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Privacy Law Gutted to Track Your Kids

Would you mind if your state department of education and labor agency evaluated your son's academic record to see if he should be "encouraged" to leave high school early and go to trade school? How about if a state health agency looked at your daughter's health records to see how she responded to an STD and pregnancy prevention program? What if this information was also shared with federal agencies without your knowledge or consent?

According to Emmett McGroarty and Jane Robbins of the American Principles Project, those scenarios aren't so far-fetched in light of revised regulations released by the Department of Education in December. They say the amended Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) rules go a long way towards creating a de facto national database that will track students from preschool all the way through college and career. Although there is legislation on the books that bars the Department of Education from creating a national student database, the new administrative rules make an end run around Congress that effectively flouts that law.

Congress itself helped pave the way for the power grab when it passed the 2009 economic stimulus bill. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act required states to beef up their longitudinal student data systems according to federally dictated standards if they wanted a piece of the stimulus pie, and gave states \$250M to do so. Now, according to the sixth annual survey of the Data Quality Campaign, "without exception, every state in the country has robust longitudinal data that extend beyond test scores." (See the March 2010 issue of *Education Reporter* to learn about data tracked by some states, including family wealth indicators, student disciplinary records and some health information.)

So while there is no physical database housed and operated by federal agencies, those agencies now have ready access to data that the federal government requires the states to collect and main-

tain. That's how the Departments of Labor and Education could end up with your son's academic record and the Centers for Disease Control could end up with your daughter's health records. Parents need not grant permission or even be notified about these disclosures under the new rules.

The revised FERPA rules give the Department of Education and other federal, state, and local government agencies *carte blanche* to allow practically anyone to access personal student information for any reason, as long as the disclosure purports to support the evaluation of an "education" program. The new rules define "education program" very broadly and explicitly include bullying, substance abuse and violence prevention programs, as long as an educational agency or institution administers them.

Other programs such as dropout prevention and recovery programs, after-school programs designed to improve academic performance, college test tutoring, and high school equivalency programs are included "regardless of where or by whom they are administered." Persons who might be authorized to access data include contractors, consultants, volunteers and other outside parties who are conducting audit, evaluation or compliance activities on behalf of a government official or agency — in other words, pretty much anyone.

The regulations, effective since early January (which, ironically, is designated as Data Privacy Month), drew sharp criticism when they were first proposed last April. The American Association of College Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) called the proposed changes "a wholesale repudiation of fair information practices" that undermine "well-settled principles of notice, consent, access, participation, data minimization, and

(See *Privacy Law*, page 4)



Liberal Coalition Proposes National Sex Standards

A coalition of progressive educators aligned with the family planning and homosexual lobbies are promoting questionable guidelines for what, when, and how topics concerning sexuality should be taught to students K-12 nationwide. Some of the groups involved include Planned Parenthood Advocates for Youth, the notorious Sexuality Information and Education Council of the U.S. (SIECUS), Answer, and the National Education Association Health Information Network, an arm of the nation's largest teacher's union. An

advisory committee includes senior officials from Planned Parenthood and the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network.

The proposed National Sexuality Education Standards purport to set forth "essential sexuality education core content" that is the answer to "inconsistent implementation of sexuality education nationwide." Report authors also cite "a pressing need to address harassment, bullying and relationship violence in our schools" as part of the rationale for comprehensive sex ed in public schools.

Some examples of the "age-appropriate" standards recommended in the report include:

Grades K-2

1. Identify different kinds of family structure
2. Demonstrate how to show respect for different types of families
3. Describe differences and similarities in how boys and girls may be expected to act

Grades 3-5

1. Describe male and female reproductive systems including body parts and their functions
2. Define sexual orientation as romantic attraction towards someone of the same gender or a different gender

Grades 6-8

1. Differentiate between gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation
2. Explain the range of gender roles

3. Define sexual intercourse and its relationship to human reproduction
4. Describe the steps to using a condom correctly
5. Define emergency contraception [the "morning after" pill] and its use

