student achievement might at first seem counterintuitive. But what happened to student test scores as classes got smaller between 1970 and 2007? Nothing, according to data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress, widely regarded as the nation's report card. The fact is, scores have stagnated for almost 40 years.

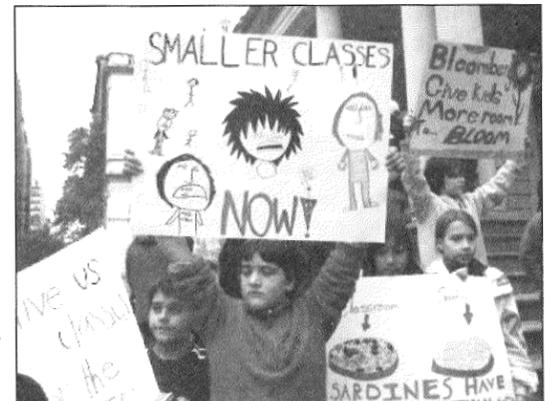
Moreover, classes are larger in Korea and Japan — two countries that regularly clobber us in educational comparisons.

Smaller classes also bring unintended consequences. *Washington Post* education reporter Jay Mathews noted in a 2006 story how California had a decade earlier authorized a \$650-per-pupil bonus to schools with kindergarten-to-third-grade classes of no more than 20 students. "This produced many more classes that required more teachers, many of whom, parents complained, were inexperienced and ineffective," Mathews wrote. Is it possible that larger classes and fewer teachers might even be preferable? Yes, if the teachers let go are the weaker performers. As Hanushek argues: "If you eliminate the bottom five percent of teachers in terms of effectiveness, or if you replaced five to eight percent of the worst teachers with an average teacher, U.S. achievement would rise to somewhere between Canada and Finland."

If we accept Hanushek's numbers and dismiss the lowest-performing 5 percent of teachers without hiring replacements, a class of 20 would then increase by just one student. Ask any parent if he'd rather have his child in a class of 21 kids with a high-performing educator or in a class of 20 with a mediocre one. With only a finite amount of money available for education, fewer

working teachers would free up funds for increased salaries, books, computers, or whatever the individual school district chooses. And, as a bonus, retaining fewer teachers would also mean fewer central-office bureaucrats and a smaller pension-fund burden on cash-strapped states.

Considering the fiscal straits in which California finds itself, continuing to insist on smaller classes is foolhardy. In fact, bigger classes could benefit



some children and the economy. But you won't hear such heretical thoughts voiced at any "Call to Action" event. Instead, you'll see all the usual suspects reciting the same old shibboleths. It's well past time to lay the small-classes myth to rest.

*Larry Sand, a retired teacher, is president of the California Teachers Empowerment Network. This article was originally published in the July 2011 online edition of City Journal, a publication of the Manhattan Institute.*



## Latest Race to Top Targets Preschoolers

The Department of Education will award \$500 million to qualifying states in a new Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge. The Department said the competition is an effort to improve the quality of early childhood education and to provide greater access to pre-K programs. States may win \$50 to \$100 million by the end of the year.



Politically, the competition is a hat tip to two of the Obama Administration's favored constituencies. The education lobby — particularly unions — has long eyed the expansion of pre-K as a way to increase membership rolls, dues revenue and political clout. Feminists are another group who have pushed for increasing access to taxpayer-funded childcare provided for children at younger and younger ages.

In addition to earning political points with education unions and feminists, the Early Learning Challenge also advances the Obama Administration's agenda to usurp state control over education by

implementing "voluntary" national curriculum standards. In order to win, states must create early learning and development standards and assessments, give kindergarten-entry assessment tests, establish statewide standards for early childhood agencies, create a rating system for early learning programs, and have a system by which pre-K data is incorporated into overall longitudinal data systems.

Some have expressed concern about how states incorporate pre-school data into the longitudinal data system. One suggestion is to have a "unique identifier" for each child from pre-school to college. However, some feel that this kind of student identification tracking constitutes government intrusion into personal privacy.

Others, such as Sharon Kagan, co-director of the National Center for Children and Families at Columbia University, are concerned that the emphasis on education standards will choke out playtime for preschoolers and diminish the focus

*(See Race to Top, page 4)*

**TeenScreen** (Continued from page 1)

“no evidence” that screening for suicide risk reduces suicide attempts or mortality.

Furthermore, even authors of the Diagnostic and Statistics Manual (DSM), the bible of psychiatric diagnosis upon which TeenScreen questions are based, admit that the DSM-IV diagnostic criteria for mental illness are vague and without “clear empirical data supporting . . . the diagnosis.”

