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35 Educators Indicted in Atlanta

In an aberration, or perhaps just the tip of the iceberg across the nation, 35 educators have been indicted in Atlanta for cheating on standardized tests. Charges include racketeering, theft, influencing witnesses, and making false statements. Beverly L. Hall, the former district superintendent and a star of the school reform movement, was included in the sweep.

While Governor of Georgia, Sonny Perdue took persistent rumors and allegations about cheating in Atlanta schools very seriously. In 2010 he appointed two special prosecutors and a special investigator to conduct a criminal investigation into cheating on standardized tests. The *Atlanta Journal Constitution (AJC)* contributed to the investigation. They, and state education officials, found “extraordinary increases in test scores from one year to the next, along with a high number of erasures on answering sheets from wrong to right.” After years of lying and stonewalling, some educators finally began to tell the truth. Some are now state witnesses.

It is alleged that erasing parties were held to correct student tests and that score manipulation occurred. One teacher states that she and six other teachers “sat in a locked windowless room every afternoon during the week of state testing, raising students’ scores by erasing wrong answers and making them right.”



Retired Superintendent Hall, who was once Secretary of Education Arne Duncan’s guest at the White House, was known for being a tough and intractable leader who demanded that her teachers and principals performed. Teachers whose classes did not meet standardized test targets were fired. “In her decade as superintendent, she replaced 90% of principals,” according to the *New York Times* (03-29-13).

“The indictment served as a resounding refutation of Hall’s assertions that Atlanta had found the secret formula that had long eluded educators elsewhere: how to get strong performances from poor, mostly minority students in decaying urban schools,” according to the *AJC*.

Hall earned more than \$500,000 in bonuses over 10 years. The bonuses were partially tied to increased test scores. Bond for her release was originally \$7.5 million, but was reduced somewhat. She faces up to 45 years in prison, if convicted. The current Atlanta superintendent of schools drives himself, but Hall incurred a \$100,000-a-year district expense for a security and transportation detail.

“Hall inculcated an atmosphere that encouraged using any means necessary to achieve test-score targets, the indictment said, and then ‘publicly misrepresented the academic performance of schools

(See *Educators Indicted*, page 4)

‘The Edifice Complex’ on College Campuses

Many colleges and universities are using borrowed money to improve campuses in order to attract students. From dorms with single occupancy and private baths to state-of-the-art fitness centers, campus improvements may contribute to higher college costs for students. Called “The Edifice Complex” by some, the construction is motivated by a desire to build prestige for the institution. Edifice Complex is a play on words combining the imposing edifices (buildings) cropping up on campus with the psychoanalytic theory of the Oedipus complex.

Many colleges, particularly in the Northeast and Midwest U.S., face stagnating enrollment rates. However, students and parents today are often more concerned about price than luxury. The dismal economy has depleted college funds and parents’ earning capacity. Increased tax burdens for parents are causing greater frugality in college choices.

The *New York Times* obtained data from Moody’s credit rating agency indicating that 500 institutions doubled their debt levels from 2000 to 2011, to \$205 billion. Although some of the colleges doing major building are rich in endowments, they are still borrowing to build.

Student indebtedness has reached the critical \$1 trillion

mark. Default rates on college loans are also at an all-time high. Job prospects for young people are dismal. This is causing students and parents to reconsider high-priced schools. Moody’s has “a negative outlook on all but the top state universities and private schools.”

Ohio University economics professor Richard Vedder, who is also the director of the Center for College Affordability and Productivity, says, “The Edifice Complex pervading higher education flies in the face of other trends that call for caution in capital spending.”

Some campus spending is done to shore up older buildings for student safety. Other schools are adding lazy rivers and rock climbing walls to fitness centers. The Edifice Complex is contributing to higher tuition and fees for students, and often also to the burden faced by taxpayers through direct funding. Taxpayers are left on the hook when students are unable to repay their loans. (*New York Times*, 12-14-2012)



Common Core’s Political Agenda

The Common Core State Standards are standardizing student learning and performance nationwide and will gauge achievement using national tests. The standards were called for and created at the behest of the federal government. Although the word “state” is commonly used in the program description, no state produced the standards. Rather, committees created them for all states. Governors were enticed to sign on before the standards were even completed. Forty-six states are teaching to the English Language standards and 45 have adopted the math standards. Common Core national standards are currently being developed for science and social studies. National testing will begin in 2014.

The standards are available online. Many have called them confusing and complicated. Detailed goals for each grade level are offered, as well as means of measuring achievements. Books, poems and informational reading are suggested in “text exemplar” sections of Appendices.

Critics and some English teachers object to the emphasis on “informational texts” and the move away from literature that is necessitated to include those assignments.

