

Indiana Voters Reject Common Core in Upset

A teacher who opposes Common Core Standards (CCS) defeated an incumbent who is nationally known as a proponent of CCS in the race for Indiana superintendent of public instruction. Although the incumbent Republican superintendent, Tony Bennett, spent \$1.3 million and the winning candidate, Glenda Ritz, raised only \$327,000, voters handed Ritz a 53% share of the vote. Some called the win a stunning upset.

Bennett is the chairman of Chiefs for Change, which is an association supporting CCS and is affiliated with former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush's Foundation for Excellence in Education. Bennett is well known nationally and was part of the GOP statewide ticket.

Ritz works as a library media specialist and teacher in Indianapolis's Washington Township. She is "a long-time registered Republican who switched party affiliation to run against Bennett, intentionally set up her own campaign headquarters and stayed away from the Democratic field offices," according to the *Southern Indiana News and Tribune* (11-06-2012).

Winning candidate Ritz said of the CSS, "There was no input from parents, education groups. There was no input into the approval of the common core." Ritz told the *Huffington Post* that she decided to enter the race when Indiana began a pass-fail reading test for 3rd-graders. (11-07-2012)

Parents and some teachers have started to push back in opposition to CCS in several states. Efforts to reign in CCS are underway in Idaho, Michigan, Utah, Alabama, and Georgia.

Ritz ran a grassroots campaign and was helped out by teachers union participation. Teachers unions support CCS but oppose many other reforms brought to Indiana by Tony Bennett. Although teachers unions undoubtedly wielded large influence, the Indiana race appears to be about rejecting CCS and other reforms that don't work.

Referring to Gov. Pence who supported all the reforms brought by Tony Bennett, a commenter named "Indiana Republican" at stateimpact.npr.org (11-13-2012) said it well:

I guess Pence didn't get the message that the people of Indiana want input into their schools and not be told what they are going to do by someone who has so much "outside money" in his pocket. Blame the teachers union all you want, but where then did the 1,000,000 crossover votes come from that weren't in the union? From angry parents who didn't get heard. Wake up Gov. Pence, the people of Indiana want this agenda stopped.

What Happened on November 6th?

November 6th has come and gone but the 2012 election results will have a long-term impact on education, both nationally and in states. Voters considered ballot initiatives to increase taxes specifically to fund education, amendments allowing for charter school creation, and various propositions and referendums affecting teachers and their unions. The re-hiring of a president who believes in federal control of schools will also affect how America educates students.

Teachers unions, particularly the National Education Association (NEA), supported Barack Obama and spent lavishly to support and oppose a variety of amendments in states.

Obama and the Congress

While his opponent favored education policy directed by state and local governments, the reelection of Barack Obama suggests that the federal government's role in education will continue to increase. The Race to the Top (RTT) grant program has seen 46 states make reforms in order

to receive more federal money. "Race to the Top represented, in my mind, not just an education program but a philosophy about how you wield influence from Washington, D.C.," said Jeffrey Henig, a Columbia University professor. (*The Hechinger Report*, 11-07-2012)

Both the NEA and the American Federation of Teachers, the largest teachers unions, supported the reelection of Obama although they disagree with some of his policies. Tying test scores to teacher evaluations, teacher merit pay, and the formation of charter schools are reforms the teachers unions do not support. Obama does support them all on some level. On the other hand, Obama's promise to invest more money in educating children from infant child-care years through college served to keep the unions on the President's team.

Obama has so far failed in his attempts to persuade Congress to pass a new version of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) or No Child Left Behind (NCLB). In his second term,



it is unclear whether the administration will simply continue to offer waivers to states that fail to meet ESEA and NCLB standards or if Congress will arrive at a compromise renewal. The Senate and House both have bills in committee that would renew the ESEA/NCLB laws but whether the Democrat-held Senate and the Republican-held House can reach a compromise remains to be seen.

