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Memorization Promotes Learning, Researchers Find

Memorization has long been out of vogue in the education establishment, and therefore many students aren't regularly tested for simple recall of new material. Teachers often emphasize learning methodologies like class discussion or concept mapping over factual recall, with the expectation that the former activities promote deeper learning that is superior to rote memorization.

But a new study finds that teachers who don't provide students frequent opportunities to practice retrieving information from their memories are denying them a valuable learning tool. It turns out that tests or other forced recall exercises aren't just passive evaluation tools. They actually help people learn, and are more effective than a number of other common study techniques.

The research, published in the Feb-

ruary issue of the journal *Science*, found that students who took a simple recall test after reading a passage retained 50% more of the material a week later than students who used other study techniques. Moreover, students who used recall quizzes as a study tool were also better at drawing inferences which required connecting multiple concepts from the text than the other groups.

The researchers conducted two experiments with 200 college students. The first experiment divided students into four groups, with each group studying the same brief science text. The first group simply read the passage for five minutes. The second group studied the passage over four consecutive five-minute sessions (similar to the way many students cram for exams by reading the material repeatedly).

The third group constructed concept

maps, in which they organized the information into a diagram representing the concepts and showed the relationships between concepts by linking them. This group drew their diagrams with the text open before them.

The final group read the passage and then took a "retrieval practice" test where they wrote down what they remembered without looking at the passage. Then they reread the passage and took another recall quiz.

When all four groups were tested one

week later with short-answer and inference questions, the retrieval practice group performed significantly better than the other three groups on both types of questions.

A second experiment focused solely on comparing the learning effectiveness of concept mapping and retrieval practice. Concept

maps are an especially trendy learning methodology thought to enrich learning by helping students organize information and develop higher-order thinking skills. For this experiment, each student studied two science topics, using retrieval practice for one topic and concept mapping for the other.

When they were tested one week later, students who studied a topic by taking recall quizzes again outperformed those who drew concept maps on both retention and inference questions. Surprisingly, those who practiced recall did better at drawing concept maps than students who drew concept maps during their initial study session for the same topic.

"I think that learning is all about retrieving, all about reconstructing knowledge," said lead study author Jeffrey D. Karpicke, an assistant professor of psychology at Purdue University. "I think that we're tapping into something fundamental about how the mind works when we talk about retrieval."

(See *Memorization Works*, page 4)



Federal Grants Fund 'Core' Developers

Last year the Obama administration and other Common Core Standards Initiative (CCSI) supporters repeated *ad nauseam* that the common education standards movement was led by states rather than the federal government. While it is true that federal money was not used to develop the standards, states were strongly encouraged — some say bribed — to adopt the common standards if they wanted to win a piece of the \$4.3 billion Race to the Top competition money.

Now that all but seven states have given up local authority over education standards by adopting the English/language arts and mathematics standards, the next push is to develop common assessment tools (*i.e.* standardized tests) to determine whether students are mastering the new standards. Obama's Education Department is funding the design of these new tests with \$330 million awarded to two assessment groups.

Recently, these two assessment consortia have expanded their plans beyond tests. The Education Department gave them an additional \$31.6 million to write instructional materials and professional development aids to prepare teachers to transition to the common standards.

Several other organizations are already working to provide curriculum and other instructional materials for teachers, including the major education publisher Pearson, a half dozen groups funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and the second largest teachers' union, the American Federation of Teachers. One can only speculate as to why the Obama administration is pouring taxpayer dollars into a project that many in the private sector are already tackling, but there is a more

fundamental issue at stake: Is it legal to design curriculum using federal funds?

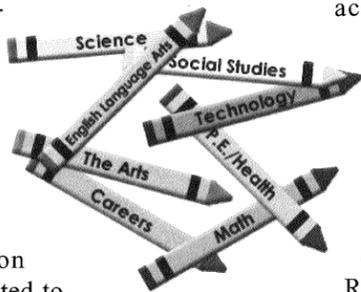
That question was a hot topic at a recent meeting of test designers, state policy people and academics in Atlanta, according to Catherine Gewertz, a reporter for *Education Week*. One of the meeting attendees, Christopher T. Cross, helped write the 1979 law that prohibits the federal government from funding curriculum when he was the Republican staff director of the House Committee on Education and Labor.