Although there are no hard and fast rules for using the texts suggested in the Appendices of the Common Core Standards for English Language Arts, it would make sense for teachers to adopt those suggested rather than choosing other readings. They will be teaching to a test so why would they deviate from what the testers suggest?

Examination of two of the English Language “text exemplars” for high school students shows they have definite political agendas. “The Cost Conundrum: Health Care Costs in McAllen, Texas,” written by Atul Gawande and first appearing June 2009 in the *New Yorker* magazine, is at its heart a call for universal, government-run health care. “Executive Order 13423” is a presidential mandate that all government agencies become “sustainable” entities. It promotes controversial scientific ideas and purports them as factually accurate in a way that could unduly influence students.

Health Care Text Exemplar

“The Cost Conundrum” consists of attacks on both medical doctors and hospitals as greedy profiteers. The heroes of the analysis are doctors who accept salaries from hospitals, rather than determining their own fees. Doctors are accused of ordering too many tests and doing unnecessary surgeries to line their own pockets. Gawande describes one physician CEO he met with as aloof and having a “let’s-get-this-over-with” attitude, and then dismisses as ludicrous the doctor’s suggestion that the government’s involve-

ment in health care has caused some of the problems in health care.

I asked him why McAllen’s health care costs were so high. What he gave me was a disquisition on the theory and history of American health care financing going back to Lyndon Johnson and the creation of Medicare, the upshot of which was: (1) Government is the problem in health care. “The people in charge of the purse strings don’t know what they’re doing.” (2) If anything, government insurance programs like Medicare don’t pay enough. “I, as an



anesthesiologist, know that they pay me ten percent of what a private insurer pays.” (3) Government programs are full of waste. “Every person in this room could easily go through the expenditures of Medicare and Medicaid and see all kinds of waste.”

Many knowledgeable critics of the current health care “crisis” make the link, as the McAllen doctor did, to decades of government interference. It cannot be easily dismissed. In fact, many would say his analysis is quite astute. Plus there are predictions that ObamaCare is further interference that will affect “the health care market in many new and profoundly destructive ways.” (*Reason*, 03-13-2013)

Promises to “make health care coverage more affordable” fall flat in the face of evidence. The Associated Press reports:

Some Americans could see their insurance bills double next year as the health care overhaul law expands coverage to millions of people. The nation’s big health insurers say they expect premiums — or the cost for insurance coverage — to rise from 20 to 100 percent for millions of people due to changes that will occur when key provisions of the Affordable Care Act roll out in January 2014. Mark Bertolini, CEO of Aetna Inc., one of the nation’s largest insurers, calls the price hikes “premium rate shock.” “We’ve done all the math, we’ve shared it with all the regulators, we’ve shared it with all the people in Washington that need to see it, and I think it’s a big concern,” Bertolini said during the company’s annual meeting with investors in December. (03-13-13)

Will high school teachers submitting Common Core’s slanted informational texts to students be qualified to dissect the politicized text assigned? Opposing viewpoints are easy to find, but will a high school teacher select and present other views to students? If not, this article is indoctrination.

(See *Common Core*, page 4)

EDUCATION BRIEFS

Cursive writing is not required by Common Core standards although elementary-level instruction in keyboarding is mandated. It is unknown how many states and school districts will devote time to teaching a skill that is neither mandated nor required to pass federal tests, or if a printed signature will be acceptable on legal documents for future generations.

A German family that has sought asylum in the U.S. since 2008 claims their own government persecuted them for homeschooling their children. The Justice Department now states that the parents have no right to educate their own children and should be returned to Germany, which mandates attendance at state-approved schools for all children. The Homeschool Legal Defense Association represents the family who hopes to get a reversal on appeal and to be allowed to stay in America.

In what Fox News calls "selective austerity," Native American schools are facing painful sequestration cuts, while a new hire in a recently created job at the Department of Education will receive a salary of \$123,758. On reservations that depend fully on the federal government for education funding, schools are "adding students to classrooms, slashing course offerings and leaving vacant jobs unfilled." The new appointee to executive director of the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for African-Americans at the DOE, whose job requires that he "identify evidence-based best practices to improve African-American student achievement from cradle to career," is a former schoolteacher and aide to Rep. Charles Rangel, D-NY. (02-13-2013)

The Department of Education Office of Civil Rights has determined that, under the 1973 Rehabilitation Act, students with disabilities have a right to sports programs "supported equally, as with a school district's other athletic activities." The National Education Association teachers' union supports the new interpretation, saying, "All students have the human and civil right to a quality public education with equal access that develops their potential, independence, and character." The price tag and funding for this mandate are undetermined.

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Judges Throw Dollars at Kansas Schools

A three-judge panel ruled in early 2013 that Kansas must increase education funding by at least \$654 per pupil, or approximately \$395 million for the state's 600,000 students. Although Kansas has been increasing total school funding for years, the court ruled it was not enough.