The divided Congress has other education issues to tackle, including an estimated \$7.9 billion shortfall in the Pell Grant program, education loan interest rate increases, and various laws governing special education, higher education, and technical education. Many Republicans in Congress oppose the administration on RTT, Investing in Innovation, and School Improvement Grants.

The most immediate problem facing Congress and Pres. Obama is sequestration, the automatic spending reductions mandated by the Budget Control Act of 2012. Cuts to almost every area of the federal government, including the Department of Education, will take effect on Jan. 2, 2013 unless the President and Congress come to an agreement on spending cuts and/or tax increases. "Everybody hates the sequester but nobody will do anything to make it go away," according to an article in the *Christian Science Monitor* (09-15-2012).

State Propositions

Californians passed Proposition 30 which increases taxes on those making over \$250,000 a year and increases sales tax by a quarter percent for four years. Gov. Jerry Brown touted this as necessary to save schools from elementary to university level in the state. Teachers unions supported Prop. 30.

A different measure in California, outlined in Prop. 32, was defeated. It would have taxed out-of-state businesses on their corporate profits and would have prevented members' union dues which are automatically deducted from teacher paychecks from being used to sponsor political candidates and support political activity. California teachers must join the union in order to teach in the state but have no say in how their dues are spent. The California Teachers Association union spent \$21 million of the \$73 million total spent by all groups on the campaign to defeat Proposition 32.

Arizonans and South Dakotans both

Affirmative Action 'Mismatch'

Since its beginnings, affirmative action has been touted as a system that aids black and Hispanic students with little or no drawbacks for its recipients. While some have argued that affirmative action unintentionally and unfairly discriminates against whites, it has been generally accepted that the system is purely beneficial for racial minorities. Recent research, however, is indicating otherwise.

Richard Sander and Stuart Taylor, Jr. are the authors of the recently published book *Mismatch: How Affirmative Action Hurts Students It's Intended to Help, and Why Universities Won't Admit It*. In their *Wall Street Journal* article "The Unraveling

of Affirmative Action," Sander and Taylor write that: "At selective schools, more than 80% of blacks, and two-thirds of Hispanics, have received at least moderately large admissions preferences . . . the equivalent of at least a 100-point SAT boost, and often much more."

The authors go on to say, "There is now increasing evidence that students who receive large preferences of any kind — whether based on race, athletic ability, alumni connections or other considerations — experience some clear negative effects: Students end up with poor grades (usually in the bottom fifth of their class), lower graduation rates, extremely high attrition rates from science and engineering majors, substantial self-segregation on campus, lower self-esteem and

far greater difficulty passing licensing tests (such as bar exams for lawyers)."

These negative effects, Sander and Taylor explain, result from a "mismatch" between the students' academic preparation and the schools' standards. When students are admitted to a school because of an artificial boost such as affirmative action, they often (though, of course, not always) find themselves unable to excel at the institution and often even drop out of more difficult academic programs.

In contrast, University of Virginia psychologists Fred Smyth and John McArdle demonstrated that students who received large preferences but avoided mismatch because they chose less-elite schools were 80% more likely to complete degrees in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and math.

Other researchers have explored the diverse impacts of this frequent mismatch between a "preferred" student's academic preparation and that of the institution's median student. In the book *Increasing Faculty Diversity*, authors and sociologists Stephen Cole and the late Elinor Barber attribute the lower percentage of professors who are black (compared to those who are white) to this mismatch and the resulting decrease in mismatched students' academic self-confidence and aspirations.

In 2011, Duke University professor Peter Arcidiacono and his colleagues conducted a study in which they found that students tended to become friends with the classmates whom they saw as "academically similar" to themselves.

(See *Affirmative Action* page 3)



(See *Election Day*, page 4)

EDUCATION BRIEFS

Parental involvement in a child's education is the most important aspect determining a student's academic success, according to a study by researchers at three universities. North Carolina State University Professor Toby Parcel, a co-author of the study, stressed that "the effort that parents are putting in at home . . . checking homework, reinforcing the importance of school, and stressing the importance of academic achievement" is critical. Results were based on 10,000 12th-graders.