Cross raised the issue with Michael

Cohen, president of Achieve, an advocacy group working with one of the two consortia developing assessments, and now curriculum materials. Cohen said his client, the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), is planning to develop curriculum frameworks and model instructional units, not complete curricula. He noted that the PARCC materials will be readily accessible through a digital library, but that no state or district will be required to use them. (The other consortium, SMARTER Balanced, has a similar plan to create a "clearinghouse" of curriculum resources.)

Still, some attendees wondered whether the intent of the federal ban al-

(See *Federal Curriculum?*, page 4)



Illinois Homeschoolers Thwart State Registration?

Chicago public schools are generally not known for their academic excellence. That well-known fact left many Illinois homeschooling parents wondering why state senator Edward Maloney (D-Chicago) recently decided to focus his efforts on "more accountability" for children not attending Illinois' often failing and sometimes dangerous public schools. Education specialists estimate there are around 60,000 homeschooled students in Illinois. Maloney, a former school administrator, proposed Senate Bill 136 to compel parents of home or privately schooled children to register annually with the State Board of Education. Shortly thereafter, he announced a change to the bill. "We're not after private school students," he said. "We're going to amend the bill's language. What we want is to know where homeschoolers are."

Maloney conceded that most homeschooling parents "do a conscientious job that exceeds standards," but said

"there are some out there that aren't. We need minimally to know who the home-taught kids are." The Senator also told the *Illinois Review* that he didn't understand why homeschoolers were so opposed to bill.



Concerned Illinois homeschooling advocates immediately rolled into action to help Senator Maloney understand by calling, writing and making appointments with him. Pastor James McDonald of Providence Church in Morton reported that Maloney told him and other

homeschool supporters that "since the State was responsible for the education of our children, the State should know who was being homeschooled." Pastor McDonald said he tried to help Senator Maloney see that "in the eyes of most home educators, the responsibility to ensure our children receive a competent education belongs to parents, not the State."

Laurie Higgins, Director of the Division of School Advocacy for the Illinois Family Institute (IFI), warned that the bill was a "slippery slope from registration to regulation." She said that although this bill only required registration, "It's naïve to think that our bloated and ravenous state bureaucracy will not expand its purview to dictate curriculum, administer tests, monitor or evaluate student progress, require certification of those who serve as teachers, and/or mandate home visits by state officials — all in the

(See *Homeschoolers*, page 4)

EDUCATION BRIEFS

Florida state Representative Kelli Stargel (R-Lakeland) has proposed an unusual bill that would require teachers to grade parents with students in kindergarten through third grade. Parents would receive a grade of satisfactory, needs improvement or unsatisfactory on the following criteria: child's punctual attendance and physical preparedness (fed and well-rested); child's homework completion and preparedness for tests; parent responsiveness to teacher communication. Stargel said the bill wouldn't add much work for teachers because they already keep records on attendance, homework completion and parent conferences. (theledger.com, 2-23-11; wpbf.com, 1-31-11)

School officials in San Pedro, California committed a 6-year-old boy to a psychiatric ward against his mother's wishes after he drew a violent picture and wrote that he wanted to die. Syndi Dorman said she promised to ensure her son saw his therapist the same day, but that school officials "said they were in control and they could do this and had already called an ambulance." Dorman's son was released after 48 hours, but he doesn't want to return to school. "He's afraid they are going to take him away again." (arkansasmatters.com, 2-1-11)

Virginia high school principal Barry Hollandsworth pulled down copies of the Ten Commandments from several students' lockers, violating their free speech rights. Liberty Counsel, a public interest law firm, sent a letter to school officials explaining that censoring student religious speech while permitting expressions of school spirit, support of social causes, etc. is a constitutional violation. In contrast, officials in a Michigan school district revised their ban against weapons at school to accommodate the religious expression of Sikh students. Sikhs may wear a small dagger called a kirpan to school as long as the blade is dull, no more than 2.5 inches long, and the dagger is sewn inside a sheath that prevents easy removal. (lc.org, 2-28-11; Detroit Free Press, 1-31-11)

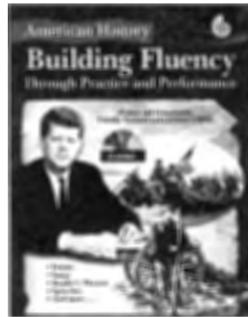
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Grade Schoolers Chant Socialist Mantra

Considering how little civic knowledge most kids leave high school with, it would seem to be a wonderful thing when grade school reading curriculum incorporates the Preamble to the Constitution of the United States — at least until you look more closely.