Although the TeenScreen website explicitly states that questionnaire results are not linked to students’ academic records, a 2003 Illinois law illustrates that this is not necessarily true. The Illinois Children’s Mental Health Act calls for a statewide data-reporting system to track the results of periodic social-emotional development screens in kindergarten, 4<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grades. It also calls for report cards on children’s social-emotional development. These records may be available to government officials and special interest groups without parental or child consent.

Even if the mental illness diagnosis is correct, the prescribed drug may not, in fact, be helpful. A September 2004 Food and Drug Administration (FDA) hearing revealed that more than two-thirds of the studies done on the efficacy of antidepressants for children found that prescription drugs were no more effective than placebos. The only positive trials were published by the pharmaceutical industry. That same month, the FDA issued its most severe Black Box Warning for some newer antidepressants found to increase suicidal thoughts and behavior in children.

Underlying all of these problems is the fact that mental health screening plans override parents’ rights to control the care of their children. Despite assurances that both parents and children must provide consent before TeenScreen or similar surveys are administered, schools and TeenScreen officials are not above using underhanded means. Kids have been bribed with movie passes or pizza parties if they participate. Schools sometimes require only “passive” consent from parents, meaning that if parents don’t sign a form explicitly opting their child out of the program, their consent is assumed.

Parents have also been coerced into putting their kids on unsafe psychiatric medications. Patricia Weathers, the

Carrolls, Johnstons, and Salazars have all been charged or threatened with child abuse charges for resisting efforts to drug their children. Just recently, Detroit officials seized a mentally handicapped 13-year-old from mother Maryanne Godboldo’s home because Godboldo stopped injecting her child with Risperdal, a psychotic drug notorious for severe side effects including suicidal thoughts and an inability to control motor functions.

Congressman Ron Paul has noted the potential for universal or mandatory mental health screenings to be used for politically motivated purposes. One federally-funded violence prevention program already lists “intolerance” as a mental problem that may lead a child to commit violent acts at school, and there are efforts underway to add a diagnosis of “extreme intolerance” to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual. “Because ‘intolerance’ is often a code word for believing in traditional values, children who share their parents’ values could be labeled as having mental problems and a risk of causing violence,” said Paul as he reintroduced his Parental Consent Act before the House of Representatives in August.

First introduced in 2005, Paul’s bill would forbid the use of federal funds to establish or implement any universal or mandatory mental health screening program. The bill also states that no federal education funds may be paid to any local education agency that uses the refusal of a parent or guardian to consent to mental health screening as a basis of child abuse or neglect.

More than 30,000 people have signed an online petition to stop using TeenScreen in schools. Parents and other concerned citizens should also tell their Members of Congress to support Paul’s bill. They should oppose mental health screening at the school board and state legislature levels, and ask state representatives to pass Pupil Rights legislation to keep students from being subjected to nosy psychological or psychiatric questions without prior, informed, written parental consent. (*Wall Street Journal*, 8-30-11; *blogs.ScientificAmerican.com*, 9-2-11; *RepublicMagazine.com*, 8-31-11; *cchrint.org*, 8-26-09)

**R-Rated Movies** (Continued from page 2)

ted to see R-rated movies.”

The study found R-rated movies “jack up the sensation-seeking tendency, which makes adolescents more prone to engage in all sorts of risky behaviors,” said Sargent. The most striking finding was the impact of the movies on kids who previously did not show signs of sensation seeking. While high sensation seekers are

already prone to high-risk behavior, exposure to R-rated movies “can make a low sensation-seeking adolescent drink like a high sensation-seeking adolescent,” said Sargent.

(*USA Today*, 8-19-11; *Buck County Courier Times*, 1-12-10; *Lehigh Valley Commentator*, Issue #13; *dms.dartmouth.edu*, 3-12-10)

**Race to Top** (Continued from page 3)

on “exploratory learning” for children.

Psychologist and brain science expert David Walsh backs up Kagan’s concerns in his book *Smart Parenting, Smarter Kids*. According to Walsh, a formal learning environment is not the best way to prepare preschoolers for future academic success. What really helps kids thrive is lots of verbal interaction with warm, caring adults, plenty of time for

imaginative play, exposure to books, and time exploring outside.

Although officials at the Department of Education say that the required assessments of infants and toddlers should not be used to hold children back from first grade, critics of the program fear that it will lead to high-stakes testing of very young children.