In an effort to combat parental apathy, 70 Chicago Public schools are offering \$25 Walgreens gift cards to parents who attend a parent-teacher conference. This novel (monetary) approach that encourages parents to speak to a teacher and pick up their child's report card is the brainchild of Mayor Rahm Emmanuel.

A civil rights group has announced that a controversial and previously outlawed Mexican-American ethnic studies program will return to Tucson schools. Earlier this year the program was halted because it violates a state law that prohibits public schools from offering courses designed for a particular ethnic group or that advocate ethnic solidarity. This latest turn of events is the result of a 40-year-old desegregation lawsuit against Tucson Unified School District by Latinos and African-Americans, supported by the Department of Justice.

Rep. Steve King (R-IA) has introduced the No Hungry Kids Act, which would reverse federal school lunch caloric limitations and strengthen parents' right to send to school any food they wish their child to eat. The bill responds to President and Michelle Obama's Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, which increased nutritional requirements and limited the maximum number of calories allowed in school lunches across the nation. Numerous students and parents have complained that the serving sizes are inadequate and the food offered is unappetizing. Rep. King said that because some kids are overweight, the federal government decided "to put every child on a diet."

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Charter Schools and Common Core: Changing the Face of Private Education

The public education movements to establish charter schools and to adopt National Common Core Standards are exerting an influence on private education in America. The transfer of students from private to public education has broad societal implications. Loss of students could have a devastating impact on private education opportunities as schools struggle to stay afloat. Dwindling enrollment could sideline religious influence in education in favor of secular influence. Students who move away from private schools also increase the burden on taxpayers. Further, private schools adopting Common Core Standards lessen the differentiation between public and private schools.

Charter schools

When school started in Fall 2012, charter school enrollment for the first time surpassed enrollment in Catholic schools. The Lexington Institute points to the irony of this reversal since charter schools "have long imitated the Catholic model: high expectations, discipline, and school uniforms." (10-16-12)

Most charter school students come from traditional public schools but significant numbers are also moving from private schools.



COMMON CORE

STATE STANDARDS INITIATIVE

PREPARING AMERICA'S STUDENTS FOR COLLEGE & CAREER

(See Private Education page 4)

The Cato Institute indicates that 8% of charter elementary students and 11% of middle and high school students are drawn from private schools. Furthermore, in highly urban districts, private schools contribute 32, 23 and, 15% of charter elementary, middle, and high school enrollments, respectively. (8-28-2012)

Any increase in public school enrollment requires an increased tax burden on citizens, spreading education dollars thinner, or cuts to other services, (or some combination of the three.) The Lexington Institute reports, "According to the National Catholic Education Association, allowing every Catholic K-12 student to enter the public school system would add \$23 billion to the taxpayer's bill." (10-16-2012)

Common Core

At the same time, there is a trend among private schools to adopt the federal constraints of the Common Core Standards (CCS). "More than 100 Roman Catholic dioceses spanning the nation from Los Angeles to Philadelphia have

Book of the Month



The One World Schoolhouse: Education Reimagined by Salman Khan, The Hachette Group, 2012, \$26.99



When Salman Khan looks at children he sees "uniqueness, curiosity, and creativity." He believes learning can be stifled in conventional classrooms where a teacher "broadcasts" a "one-pace-fits-few" lecture while students sit at their desks and passively listen.

Reading *The One World Schoolhouse* is exciting. Salman Khan's goal and methodology for students of all ages to become enthusiastic, creative, lifelong learners is revolutionary. He advocates differentiated education with students moving ahead at their own pace and mastering each incremental level before moving on.

When Khan's cousin needed math tutoring, the M.I.T. graduate helped her from a distance, using technology. Then he began putting his lessons on YouTube. Now he has delivered nearly 215 million lessons to students on a wide variety of subjects and has pilot programs in school districts.