Grades 9-12

1. Differentiate between biological sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity and expression
2. Differentiate between sexual orientation, sexual behavior, and sexual identity
3. Advocate for school policies and programs that promote dignity and respect for all
4. Access medically accurate information about contraception methods, including abstinence and condoms
5. Access medically accurate information and resources about emergency contraception
6. Explain how to access local STD and HIV testing and treatment services

(See *National Sex Standards*, page 4)

New Parent Power in New Hampshire

New Hampshire parents have a new tool for directing their children's public school education. The Tea Party dominated legislature overrode Democratic Governor John Lynch's veto to approve a measure empowering parents to request an alternative for any aspect of their child's school curriculum they find objectionable.

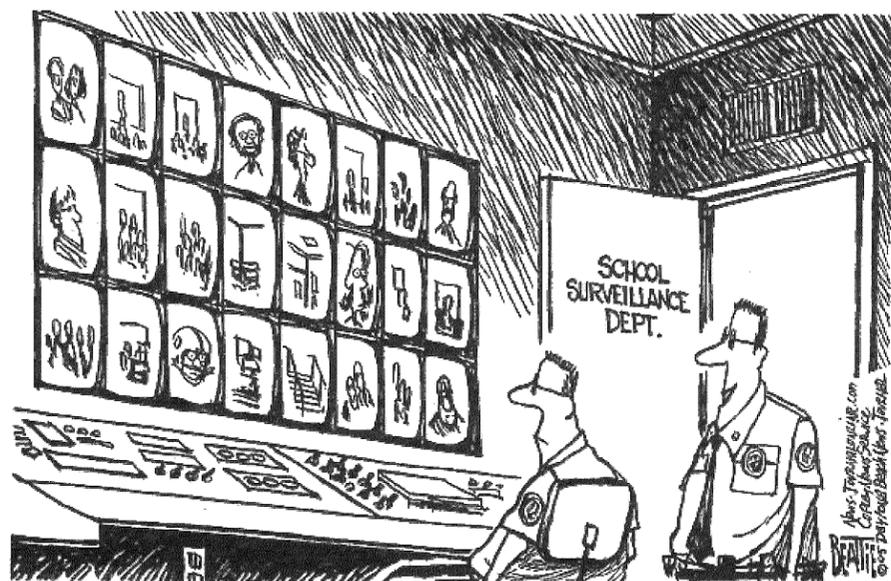
School districts must now work with parents to determine an alternative curriculum or text that will satisfy state educational requirements for the particular subject matter. Parents are responsible for paying the cost of developing the new curriculum and for any substitute materials.

Bill sponsor Rep. J.R. Hoell emphasized that the law enables parents to ad-

dress both moral and academic objections to the curriculum. For example, parents who disagree with the "whole language" approach to reading instruction could request a phonics-based curriculum instead. Hoell also said parents could object to the distribution of condoms and lubricants in sex ed classes. He disputed criticism that parents could opt children out of sex ed classes entirely, saying only parents with religious objections could do so.

In his veto message, Governor Lynch protested that the measure would prove too burdensome to school districts and could cause teachers to shy away from "new ideas and critical thinking" to avoid complaints. His comments gave parents little credit for using good

(See *Parent Power*, page 4)



"Oh, look . . . they're reading '1984' in Ms. Smith's English class."

EDUCATION BRIEFS

Advocates for religious liberty won an important victory on January 11 when the Supreme Court ruled unanimously that a Lutheran school teacher could not sue her employer. The Supreme Court ruled that churches and church organizations enjoy a virtually absolute right to fire individuals under the “ministerial exception” to employment laws, and religious employers are protected from being second-guessed by judges for their employment decisions about who will “carry out their mission.” A 4th-grade teacher had threatened to sue the school under the Americans With Disabilities Act over an employment dispute.