Published by Teacher Created Materials (TCM), the *Building Fluency Through Practice and Performance* series includes reading activities meant to be regularly read, reread, and performed by students. The stated goal of these interactive exercises is to improve word recognition, fluency, comprehension and interpretation.

One troubling section titled "The Promise of America" turns the Preamble into a five-page choral project. Students chant various lines assigned to their group, including sentences meant to aid interpretation. Note what the children are to chant after the phrase "promote the general welfare":



We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect Union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare . . .

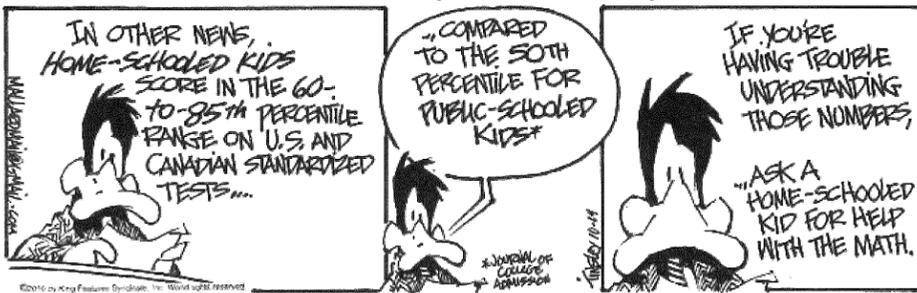
- R7:** People's basic needs must be met in a country.
- R5:** Needs for housing, education, transportation, and health care are overseen by our government system.
- R6:** Labor laws ensure that people work in safe environments and that they are paid fairly for the work that they do.

According to this curriculum, the promise of America and the intent of the Founding Fathers who wrote the Constitution is . . . socialism? The last time we checked, neither the Preamble nor the Constitution tasked the government with providing housing, education, transportation or health care for citizens. Continuing where the above quote of the Preamble left off, the Founders did intend to "secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity," which is the explicit reason they

"ordain[ed] and establish[ed] this Constitution for the United States of America."

According to Mike Opelka of *The Blaze* website, neither TCM, their printing company Shell Education, nor sales outlet Sussman Sales could provide data on how many schools are using the "Promise of America;" however, one company rep told *The Blaze* that the fluency program is "really popular." Is your child's school using this subtly indoctrinating curriculum? (theblaze.com, 3-2-11)

MALLARD FILLMORE / by Bruce Tinsley



Must 5th Graders Learn Arabic?

The Mansfield school district in Texas revised its implementation of an Arabic studies grant after almost 200 parents showed up at a meeting with questions last month. Parents were upset that they weren't consulted or even informed about plans to embed Arabic language and culture across the curriculum until after the fact.

The program is being funded by a five-year, \$1.3 million federal Foreign Language Assistance Program grant that identifies Arabic as a "language of the future." The program seeks to make more Americans fluent in Arabic, Chinese and Russian to benefit the private and public sectors. In addition to language acquisition, the grant calls for Arabic culture, government, art, traditions and history to be integrated into social studies, language arts and other

subjects at the elementary level.

The district issued a somewhat disingenuous press release denying the accuracy of media reports of "mandatory Arabic classes." According to a FAQ document available on the district website, it is true that Arabic exploration and foreign language classes are elective options in 7th-12th grade. However, the original plan called for 5th and 6th grade curriculums to integrate Arabic culture and language into various mandatory subjects, with K-4 also adding Arabic elements in subsequent years.

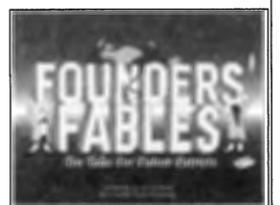
Actually, the grant requires a substantial amount of instructional time be spent on Arabic language and culture — 100

(See *Arabic Studies*, page 4)

Book of the Month



Founders' Fables: Ten Tales for Future Patriots, Laurie Cockerell, Kinderfable Press 2010, 48 pages, \$10.



Laurie Cockerell believes many families want to instill a love for America and an appreciation for the principles our nation was founded upon. When she realized that there are very few books that are truly aimed at the elementary student's interests and abilities, she decided to do something about it.