Yes, Khan's system uses computer learning. But it is not just a student sitting in front of a screen for hours on end. Rather, a student works at a computer for 1-2 hours a day. The rest of the day is spent applying what was learned. Technology is one tool in his classroom, a classroom which can be anywhere in the world.

Khan uses tests as a diagnostic tool to identify gaps in a student's mastery of a subject. He fights the concept of testing as a way to track students who sometimes end up in remedial classes. He says this sort of testing filters out "differentness," which is sometimes creativity.

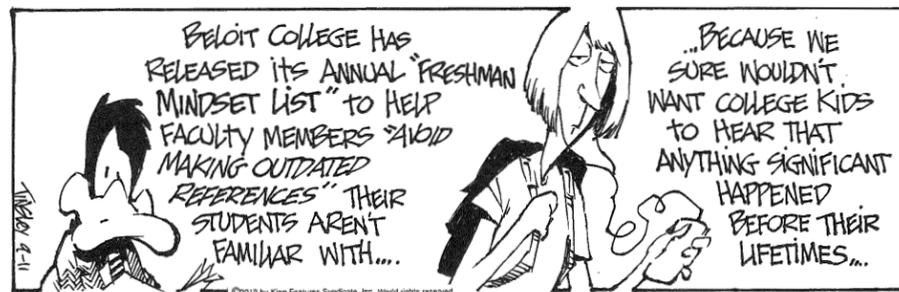
In today's educational system, 75% is a passing grade. Khan finds this unacceptable and favors 100% mastery. Even a score of 95% means 5% of an important concept is missed. Instead of ignoring that 5% deficiency, Khan's system remedies it. What is missed is reviewed and mastered. In this manner, all students reach proficiency in what they attempt. Students labeled as remedial have leapt ahead in math, sometimes attaining multiple grade levels in a short period of time.

Khan asks if it is not better to fully comprehend algebra than to have a superficial understanding of algebra, trigonometry and calculus?

Far from sidelining teachers, in the Khan model the role of the teacher is elevated to a mentor who provides quality, helpful interactions and challenging applications of concepts learned.

The mission statement of the Khan Academy is to "provide a free, world-class education for anyone, anywhere." In a world with broadening inequality and instability in some developing nations, education can be a game changer.

MALLARD FILLMORE / by Bruce Tinsley



Zero Tolerance for Deaf Child's Name

Parents of a deaf child named Hunter were told by his Nebraska public preschool that they must change his name because he was in violation of the school district's weapons policy. To sign his name, the three-year-old crosses his index and middle fingers then wags his hands. This sign apparently appeared to school officials to represent a gun.

Grand Island Public Schools' policy section 8470 — Weapons in Schools states: "Students are forbidden to knowingly and voluntarily possess, handle, transmit or use any instrument in school, on school grounds or at school functions that is a firearm, weapon, or looks like a weapon. . . ."

Hunter Spanjer's family has chosen to use Signing Exact English (SEE) as their preferred means of communicating with Hunter, but he is also learning American Sign Language (ASL). At one point, the school seemed to imply that Hunter's parents had made a mistake by choosing SEE and that they should change to the district-preferred ASL. A district spokesman said, "The school district teaches American Sign Language (ASL) for students with hearing impairments. ASL is recommended by the Nebraska Department of Education and is widely used in the United States."

A school spokesman told the *Daily News* that one suggestion the district made was that Hunter spell out his name rather than signing it in one gesture. H-U-N-T-E-R seemed to some to be a daunting undertaking for a three-year-old.

In response to the situation, the National Association of the Deaf (NAD) called on Grand Island Public Schools to retract its "request and issue a statement that respects and supports Hunter Spanjer's cultural and linguistic identity." The NAD also offered to assist the family in "legal action if the school will not honor its own nondiscrimination policy, and instead misapply a weapons policy that is not even applicable."

In response to a media request, the school district stated, "Grand Island Public Schools is not requiring any current student with a hearing impairment to change his or her sign language name."