A recent Pew Research Center Poll found that a majority of young people favor socialism over capitalism. The poll, published on December 28, found that 49% of 18-29 year olds said they hold a positive view of socialism, while just 43% reported a negative view. Only 46% indicated a positive view of capitalism, and 47% reported a negative view. 18-29 year olds are the only age group in which support for socialism is higher than support for capitalism.

An Atlanta federal appeals court upheld a ruling that an Augusta State University student must keep her biblical views on sex to herself. The University threatened Jennifer Keeton, a graduate school counseling student, with expulsion when she said it would be difficult for her to work with gay clients. Keeton filed a lawsuit claiming the school was punishing her for her Christian views, but courts rejected her challenge. Keeton was asked in May 2010 to attend sensitivity training, read counseling journals, and mix with gays at the gay pride parade.

Los Angeles students are eating more junk food than ever, thanks to the L.A. school district’s healthful lunch menu. The award-winning menu, which has been hailed as revolutionary in the fight against youth obesity, diabetes, and other health problems, has not been popular with students. Thousands of students have dropped out of the program, and others report suffering from headaches, stomach pain and anemia due to skipping lunch.

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States Work With 3rd Graders to Tackle Low Graduation Rates

Iowa and New Mexico are leading a movement to turn to an unlikely group for help addressing low high school graduation rates: the nation’s third graders.

That’s because studies show that children who can’t read by the 3rd grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school than their more reading-proficient peers. If those 3rd graders are poor, the likelihood that they will not graduate by age 19 increases 13-fold.

Governors in Iowa and New Mexico have proposed new reading skill levels for 3rd graders in hopes that early literacy intervention will help students by preventing “social promotion” and will save the states money in the long-term. The Governors are encouraging their respective state legislators to consider the new policies when they meet this winter.

The proposed reading standards have already met with some controversy. Democrats in New Mexico have been particularly critical, calling Governor Susana Martinez’ proposal “the third-grade flunking bill” and arguing that increased 3rd

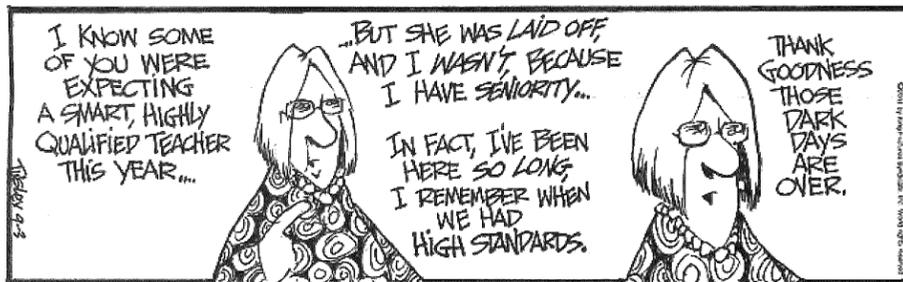
grade retention is “punitive,” “counterproductive,” and would decrease parental involvement in schools. Governor Martinez has responded by calling for a “bold change” in New Mexico’s education policy, pointing out that existing policies have left New Mexico in 48th place nationally in education achievement rankings, and that 80% of New Mexico’s current 4th grade students cannot read at grade level.

Iowa officials have proposed an “Iowa Center for Literacy Education” to provide early literacy resources to its most at-risk districts, and are recommending statewide reading assessments for all 3rd graders in March of each year in an effort to keep students who cannot pass the tests from advancing to the 4th grade. Retained 3rd graders would be offered the opportunity to advance following an intensive summer reading camp, and would be permitted to advance to the 4th grade during the school year as soon as they can read.

Similar proposals have already been made into law in Utah, Arizona, and Oklahoma.



MALLARD FILLMORE / by Bruce Tinsley



EEOC Stifles Students and Punishes Employers

A high school diploma has long been considered the most basic requirement for entry-level employment. And while the value of that diploma has slipped thanks to ever-declining educational standards, its status as an indicator of adulthood and basic competency has not — until now.