The former elementary educator used her background and knowledge of what kinds of characters and language appeal to young children to write *Founders' Fables: Ten Tales for Future Patriots*. The book is a collection of ten original fables that introduces kids to the values of America's Founding Fathers and the principles of limited government in an easy-to-understand, age-appropriate way.

Each story is introduced with a quote from a Founding Father. Then the fun begins with rhyming stories and humorous illustrations that will engage and amuse both younger and older readers.

For instance, all the ladies in town enjoy buying bonnets in Holly the hippo's lovely hat store. But Holly has to sell the shop because the mayor sets a silly new rule for every shop. In another tale, a council of ducks hires the beavers to build a water park. The problem is that the ducks can't pay for it all, so they leave years of payments to future generations of ducklings who never get to enjoy the now-worn-out slides and flipping rides. Later in the book, Joe the monkey may have to tear down his perfect tree house because other monkeys swinging through the vines think his house is in their way.

With these and other whimsical stories, Cockerell illustrates conservative American values often assumed too complicated for children. She tackles national debt, eminent domain, self-reliance, government intervention, and free speech.

Each fable is followed by a suggested art project and two short sets of questions, one for younger children and another for older readers. The questions and activities offer opportunities for deeper learning and conversations between children and parents or grandparents.

The illustrations and rhymes of the fables are best suited to 5- to 12-year-olds, but some of the questions for older children may spark fruitful conversations among teens and adults.

You can download a sample chapter for free at www.foundersfables.com. The website also offers a list of a dozen family activities that encourage more learning about the Founding Fathers.

FOCUS: What Did We Get for Our Money?

By Andrew J. Coulson

For over half a century, a succession of Congresses and presidents has sought to do two things for American elementary and secondary education: raise overall achievement, and narrow the gaps between high- and low-income students as well as between minority and white students. The federal government has spent roughly \$2 trillion on these efforts since 1965, adjusting for inflation.

Congress' first attempt to improve the quality of instruction in the nation's schools was the National Defense Education Act of 1958, a direct response to the Soviet launch of the satellite Sputnik. It was intended to raise mathematics and science achievement. There are no data on science achievement during this period to my knowledge, but we do have nationally representative trend data for mathematics performance at the end of high school. Math scores declined slightly during the latter half of the 1950s, and this decline accelerated from 1960 to 1966, after the NDEA was passed. Scores had still not recovered to their 1955 high point three decades later.

Figure 1 charts the percent change in Math, Science, and Reading scores from the 1970s to the present, along with the percent change in real federal education spending per pupil. Math and Reading scores at the end of high school are unchanged over the past forty years, while Science scores suffered a slight decline through the year 1999, the last time that test was administered. Data from another nationally representative test series show a continuing decline in 12th grade Science between 1996 and 2005, the last year for which we have trend data.

Presented with stagnant or declining performance in the face of a meteoric rise in federal spending per pupil, it is reasonable to ask: what happened to total spending? If state and local expenditures fell to such an extent that they offset federal increases, that might explain the profound disconnect revealed in Figure 1.

To answer that question, Figure 2 shows how the total cost of an entire k-through-12 public school education has changed over time. We spent over \$151,000 per student sending the graduating class of 2009 through public schools. That is nearly three times as much as we spent on the graduating class of 1970, adjusting for inflation. Despite that massive real spending increase, overall achievement has stagnated or declined, depending on the subject.

But what of the federal government's other educational goal: narrowing the achievement gaps by income and minority status? Test score breakdowns by family income are not available, but we do have something close: a breakdown by parents' level of education. This allows us to compare the children of high school dropouts to those of college graduates. In Reading and Science, the gap between these students has not narrowed in 40 years. In Math it has narrowed by barely one percent of the test score scale. So, here again, federal appropriations and the programs they have funded have failed to

achieve their goals.

That leaves us with one last federal policy goal to examine: shrinking the gaps between minority and white students. In science, these gaps, too, are unchanged, while they have narrowed in Reading and Mathematics. But a key question remains: were federal programs responsible for this isolated gap narrowing?

If so, the gap narrowing that did occur should track federal legislation and spending: starting gradually and then accelerating rapidly during the past two decades. To see if that is indeed the pattern, Figure 3 charts changes in the black/white Reading gap.