In a recent Facebook update Hunter's grandmother indicated that the preschool has decided to let Hunter use his SEE name sign. The school will also send staff to SEE training and will allow the Nebraska Commission for the Deaf to come to the school and present information to staff about the needs of the deaf.



FOCUS: Kiwis Do It Better?

A professor who grew up in New Zealand finds American universities to be more like finishing schools.



Richard Cocks

by Richard Cocks

I am a New Zealand native who has experienced higher education both there and in the United States. I came to the United States in 1990 to do a Ph.D. in philosophy at the University of Cincinnati, and I now teach at SUNY's Oswego campus. Let me share with you a few of my experiences in the United States and how they contrasted with higher education in New Zealand. But be warned: the end of the story is not a good one. Since I left in 1990, New Zealand seems to be following the path laid out by Americans.

In the United States, I quickly came to realize that "college" was not university, but more like a finishing school. Professors, though sounding grand in name to a New Zealander, have only a quarter of the status of a lecturer in New Zealand.

I also discovered that my so-called students couldn't write.

In my first semester as a graduate assistant, I gave up the idea of asking American students to write essays because I was sure that failing all my students wouldn't be regarded as acceptable. Most would have failed because their writing was deplorable. Later I came to believe that their poor writing was because they hardly ever read for pleasure.

I decided to try other methods of getting students to learn to express themselves. One method is asking several homework questions, which, if properly answered, will constitute a well-written essay. The answers are submitted and corrected all semester until both the writing and the content are perfect. In that way, I can have high standards without failing the majority of students. The students master the material and improve their writing ability at the same time.

As a new instructor, I had imagined that I would be able to refer to famous cultural items as a common reference point. "This is like *Madame Bovary*," I would venture. Silence. I naively thought that I just needed to find the right cultural references. Perhaps Charlie Chaplin. He rose to fame in the U.S. after all. Nope. Unfortunately, there are no universally known cultural references that all one's students will be conversant with.

High standards are attainable only by restricting enrollment to those capable of meeting those standards. Open enrollment and high standards are incompatible. In addition, high achievement in any field is likely to be limited by one's motivation, and motivation in turn is affected by interest. Only a small minority of any popu-

lation is actually interested in academic subjects.

In New Zealand (before I left, that is) university was for the elite, but was strictly meritocratic. Only academic merit was considered. Community service and "leadership" abilities were irrelevant. There were no fees to speak of and the small government stipend meant that all who were qualified could afford to attend.

There were no remedial classes at university. The American idea of "college," by contrast, seems to me to be more like

a venue for trying to learn some of the things one should have mastered in high school.

The modern American system pretends to be more democratic and less elitist by

making college available to nearly all. But this is largely an illusion. I would argue that the very concept of non-elite higher education is unintelligible. There is nothing "higher" about an education that requires no special abilities or effort to attain.

Most American students cannot actually understand what their professors are trying to teach them unless the professors reduce the level of what they are teaching to the level of concrete operational, or rule-governed, thinking. Biology as a subject seems to be very amenable to this kind of thing. Concrete operational thinkers are in principle capable of understanding "facts" and of rote learning. The students are told what three things will appear on the exam and then reproduce it.

Among the worst features of American colleges is the importance attached to student evaluations of professors and their courses.

There were no teaching evaluations in New Zealand. From my perspective, teaching evaluations are counter-productive. Teaching, like parenting, is not a popularity contest. In fact, seeking to win the favor of your students is directly at loggerheads with one's mission to educate them.

I frequently have problems with teaching evaluations because I am considered to be a hard grader with high standards and I don't focus on ingratiation in the classroom. I do try to include humor and I usually have energy and enthusiasm. Still, hard grading sometimes leads to complaints.

At one college where I taught, the mere fact of complaints was taken by my department to be evidence that I was doing something wrong. That those complaints were found to be groundless

was no defense! Warrantless complaints were deemed an indication that I had a problem and I was told that if I wanted to keep my job, I needed to get better evaluations.