An “informal discussion letter” issued by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) threatens to replace this long-standing employment requirement with a set of vague terms regarding “business necessity” and “reasonable accommodation” — leaving both students and their would-be employers at the mercy of lawyers and bureaucrats who have little incentive to act according to the real interests of either group.

The EEOC’s letter offers an expansive new interpretation of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) when it explains,

Thus, if an employer adopts a high school diploma requirement for a job, and that requirement “screens out” an individual who is unable to graduate because of a learning disability that meets the ADA’s definition of “disability,” the employer may not apply the standard *unless* it can demonstrate

that the diploma requirement is job related and consistent with business necessity. The employer will not be able to make this showing, for example, if the functions in question can easily be performed by someone who does not have a diploma.

Even if the diploma requirement is job related and consistent with business necessity, the employer may still have to determine whether a particular applicant whose learning disability prevents him from meeting it can perform the essential functions of the job, with or without a reasonable accommodation. It may do so, for example, by considering relevant work history and/or by allowing the applicant to demonstrate an ability to do the job’s essential functions during the application process. If the individual can perform the job’s essential functions, with or without a reasonable accommodation, despite the inability to meet the standard, the em-

(See EEOC, page 4)

Book of the Month



You Can Still Trust the Communists to be Communists (Socialists and Progressives Too), Fred C. Schwarz and David A. Noebel, Summit Ministries, 2010, 370 pages, \$14.95.



If you doubt that the public school system is producing a generation of American socialists, a December 2011 Pew Research Center Poll is Exhibit A (see *Briefs* at left). The survey didn’t ask respondents for their opinion on communism, but socialism has long been viewed as a steppingstone to full-fledged communism. As Vladimir Lenin said, “The goal of socialism is communism.”

The Marxist-Leninist promise of a social utopia still deceives many in American academic, political and social circles, and they work steadily to advance its agenda from their positions of influence and power. School-age children regularly imbibe atheism, evolution and economic determinism (also known as “social justice”) in their classrooms without being told that these are the three basic tenets of communism. That’s why Americans still need Fred C. Schwarz’s classic primer to understand the theory, strategy, tactics, and objectives of communism.

Schwarz came to the United States from Australia in the mid-1950s and trained two generations of Americans, including Ronald Reagan, to understand and defeat communism. A physician by training, Schwarz was particularly good at using medical metaphors to diagnose communism, explain how it germinates and spreads, and prescribe the cure.

The essence of Dr. Schwarz’s message was published in his 1960 book, which uses simple language and cogent arguments to explain how people are recruited and molded to be communist loyalists, how they seize power, set up deceptive fronts, and take over the agenda of other organizations. The book also explains the mystery of why communism appeals to segments of the wealthy, intellectuals and idealistic reformers.

Schwarz’s book has been updated and republished by David Noebel, an expert on worldviews and the founder of Summit Ministries. Noebel left Schwarz’s original work largely untouched, but added a useful bibliography and three new chapters to update us on the continuing communist assault on capitalism and Christianity. His final chapter, titled “The Socialization of America,” shows how the U.S. House of Representatives “crawls with a large, well-organized assembly of Socialist organizations.”

If you need help persuading others to read this book, share this quote from Nikita Khrushchev, printed in the appendix: “We can’t expect the American people to jump from capitalism to communism, but we can assist their elected leaders in giving them small doses of socialism until they awaken one day to find that they have communism.”

FOCUS: SAT Wars

By Mary Grabar

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When standardized college admissions tests, like the SAT, are eliminated, as some argue they should be, what will replace them? Aspiring college freshmen might be asked to write a story to the title, "The Octopus's Sneakers." Or they might be asked to answer, "Who has had more impact on your life, William Shakespeare or Ryan Seacrest?"

These are actual questions already being used. They are among the things promoted in the new book, *SAT Wars: The Case for Test-Optional College Admissions*, published by Columbia Teachers College Press. A more accurate title would have been "Declaring War on the SAT."