Comparing Figure 3 with the federal spending per pupil trend shown in Figure 1, there seems to be little support for the hypothesis that federal efforts have narrowed the black/white reading gap. The gap was essentially unchanged for the first 15 years after the passage of the ESEA and Head Start. Then, in the absence of any dramatic change in federal policy or spending, the gap suddenly narrowed between 1980 and 1988. Since 1988, the gap has actually *widened* slightly, despite a dramatic rise in federal spending over that period. The patterns for both math and reading for both black and Hispanic students tell similar stories.

To sum up, we have little to show for the \$2 trillion in federal education spending of the past half century. In the face of concerted and unflagging efforts by Congress and the states, public schooling has suffered a massive productivity collapse — it now costs three times as much to provide essentially the same education as we provided in 1970.

Grim as that picture may seem, it fails to capture the full measure of the problem. Because as productivity was *falling* relentlessly in education, it was *rising* everywhere else. A pound of grocery store coffee is not merely as affordable as it was in 1970 — it is *cheaper* in real dollars. Indeed virtually every product and service has gotten better, or more affordable, or both over the past two generations.

The fact that outcomes have remained flat or declined while spending skyrocketed is a disaster unparalleled in any other field. The only thing it appears to have accomplished is to apply the brakes to the nation's economic growth, by taxing trillions of dollars out of the productive sector of the economy and spending it on ineffective programs.

But amidst this bleak overall record, there is one federal education program that has been proven to both improve educational outcomes and dramatically lower costs. That is the Washington, D.C. Opportunity Scholarships Program. Research conducted by the Department of Education finds that students attending private schools thanks to this program have equal or better academic performance than their peers in the local public schools, and have significantly higher graduation rates. This, and very high levels of parental satisfaction, come at an average per pupil cost of around \$7,000. By contrast, per pupil spending on K-12 public education in the nation's

Figure 1. Inflation-Adjusted Federal K-12 Spending Per Pupil and Achievement of 17-Year-Olds, % Change since 1970

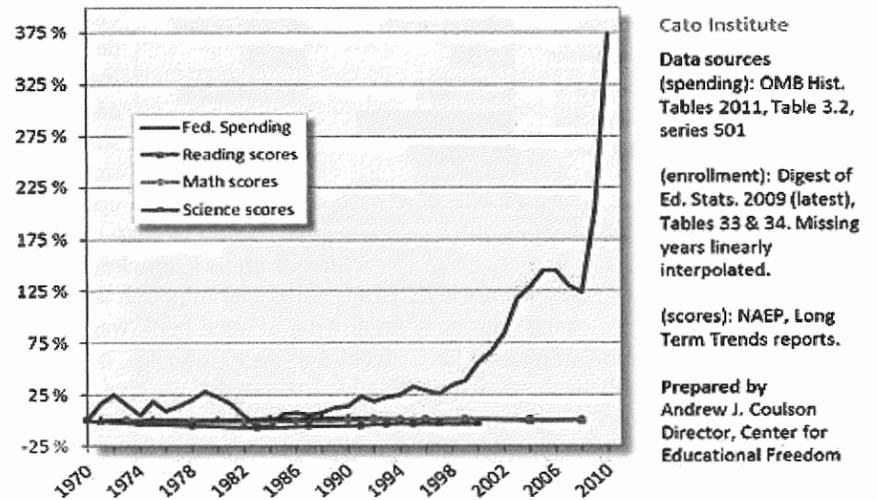


Figure 2. Inflation-Adjusted Cost of a complete K-12 Public Education, and Percent Change in Achievement of 17-Year-Olds, since 1970