I found out which professor had the highest evaluations and then quizzed him about the secret of his success. His candor was astounding. His emailed response was that "in response to pressure from students and the administration, I have lowered my standards and increased my grades."

Another problem with American universities is the fact that there is no attractive alternative. An incredibly important aspect of New Zealand's system was a workable alternative to attending university, something called a Polytechnic.

Polytechnics were entirely focused on vocational training. The vocations one could train for at a Polytechnic included nursing, journalism, lower-level engineering, being a chef, graphic design and being a secretary. Those are not nasty, underpaid, low-status jobs.

The modern American habit of forcing prospective nursing students, for example, to take academic subjects seems almost punitive and possibly counter-productive. I imagine most nursing students are not terribly interested in academic subjects nor have any special aptitude for them, partly for that reason.

Polytechnics were not as high status as university, but graduates from the former knew that they were likely to be highly employable whereas university

graduates had a much less certain future.

High school was very rigorous and failing their exams at some point was the prospect for ninety-five percent of the pupils. But failure just meant shifting away from academic subjects, which I imagine came as a relief to many people, and toward vocational areas with a relatively bright and assured future.

Thus, from my years in the United States, I believe that the nation's education system would be improved by providing alternative vocational tracks to attending college, abandoning teaching evaluations (or limiting them to appropriate questions), and restricting enrollment at colleges to those few students who really want a *higher* education.

Post script: I am sorry to report that since I left New Zealand it has been moving in the American direction. Polytechnics have largely been converted to lower-level colleges. The well-established universities of old now admit thirty percent of the population instead of five, necessitating the lowering of standards. Following the dictates of revised government policy, New Zealand high schools have largely stripped the rigor and standards out of the system and now attempt to fudge the differences of attainment between students.

Instead of setting good educational examples for the rest of the world, the United States is setting bad ones.

Source: The John William Pope Center for Higher Education

Affirmative Action (Continued from page 1)

They found that when minority students encounter a mismatch at their school, they often self-segregate. Through study of multiple schools, Arcidiacono and his colleagues concluded that decreasing admission preferences would increase the likelihood of cross-racial friendships even if it decreased the number of black and Hispanic students at the most elite schools.

Sander and Taylor, who confirmed these findings with their own research, explained: "It is, of course, not surprising that the large performance gaps on campus that highly correlate with race tend to foster — rather than undermine — racial stereotypes."

Sander and Taylor extol the University of California system's race-neutral admissions policy (established in 1998) and cite its success: "Black, American-Indian, and Hispanic students made up 26% of all U.C. freshmen in 2010, up from 16% in 1997 . . . while the number [of black and Hispanic students] with GPAs above 3.5 rose 63%."

Mismatch also emphasizes that the disparity between different races' academic performance levels needs to be ad-

ressed before students reach university age. The authors explain that "[a]ccording to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, the average black 12th-grader is on par with the average white 8th-grader." Sander and Taylor predict that this appalling disparity will take decades of education reform to fix.

Declaring that universities are too invested in affirmative action to change course while politicians are afraid to speak out against it for fear of being labeled as racist, Sander and Taylor call upon the Supreme Court to reform racial-preference systems when they decide *Fisher v. Texas*, a case that concerns affirmative action policies at the University of Texas. Sander and Taylor propose a variety of changes including: more transparency between academic admissions departments and prospective students; an increased focus on socioeconomic preferences above racial preferences; and a mandate to discontinue the use of race-based scholarships. They explain that these changes will not solve the problems affirmative action causes, "but they will set us on the path to more honest policies and inquiry." *Wall Street Journal*, 10-13-2012



Bucking Convention in Struggling Michigan Schools

Michigan's Education Achievement Authority (EAA) aims to improve the state's lowest-performing five percent of schools by bucking conventional tenets of education, including grade levels and letter grades. The EAA, headed by Chancellor John Covington, is essentially a new school district made up of the state's struggling schools. Some 10,000 students at EAA schools will advance according to their performance, rather than pre-established timing, and will follow personalized learning plans, a system the EAA calls "student-centered learning."