The first of the aforementioned examples is from Oklahoma State Psychology Professor Robert J. Sternberg's Rainbow Test, which he promotes (along with the "Kaleidoscope" test) as "an atheoretical [sic] composite" that tests "motivation and conscientiousness." Other test tasks include "orally telling two stories based upon choices of picture collages" or "captioning cartoons."

The Shakespeare/Seacrest prompt

faces potential students at Wake Forest University, where sociology Professor Joseph A. Soares was instrumental in that school's adoption of a test optional admissions policy.

The new program relies on face-to-face interviews after candidates are prescreened with 30-minute written online virtual interviews using questions like the Shakespeare/Seacrest one. Soares also happens to be the editor of this new book. In his introduction, Soares notes that all but three of the chapters originated as presentations at national conferences: at Wake Forest, the American Educational Research Association, and the National Association of College Admissions Counselors (NACAC), the group that I wrote about in 2009. NACAC's 2008 report encouraged institutions "to consider dropping the admissions test requirements."

Then, I noted the self-contradictions within its own pages and that this purportedly professional organization would be relying on the dubious research of activist Robert Schaeffer, a widely quoted Public Education Director for the misnamed National Center for Fair & Open Testing, or Fair Test.

As I described in 2009, Schaeffer runs a firm that provides "strategic communications for progressive causes," like nuclear disarmament, making Schaeffer

something less than an authority on higher education policy. In "SAT Wars," Schaeffer offers a recycling of an old essay that relies on the "research" conducted by Fair Test.

Another contributor to the volume is a lawyer who was involved in two lawsuits against the Educational Testing Service, the company that administers the SAT, which is the oldest and most widely used college admissions test. Such conflicts of interest lead to contradictions within the book.

For example, *SAT Wars* tells us the test should be eliminated or made optional because it privileges white, upper-class children of college-educated parents who can afford test preparation courses. Later in the book, we learn that such courses have no statistically significant bearing on improved scores.

Standard charges about discrimination against minorities are repeated, but the fact that Asian minority students outperform the presumed "privileged" white students is almost ignored.

In fact, Soares, in his conclusion, contradicts the points made by the authors of the final essay, Thomas J. Espenshade and Chang Yang Chung. Soares repeats the mantra, "High school



GPA is the best academic predictor of college grades, and the SAT/ACT adds only very modestly to the power of statistical models."

Espenshade and Chung, though, assert "standardized admissions test scores are statistically significant and substantively important predictors of college grades." Looking at an evaluation of 150,000 students from 110 four-year colleges and universities, they conclude that GPA and test scores in combination "do best."

They refer to research that "discred[its] the belief that SAT or ACT tests are biased against members of minority groups."

Where the SAT is useful is among those groups that test-optional advocates purport to help: those from poorly performing schools, most often in low-income and minority areas. Three researchers from Johns Hopkins University affirm the importance of the SAT in qualifying math and science students.

They write, "For almost all academic areas, the introduction of SAT scores made the effects of race insignificant or considerably lessened. In other words, considering the SAT helped to mitigate the effect of race." For natural science and engineering students, "the effect of parent education went away with the introduction of SAT scores."

According to Espenshade and Chung, it is at top-tier high schools that grade point averages hold the most weight in predicting academic success. Grade point averages in low-performing schools are least likely to be reliable predictors.

Admissions people know that an "A" from a poorly performing school does not mean the same as one from a high-achieving school. For the smart student who happens to be stuck at a poor school, standardized tests offer an opportunity to shine.

Espenshade and Chung also distinguish between a test-optional policy, where students have the option of submitting scores as part of their application process, and the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy of disregarding scores altogether. The latter is the most encouraging to groups that underperform, but the authors conclude, "At some point a tradeoff emerges between diversity and college preparedness."