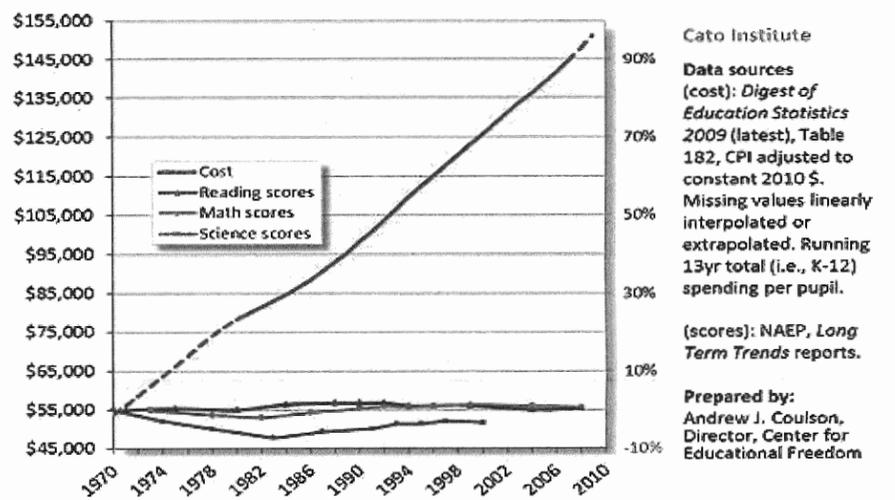
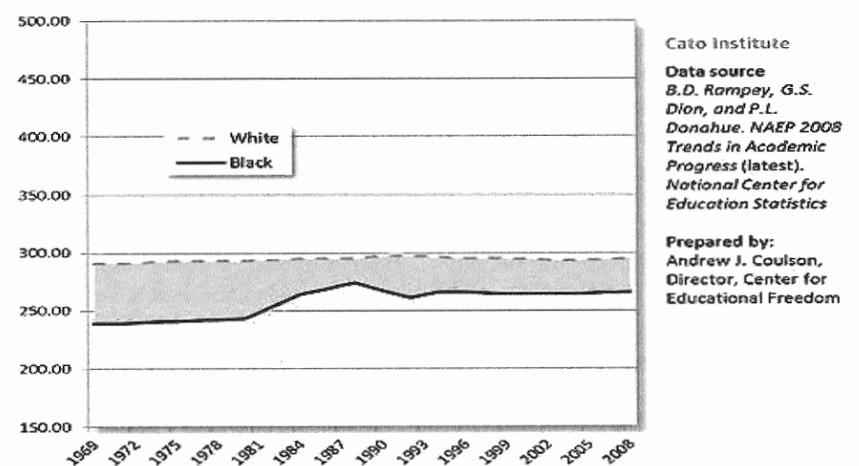


Figure 3. Black/White Reading Score Gap, NAEP Long-Term Trends, 17-Year-Olds, 1971-2008



capital was roughly \$28,000 during the 2008-09 school year. The OSP program is thus producing better results at a quarter the cost.

D.C., of course, is a special case. The federal government is not empowered by the Constitution to create such a program on a national level. Indeed the Constitution delegates to the federal government no national education policy powers, reserving them, under the 10th Amendment, to the states and the people. Clearly, this limit has not been observed for generations, but its wisdom is by now inescapable. We have decades of evidence of the inability of our national education programs to fulfill their worthy intentions.

Nevertheless, Congress could contribute greatly to the spread of educational excellence around the nation by preserv-

ing and growing the Opportunity Scholarships Program as an example of what is possible and by phasing out its vast array of ineffective programs. This would ultimately allow for a permanent annual tax cut on the order of seventy billion dollars, and would bolster interest in the many state level private school choice programs that have also been improving outcomes while lowering costs. Any move in this direction would be of lasting value to American families and the economy.

Andrew Coulson is the director of Cato Institute's Center for Educational Freedom. This article is adapted from his testimony to the Committee on Education & the Workforce in the United States House of Representatives on February 10, 2011, and is reprinted here by permission.

Memorization Works *(Continued from page 1)*

The study is notable because its results challenge long-standing assumptions about human learning, especially the idea that the act of recall may measure prior learning, but does not itself produce learning. “When you’re retrieving something out of a computer’s memory, you don’t change anything—it’s simple playback,” said Robert Bjork, a psychologist at the University of California, Los Angeles.

But, “when we use our memories by retrieving things, we change our access,” to that information, explained Dr. Bjork. “What we recall becomes more recallable in the future. In a sense you are practicing what you are going to need to do later.”

Prominent Harvard education professor Howard Gardner said the study results “throw down the gauntlet” to “progressive educators” like himself who advocate for constructivism. (Constructivists em-

phasize reasoning over memorization, believe children should discover their own ways of learning, and that they should make their own meaning.)

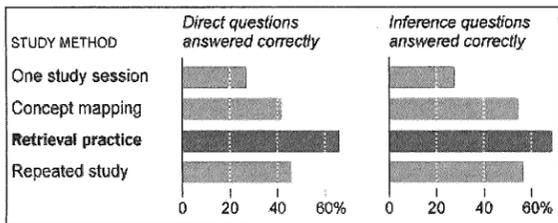
“Educators who embrace seemingly more active approaches, like concept-map-

ping . . . are challenged to devise outcome measures that can demonstrate the superiority of such constructivist

approaches,” said Gardner.