This year, Michigan students in EAA schools who would traditionally be placed in kindergarten through 9th grade are instead assigned according to 18 levels. These depend on students' skill levels, as determined by an assessment test two weeks into the school year. Students access personalized lessons in core areas and electives through logging onto a website that monitors each student's individual learning plan.

Before advancing to the next level of lessons, students must demonstrate that they have mastered the material through projects and tests. In an October 2012 article, *Education Week* explained: "For example, if a student's learning target is to show mastery of the concept of symmetry, the teacher will give a lesson, then the student will choose from several practice lessons online. Next, the program will offer a choice of projects to complete to show evidence of mastery."

Progress reports will not have A-F letter grades, but instead will list learning objectives and whether the student has achieved them or not.

Chancellor Covington explained, "When you start teaching a child where

they are — to address deficiencies — kids are going to be better off."

Both Covington and Mary Esselman, the EAA's chief officer of accountability, equity, and innovation implemented a similar student-focused system in ten schools in Kansas City, MO, before coming to Michigan. The Kansas City school district scrapped the system two years after starting it due to mixed test results and the new superintendent's hope to take the district down a different route.

According to *Education Week*, "The Chugach school district in rural Alaska, with 250 students, is credited with developing a model adopted by 29 schools and districts in the United States." Students taught in those 29 areas using the Chugach method are up to 55% more likely to pass state standardized tests.

Rick Schreiber, co-founder of the Alaska-based Re-inventing Schools Coalition, inspired by the Chugach schools, explained that "Usually, with the people we're working with, by year three is when we start to see some results that are pretty significant."

On the classroom level, *Education Week* reports that teachers are pleased with the personalized learning system. Jennifer Armstead, who teaches at the EAA's Nolan Elementary-Middle School recounted, "It used to be you'd teach the class, give them a work sheet. This is more individualized."

Nolan's Principal Angela Underwood, who formerly worked as principal in a Kansas City school under Chancellor Covington is confident that students will be successful using individualized plans. Mary Esselman, supports this sentiment: "You're not teaching a lesson, you're teaching a child." *Education Week*, 10-3-2012

Election Day (Continued from page 1)

defeated propositions that would have raised sales taxes that help fund education.

In Illinois, an amendment that would have required the General Assembly to pass public employee pension increases by a three-fifths vote instead of a simple majority was opposed by the NEA and the amendment failed.

Michigan voters rejected an amendment to the state constitution guaranteeing the rights of public and private sector employees to unionize. Although the NEA supported the amendment, 58% of voters rejected the measure.

Oklahomans overwhelmingly approved a constitutional amendment prohibiting affirmative action. Racial and sexual preferences in education, public employment and contracts are now against the law in that state except when affirmative action must be adhered to in order to keep or obtain federal funds.

Charter School Amendments

After three previous ballot defeats, charter schools were approved on the fourth try in Washington state. As many as eight charter schools a year may be

created for the next five years in the state.

Georgia solved its complicated charter school situation by passing a ballot measure that allows for the appointment of commissions that can approve charter schools even when a local school board has turned down the application. The Georgia Supreme Court had previously ruled that a statewide commission that approved the creation of charter schools was unconstitutional. Now the state constitution has been amended to provide for that entity. Independent commissions are important because local school boards are sometimes prone to deny the application of a competitor.

The Georgia Legislative Black Caucus has filed a lawsuit in an attempt to halt charter school creation. It is alleged that the 59% of voters who approved the amendment did not understand that they were voting for a commission to be created to approve charter schools. In response to the lawsuit, the *Wall Street Journal* stated, "This is the legal equivalent of sending back a hamburger because you didn't know it came with meat." (11-19-12)

The NEA opposed the charter schools amendments in Georgia and Washington.

Chess as An Equalizer

Chess is an inexpensive addition to curriculum that holds promise for a broad range of students to develop their potential, learn to think, and experience success. This is what has prompted one inner-city principal to become a proponent of using chess "as a great equalizer." Chess teaches students to think critically and to think ahead.