When one's main concern is not academics but "diversity" and identifying "creative, ethical problem-solvers" through Rainbow tests as Soares recommends, it seems that the evidence to the contrary can be ignored. "I hope," he concludes, "that as part of this conversa-

(See *SAT Wars*, page 4)

Schools Need Less Emphasis on Empathy

By Mary Grabar

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The recent controversy over a lesson on Islam used in a Cobb middle school as supplemental material for a unit on the Middle East illustrates a problem that goes beyond what Pamela Geller calls the "Islamization" of America. After being withdrawn from Cobb and Henry schools, it was correctly taken off the approved state list for supplemental materials by state school Superintendent John Barge.

A first-person narrative of the fictional young woman, Ahlima, serves to express the superiority of Islamic dress (it's modest), Islamic law (Shariah offers "protection" to women) and polygamous marriage (it protects women from divorce). It brings 11-year-olds to answer, "What do you think about what Ahlima told you?" and thereby demonstrates a disturbing set of assumptions.

Consider what an "official" of the curriculum company told an Atlanta Journal-Constitution reporter: "It's important for kids to have some empathy for other people in the world."

Really? When did schools get into the empathy business?

But this official's admission illustrates how prevalent this belief is among educators. Educators have swung sharply from what most citizens believe schools should be doing, and that is imparting

knowledge objectively and teaching students how to present written and oral arguments using logic and evidence.

Instead, students are asked to adopt attitudes and present opinions on adult issues. Most students recognize and resist overt proselytizing. They find it more difficult when they are asked to empathize with individual characters, like "Ahlima." But there are other means by which educators exploit students emotionally:

- Writing assignments that ask for feelings and opinions. Teachers follow the lead of organizations like the National Council for Teachers of English and assign informal, impressionistic projects like blogging, journal-keeping and pictorial representations, instead of traditional papers.
- Group work. Students are given emotional prompts, like a song, and are asked to discuss how various groups would "feel." Children and teenagers, already susceptible to peer pressure, are encouraged to conform to the prevailing attitude of the group — and the teacher.
- Community service. Volunteering loses its meaning when it is done to fulfill requirements. A few hours spooning out soup offers much in boosting students' egos, but little in boosting academic knowledge.
- The emphasis on everyday people, instead of leaders and heroes. When individuals aren't studied for historically significant accomplishments,

the focus turns to feelings and personal sufferings.

- Anti-bullying efforts. Sometimes with good intentions, legislators mandate emotionally invasive, and perhaps emotionally damaging, strategies to address bullying. These workshops force children to reveal fears and emotions, breaking down their sense of autonomy.

Education schools train teachers in such strategies by de-emphasizing knowledge and asking education majors to study identity politics and learning styles, and to fulfill course requirements by journaling and thinking "deeply."

As I learned at a college teaching workshop, millennials (born between the mid-'70s and mid-'90s) don't respect authority, get bored easily and demand justification and reward for every task. Not surprisingly, employers are finding graduates ignorant about history and civics, with poor work habits and horrible communication skills.

A 2009 York College study, "Professionalism in the Workplace," found that employers who felt that professionalism had decreased among new graduates most often attributed it to a "sense of entitlement."

To pick up the slack of the classroom, we need tutors, graduation coaches and work readiness programs. Some of the decline is due to circumstances beyond educators' control, like family dysfunction. But when schools emphasize

(See *Empathy*, page 4)

Mexican-American Studies Standoff

A controversial Mexican-American Studies (MAS) program in Arizona has finally been suspended a full year after a law banning the courses took effect. The governing board of the Tucson Unified School District (TUSD) voted 4-1 to immediately terminate the



classes after Arizona's Superintendent of Public Instruction John Huppenthal announced he would retroactively enforce a provision to withhold 10% of the district's state funding if the district did not

come into compliance with the new law. TUSD Superintendent John Pedicone said the penalty amounted to \$8M since August 15th and could total \$15M annually. Board president Mark Stegeman said the district "would have great difficulty coping" with such a significant loss of funding. "It's safe to say that [Huppenthal and the Legislature] are trying to increase the pressure on the board to take immediate

action," he added.