Study authors Karpicke and Janell R. Blunt noted that although concept mapping with an open book was not as productive as recall quizzes, concept maps could also be used as a retrieval practice exercise if students did not have source material in front of them.

The bottom line? Activities that require students to retrieve and reconstruct knowledge are not time-wasting busywork; rather they are one of the most effective means of enhancing learning. (www.sciencemag.org, 1-20-11; *The New York Times*, 1-21-11)



Homeschoolers *(Continued from page 1)*

service of protecting children, of course.”

Other comments from Maloney seemed to give credence to Higgins warning. “There are virtually no regulations on homeschools. No curriculum, no periodic checks on their progress. Regional superintendents tell me they have no way of knowing whether a home-taught student is truant or not,” said Maloney. “We want more accountability.”

Current Illinois law requires homeschooling parents to obey attendance laws mandating that every child ages 7 to 17 attend a school that teaches math, English, science and social studies, and that those subjects be taught in the English language.

About 4,000 homeschooling parents and their children descended upon the state capitol in Springfield on February 15th to demonstrate their opposition to the bill during the education committee hearing. Homeschooling families packed the hearing room, then overflowed into the hallways of the second and third floor. As they waited for the meeting to start, the crowd began singing hymns and patriotic songs.

During the hearing, both Senators Kimberly Lightford (D-Chicago) and Iris Martinez (D-Chicago) worried about homeschoolers “falling through the cracks” if government did not take an active role in ensuring they received a quality education. Senator Lightford also questioned homeschool teacher qualifications and lack of certification. IFI Executive Director David E. Smith said Lightford’s remark “reveals the true intent of some government employees and points to the ‘slippery slope from registration to regulation’” homeschool proponents want to forestall.

In an email sent to constituents, the Illinois Christian Home Educators marveled at the irony of the Senators’ comments: “If ‘falling through the cracks’ means kids ending high school without a diploma, without being able to read, without being able to enter college without remedial classes, and with a juvenile jus-

tice record, then ‘falling through the cracks’ is quite common in public schools . . . Why [should] the least effective system of education supervise the most effective system?”

Homeschooling advocates have the data on their side. A 2009 study provided the most comprehensive picture of homeschooling efficacy to date. The research drew from almost 12,000 homeschooled students from all 50 states who took three well-known tests — the *California Achievement Test*, *Iowa Tests of Basic Skills*, and *Stanford Achievement Tests* — during the 2007-2008 school year. The national average percentile composite score for homeschoolers in reading, math, science and social studies was 86% versus a 50% average percentile composite score for public school students.

The *Progress Report 2009: Homeschool Academic Achievement and Demographics* study also revealed that student gender, parents’ education level, and family income had a negligible impact on student academic performance. Furthermore, families residing in states with high regulatory demands on homeschoolers had the same average test scores as those living in low regulation states, demonstrating that greater government regulation does not improve academic achievement.

Nonetheless, some remain skeptical of homeschooling parents’ commitment and competence to educate their own children. Comments made by truancy officer Bill Reynolds during the hearing proved especially alarming. Reynolds expressed his desire to “help” homeschoolers in his area, but said he could not do so if he did not know who they were. Consider the following exchange between committee member Senator David Luechtefeld (R-Okawville) and Reynolds:

Senator Luechtefeld: “If they register — will you go to any house and see if you can help?”

Reynolds: “Yes, sir.”

Senator Luechtefeld: “Even those that are doing a really good job?”

Federal Curriculum? *(Continued from page 1)*

lowed for a distinction between “curriculum” and “curricular/instructional materials/resources.” Cohen insisted that “curriculum implies something highly detailed that dictates what gets taught and how it’s going to get taught. We’re not doing that.”

Cohen also pointed out that the Department of Education approved the consortia’s

plans for the materials, so “clearly the Department didn’t think this was running afoul” of the 1979 law. Pascal “Pat” Forgione, head of the Educational Testing Service’s Center for K-12 Assessment and Performance Management, wasn’t so sure. The issue could be the “Achilles heel” of the consortia’s work, said Forgione, the host of the Atlanta gathering.