(*Education Week*, 8-24-11 and 7-13-11 and 5-11-11; *blogs.edweek.org*, 7-1-11)

**NCLB** (Continued from page 1)

from issuing waivers with such conditions attached. He spoke on the Senate floor the day the waiver plan was released. “The restraint I am asking for is that the Secretary not use this occasion, when the states are over a barrel, to become a national school board and begin to impose on the states those requirements that Congress would not do through legislation and that states ought to be deciding for themselves.”

Other Congressmen are also questioning the authority of the Obama Administration and Department of Education to grant waivers dependent on state compliance with federal standards. Senator Marco Rubio explained his objections in a letter to Arne Duncan. “This initiative is an overstep of authority that undermines existing law, and violates the constitutional separation of powers. The responsibility for legislating lies with Congress, and forcing policy reforms through NCLB waivers violates this most basic of constitutional structures. . . . I am concerned that the administration’s requirements for granting a waiver from NCLB would entail states having to adopt a federally-approved college and career ready curriculum: either the national Common Core curriculum standards, or another federally-approved equivalent. I am also concerned that the U.S. Department of Education has created through its contractors, national curriculum materials to support these Common Core standards. Such activities are unac-



ceptable; they violate three existing laws: NCLB, the Department of Education Organization Act, and the General Education Provisions Act. All three laws prohibit the federal government from creating or prescribing national curriculum.”

In another letter to the Secretary of Education, Representative John Kline wrote that he “cannot support a process that grants the secretary of education sweeping authority to handpick winners and losers.” Representative Spencer Bachus also expressed his position in a letter to Arne Duncan, saying that it is “highly inappropriate” for waivers to be granted only if schools adopt “various priorities of the Department and Administration, including Common Core Standards.”

According to Gene Wilhoit, executive director of the Council of Chief State School Officers, some states will wait for Congress to reauthorize NCLB because they believe that the conditions attached to the waivers are an inappropriate use of power on the part of the President and his Secretary of Education.

The American Association of School Administrators issued this statement: “If we all agree that the regulations that are to be waived are onerous and an impediment to real change in our schools, then they should be waived for all schools, not just the ones in states that apply for and receive the waivers.”

(*Education Week*, 9-28-11 and 10-5-11; *blogs.edweek.org*, 9-28-11 and 9-29-11; *www.canadaviews.ca*, 9-22-11)

**9/11** (Continued from page 1)

states do not mandate specific coverage of the 9/11 attacks, but do include terrorism or some aspect of the U.S. war on terror. A total of 14 states do not make any mention of 9/11 or terrorism at all.

What is being taught about 9/11 varies greatly from state to state. For example, Louisiana and Oklahoma state standards call for coverage of domestic and foreign terrorism such as the Oklahoma City Bombing and 9/11. Massachusetts calls for a description of America’s response to 9/11 and its wider consequences. Michigan standards go into more detailed coverage of 9/11, including America’s response to terrorism, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and how the attack has altered America and her policies. Texas state standards go so far as to require that students understand radical Islamic fundamentalism and that students be able to explain the U.S. response to terrorism from 9/11 to present. Virginia requires students to explain 9/11 in light of George Bush’s presidency and the impact on foreign policy. Standards in Washington State require students to weigh the validity of 9/11 being the sole cause of the War on Terror, while standards in New Jersey require only an analysis of the reasons for terrorism and its impact.

Even after ten years, many teachers still find it hard to teach 9/11 to students who don’t know anything about it. The 9/11 attacks and subsequent wars can easily bring up controversial subjects and differing viewpoints that some teachers do not want to delve into. Some teachers

shy away from subjects such as “foreign policy, the balance between civil liberties and homeland security, or issues about Islam,” says Robert Watterson, director of West Virginia University’s Center for Democracy and Citizenship Education.

The controversy over curriculum began at the one-year anniversary of 9/11 in 2002 when the National Education Association (NEA) launched a website providing teachers with lesson plans for teaching 9/11. Those lessons were criticized by many as being sympathetic towards the enemy.

Plenty of other resources are now available from universities and non-profit organizations. Officials in New Jersey have created a 9/11 curriculum to be used by teachers voluntarily, and the National September 11 Memorial and Museum is working with school districts to create 9/11 curriculum as well.

Yet some of the proposed lesson plans may still be unsuitable if they are anything like what is already available. Diana Hess of UW-Madison, and Jeremy Stoddard, associate professor of education at the College of William and Mary, evaluated currently available curricula and found that “a lot of it was really cursory and lacked the specific detail you would see in the rest of the text on other things, and we saw that as bizarre. For the most part, they didn’t want to engage kids in any kind of controversy about 9/11.” (*Education Week*, 9-4-02 and 8-31-11)