The law in question bans courses that are designed primarily for one ethnic group, advocate ethnic solidarity over treating people as individuals, or promote resentment towards a race or class of people. The MAS program does all three, according to Huppenthal. A U.S. Circuit Court judge ruled against eleven teachers and two students who asked for an injunction prohibiting enforcement of the new law until their lawsuit is settled.

The situation is complicated by the MAS's status as the linchpin of a court-ordered desegregation program. Attorneys with the Mexican-American Legal Defense and Educational Fund are seeking reinstatement of the classes on behalf of several families involved in a 38-year-old desegregation lawsuit against the TUSD. A federal judge wanted to close the case in recent years, but the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that the district had not complied with the plan and still required judicial oversight. (TucsonSentinel.com, 1-10-12; AZCentral.com, 2-7-12)

Privacy Law (Continued from page 1)

data retention."

The AACRAO also charged that the Department of Education lacks the legal authority to implement most of the "radical changes" proposed through this regulatory action, particularly since some of the changes "clearly conflict with congressional intent." The Department responded by claiming broad authority to make whatever regulation changes they deem necessary to "manage the functions of the Secretary [of Education] or the Department."

Rep. John Kline, Chairman of the U.S. House Committee on Education and the Workforce, expressed his objections in a letter back in May, requesting that Education Secretary Arne Duncan rescind the proposed regulations because they "violate Congressional intent" and constitute "an assault" on student privacy. In contrast to the bold language of Kline's protest letter, the Committee's response to the Education Department's ultimate regulatory power grab was muted. A spokeswoman said the Committee will be "monitoring the implementation of the new rule carefully" to determine whether the Department of Education is "taking appropriate steps to protect student privacy."

EEOC (Continued from page 2)

ployer may not use the high school diploma requirement to exclude the applicant. However, the employer is not required to prefer the applicant with a learning disability over other applicants who are better qualified.

Though the EEOC states that the letter is merely "an informal discussion" and "should not be considered an official opinion of the EEOC," the legal implications are clear. "Employers should take note," argues Dan Danner of biggovernment.com:

Despite this being an "informal" letter, EEOC investigators and trial lawyers will undoubtedly use this to their advantage. It continues an unfortunate pattern of federal agencies quietly making policy and stepping up enforcement on small businesses for the slightest missteps.

The Department received 274 comments from parents, privacy advocates, researchers, professional associations and various education representatives. In the end, they rejected almost all of the suggested changes, releasing the final regulations with very few substantive modifications. The changes they did incorporate generally loosened restrictions and further broadened access with the effect of reducing privacy protection.

Several commenters specifically expressed concern that the new rules create a "de facto nationwide database" of confidential student information. While Department officials acknowledged that states might choose to link their data systems with other states, they denied that such a system of interconnected databases would be national because the federal government "would not play a role in its operation."

McGroarty and Robbins protest that this denial is disingenuous since the Department would have access to data from all 50 states and could share it with whomever they choose. "Unless Congress steps in and reclaims its authority, student privacy and parental control over education will be relics of the past," concluded McGroarty and Robbins. (NYPost.com, 12-28-11)

Labor and employment lawyer Maria Greco Danaher agrees:

While an employer is not required to 'prefer' a learning-disabled applicant over other applicants with more extensive qualifications, it is clear that the EEOC is informing employers that disabled individuals cannot be excluded from consideration for employment based upon artificial barriers in the form of inflexible qualification standards.

Business owners are not the only people who should be concerned about this development. Students will have little incentive to finish high school if they know they can earn a living without a diploma, and there may well be a rush to diagnose able students with learning disabilities so they can receive preferential treatment in the workplace.

National Sex Standards (Continued from page 1)

The National Abstinence Education Association (NAEA) is one of the organizations criticizing the proposed standards for using sex education guidelines as a vehicle to promote controversial ideological agendas in K-12 classrooms. Valerie Huber, Executive Director of the NAEA, told the *Washington Post* that sex ed should be "about health, rather than agendas that have nothing to do with optimal sexual health decision-making. Controversial topics are best reserved for conversations between parent and child, not in the classroom."