Working as a turnaround principal in three different inner city schools, Salome Thomas-EL has seen his students move on "to attend magnet and private high schools, competitive colleges and graduate and law schools." His students have come from the most impoverished areas of Wilmington, DE and Philadelphia to compete in and win local, state, and national chess championships.

Thomas-EL says playing chess requires the use of memory, logic, and reason and encourages students to consider rewards while seeing the

consequences of their decisions. Students as young as five years old can learn the game quickly. Using a few chess pieces or all of them, they learn to anticipate moves, think ahead, and solve multi-step problems, as well as how to make abstract decisions.

Believing that traditional U.S. curriculum does not allow students to learn and teach themselves in the early

grades, Thomas-EL states that chess allows students to think on their own, without the assistance of adults. He laments the focus on test scores to the detriment of learning to embrace and overcome challenges.

Thomas-EL, who has been an educator for 25 years, believes in innovative and creative approaches to education, and in having high expectations for students. Chess could be a cheap fix for schools where teaching to the test has resulted in students who never truly learn to think. *Education Week*, 9-26-2012

Private Education (Continued from page 2)

decided to adopt the standards according to a recent survey from the National Catholic Educational Association," reports *Education Week* (10-10-2012). Lutheran and other Christian schools are also choosing CCS.

Is this change motivated by a desire for better student results or is it an act of resignation or desperation? Private schools adopting CCS seem to believe they must do so in order to stay both competitive and credible. Some cite the fact that textbooks and testing are being adapted to CCS. There is also an expectation that eventually changes will be made to SAT and AP testing to reflect CCS. Schools also say parents want to compare schools and CCS makes it easier for them to do so.

But rather than keeping private schools competitive, adopting CSS can be seen to dilute and devalue private schools' worth as an alternative to public education. Private schools enrich the educational landscape through distinctions that make them different from public schools. If they teach to the same standards why should parents pay for what they can get free?

Stating that independence is central to the National Association of Independent Schools, its executive director Patrick F. Bassett was quoted in *Education Week* (10-10-2012) saying that he expects few NAIS college preparatory schools to adopt Common Core Standards. According to Bassett, "decision making through a national effort runs counter to our very being."

Reform Laws Repealed with NEA support

Bonuses for top-performing teachers and funding to attract teachers to areas of most need were voted down in South Dakota. Republican Gov. Dennis Daugaar attempted to end teacher tenure and instead pay teachers based on performance, but his efforts were overturned at the polls through a referendum put on the ballot by teachers unions. The laws passed by the state legislature would have given the top teachers in each district a \$5,000 bonus had it not been overturned by 68% of voters.

In Idaho, "Students Come First" education reform laws championed by state school superintendent Tom Luna and passed by the state legislature were repealed by a ballot referendum initiated by the state teachers union. The laws would have limited collective bargaining by teachers unions, eliminated tenure, partially tied teachers' pay to student test scores, and increased technology spending in schools. The NEA spent \$2.8 million to oppose the Idaho education reforms.

Social Issues and the NEA

NEA support helped a Maryland version of Obama's Dream Act succeed at the polls. The state will offer in-state tuition to illegal aliens who first attend two years of community college before attending a state college. University of Maryland out-of-state tuition is over \$25,000 while in-state tuition is just over \$7,000. The NEA supported another Maryland proposition in favor of gay marriage and that measure passed.

A Florida ballot measure titled "Religious Freedom" would have allowed tax dollars to fund parochial and other church-based schools. The NEA opposed it and it failed.

The NEA also fought a Minnesota ballot measure that would have required voters to show proper identification at the polls in future elections. This measure also failed.

Speaking from Obama's victory party, NEA president Dennis Van Roekel told the *Huffington Post*, "The ballot propositions show that we've turned a real corner in America." However, some may ask where exactly we've ended up after having turned that corner?