Arabic Studies *(Continued from page 2)*

minutes per week, *i.e.* an average of 20 minutes per day for Cross Timber Intermediate 5th and 6th-grade students. District spokesman Richie Escovedo explained that, “Part of the grant language brings in targeted instruction that will be embedded in the classes. Algebra comes from the Arabic world. . . . Instead of a Valentine’s cake, you might make a Moroccan dessert.”

Parent Cindy Henderson said she didn’t think the school should spend so much time teaching about one culture. “I don’t like it being stuffed down our throats,” she said. Others questioned whether students could afford 100 instructional minutes devoted to an Arabic

perspective when many are not proficient in English or mathematics.

Henderson was also among parents at the meeting who questioned whether Arabic culture could be taught without teaching Islam. “They said they aren’t going to teach religion, but I don’t see how you can teach that culture without going into their beliefs.” Parent Baron Kane wondered why Arabic culture should get preferential treatment. “The school doesn’t teach Christianity, so I don’t want them teaching Islam,” he said.

Other parents were upset because no one showed them what information would be taught. Texas attorney Kelly Shackelford, president and CEO of the Liberty Institute, validated those concerns.

In a radio interview with terrorism expert Gadi Adelman, Shackelford noted the potential for anti-Christian, pro-Islamic bias in student materials, such as that recently uncovered by the Texas State Board of Education (see October 2010 *Education Reporter*). “Instead of presenting the works and positives of both [Islam and Christianity] in an objective way, it was treated like Christianity was all about the Crusades, killing and murder, and that Islam was a peaceful religion that was about lifting women’s rights. It was just bizarre to read how unbalanced it was.”

In response to parental objections, the Mansfield district has proposed changes to the Department of Education that modify the timeline and structure of the grant. The district will not implement the grant this academic year as originally planned, but will use 2010-2011 as a “planning year.”

Other proposed changes include: Beginning in 2011-2012, parents may choose one of two language exploration tracks at Cross Timbers. One of the two tracks features Arabic as the primary language explored while the other features Spanish as the primary language. Students will receive 48 hours per year of instruction on the primary language and a combined 12 hours for other languages including French, German, Chinese and Russian.

Parents will be able to opt their children out of any specific language during advisory periods. Parents will also have “full access to the written curriculum and will have opportunities for input prior to the district moving forward with this program.”

The website assures parents that “Arabic language classes will not be mandatory at any level in the District.” That is no concession, however, because Arabic language classes were always one of numerous options for 7th-12th graders. What remains unclear is whether the Education Department will insist that Arabic culture be embedded across the curriculum for K-6th grade students if the district is to retain grant funding. (*Star-Telegram*, 2-8-11; *FamilySecurityMatters.org*, 2-14-11)

Reynolds: “That’s right. And I’ll know very quickly as I knock on the door; the ones that are doing a good job won’t let me go. They’ll want me to come in. The ones that say we don’t want you around I’ll know to take further action.”

Senator Luechtefeld: “I still don’t see how this changes things just because they register.”

Reynolds: “It gives me the name and the opportunity.”

Reynolds’ testimony made it clear that he interpreted Maloney’s bill as a license to harass homeschool families at will. He seemed either unaware of or unconcerned with the Fourth Amendment right of citizens “to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures” without probable cause. IFI’s David Smith lamented the guilty until proven innocent attitude directed towards homeschool families and characterized the bill as “a solution looking for a problem.”

Senator Maloney tabled SB 136 the day after the hearing, but left open the possibility of future legislation. Two weeks later he told the *Illinois Review* that he is working with Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) Superintendent Christopher Koch to discuss how the state can ensure that school-age children are attending some form of school that meets the requirements of Illinois law. He noted that truancy officers complain that their investigations of possible truants are hampered because they have no way to verify that parents who claim to be homeschooling their kids are actually doing so.

The senator said he will continue to discuss the matter with homeschool representatives and Koch’s ISBE staff to come up with a registration solution that will be acceptable to all parties. “It could be simply a guideline for truancy officers, or the ISBE may find we need legislation to protect homeschooled students,” said Maloney. “We’ll determine what’s best in the days ahead.” (*IllinoisReview.typepad.com*, 2-8-11, 3-2-11; *IllinoisFamily.org*, 2-3-11; *hslsda.org*; *SouthTownStar.Suntimes.com*, 2-9-11)