Leslee Unruh of the National Abstinence Clearinghouse went further, assessing the proposed standards as nothing more than an attempt to brainwash schoolchildren with a "twisted worldview." She called upon parents to "take charge and refute these guidelines in the school systems."

Focus on the Family education analyst Candi Cushman argued that "no national, special-interest group should control how local schools address" sex education. "Parents and school officials are the most qualified to develop good policies based on their communities' needs," she said.

Though the proposed guidelines are being touted by the authors as "the first-ever national standards for sexuality educa-

tion in schools," at present they are merely suggestions, with no enforcement power behind them. However, Cushman noted, the NEA's involvement could provide the thrust needed to get the standards implemented into schools quickly, and without parental knowledge or consent. "Schools are under no obligation to carry out these so-called standards," she said. Nonetheless, she added, the "unfortunate reality is that these guidelines could still be used by some schools and liberal education officials as leverage to undermine parental rights and expose children to controversial sexual teaching against their parents' will." Cushman said that historically parents have often been able to block such efforts when they spoke out. (See Focus on the Family's TrueTolerance.org website for resources.)

"Explicit, anything-goes-sex-education groups would have our children and youth believe there are no values, principles, or moral foundations associated with sexuality," said Chad Hills, also of Focus on the Family. He said the "soft sell" used by the coalition is intentional. "If parents knew who was on the advisory committee that crafted these recommendations, they'd take immediate action." (TheNewAmerican.com, 1-16-12; CitizenLink.com, 1-10-12)

Parent Power (Continued from page 1)

judgment about their children's education: "Parents could object to a teacher's plan to teach the history of France or the history of the civil or women's rights movements. Under this bill, a parent could find objectionable how a teacher instructs on the basics of algebra."

State Democratic Chairman Ray

Buckley also expressed disdain for parental influence on children's education, calling the law "an unprecedented attack on New Hampshire children's right to a quality education." He claimed it would "end education in New Hampshire as we know it, allowing children to be removed from any lessons their parents choose." (HuffingtonPost.com, 1-4-12)

SAT Wars (Continued from page 3)

tion each college would find ways to move beyond the SAT/ACT."

Continuing a "conversation" appears to be the aim, for real evidence seems to have little bearing. Martha Allman, dean of admissions at Wake Forest, describes an exhausting admissions selection process requiring extra personnel.

But because the new cadre of students was "the most accomplished and the most geographically, ethnically, and socioeconomically diverse class in Wake Forest history," it was worth the tears, occasional raised voices, and late nights, according to her. It's to be expected when admissions decisions rely on responses to inane questions.

Soares agrees with Allman about the results and rhapsodizes about "more lively

class discussion," "classroom excitement," and "students looking more diverse, not just racially but also in terms of attire and comportment."

Finally, he repeats the refrain that has become dogma: "All students, regardless of race, ethnicity, or gender, learn best in a community with a diversity of talents and demographics."

I've never seen a legitimate study to support this claim, nor is one of any kind offered in this collection.

Pity the underprivileged student from a poor-performing school who is a math whiz and faces the task of coming up with a story about an octopus. I have a Ph.D. in English, and I doubt that I could come up with one to satisfy these new keepers of the academic gates.

Empathy (Continued from page 3)

feelings over knowledge and give students a false sense of accomplishment, they're not helping.

Real knowledge and a strong work ethic come from such things as memorization, rewards for correct answers, intellectually challenging reading, and standard-based math and writing, not from "brainstorming" in groups, or getting praise for unsupported opinions, impres-

sionistic scribbling in journals or token acts of do-good-ism. The "Ahlima" lesson should prompt school officials and parents to investigate how schools have lost sight of their mission.

Mary Grabar holds a Ph.D. in English and teaches at a university in Atlanta. She writes frequently on education, culture, and politics, and is a published fiction writer and poet.