The court based its ruling in part on the state not increasing taxes on citizens, saying, "It seems completely illogical that the state can argue that a reduction in education funding was necessitated by the downturn in the economy and the state's diminishing resources and at the same time cut taxes further."

Critics argue that school funding should be left up to the legislature, as provided for by law. But this is not the first time activist judges have told Kansas legislators they are doing it wrong.

Montoy v. State of Kansas, a lawsuit settled in 2006, allowed the court to exert control over education spending. Although the Kansas Supreme Court based its ruling on admittedly flawed data used in a 2001 Augenblick & Myers cost study, no new study has determined actual cost requirements for schools to operate effectively.

Furthermore, the court has no expertise in education and there is no evidence that increased funding improves education. According to Dave Trabert of the Kansas Policy Institute (KPI):



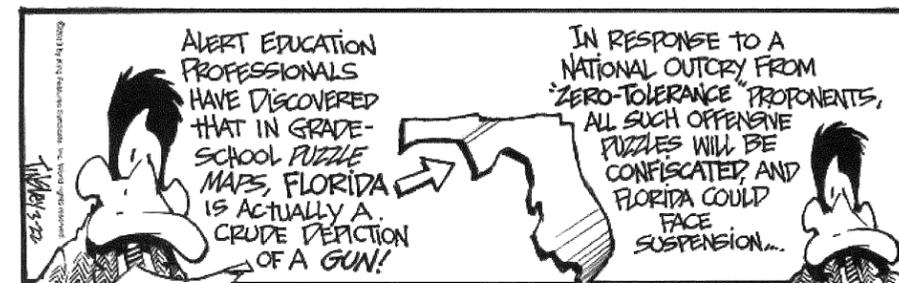
Performance on independent national tests has remained unchanged for years, despite billions more in taxpayer aid. Less than half of Kansas' 4th grade and 8th grade students are 'Proficient' in math and only about a third in reading. It costs a lot of money to operate schools but it's how the money is spent that matters, not how much. In ordering the State to spend \$443 million more on the premise that school funding is unconstitutionally low, the court itself violated the Constitution. The Kansas Constitution says that only the Legislature has the power to appropriate.

Critics contend that in order to fix the problem of judicial interference in Kansas, the state constitution must be changed and judge selection methods must change. The court is overstepping, in violation of separation of powers. It is negating the legislature's constitutional right to fund programs. Kansas must also act to restrain the courts from acting unconstitutionally when politically charged issues are involved.

The Republican governor and Republican majority in the Kansas legislature have tried to stimulate the state's economy by refraining from increasing income and property taxes on individuals. The Kansas economy needs this stimulus, as indicated

(See *Kansas City Schools*, page 4)

MALLARD FILLMORE / by Bruce Tinsley



One Kansas School District's Success Story

Four small towns in Kansas are accomplishing what school districts across the nation strive to achieve. In Waconda Unified School District, almost all students pass state math and English assessments, most at "exceeds standards" or "exemplary" levels. Nearly 100% of students graduate from high school and go on to college.

Composed of communities where fewer than 20% of citizens have college degrees (the national average is 28%) and annual incomes are below the national average (65% of students qualify for free or reduced federal lunches), the approximately 375 students, along with routinely acing the state tests, also perform in the top 10%, compared to international students.

Experts' opinions about the success of this district vary. A Columbia University professor dismisses Waconda students' achievements as a result of demographics, saying, "It's a homogeneous, intact, all-white community." (*The Hechinger*

Report, 03-19-2012) Aside from having no issues with English language learners, it is unclear how the demographics could possibly help the children learn. "Roughly ten percent are foster children. Nearly one in five is classified as having special needs," according to the *Hechinger Report*. Latchkey after-school circumstances are the norm. And, most significantly, Waconda outperforms other schools in the area with similar demographics.

What does help children to learn in Waconda? It seems to be basic, traditional education, dedicated educators, attention to early intervention, and the high expectations of parents. "Sometimes you get one of those elements in a school [or] two. But to have [all] come together, that's not the norm at all," John Hill, president of the National Rural Education Association told the *Hechinger Report*.

The district practices mastery-based education: students must know subject

(See *Kansas School District*, page 4)

Book of the Month



Homeschooling in America: Capturing and Assessing the Movement. Joseph Murphy, Corwin Publishers, 2012, \$34.95

As America stands on the brink of nationalized, federally controlled education under Common Core Standards, it is instructive to review the phenomenon of education at home.

Homeschooling in America, a scholarly work by Joseph Murphy, an associate Dean of the Vanderbilt University Peabody School of Education, is an in-depth analysis, not a how-to-homeschool resource.

Homeschooling is both a social and an educational movement. *Homeschooling in America* claims that acceptance and growth in homeschooling correlates to fundamental changes in society and the movement away from trusting the government to run society.

Reasons for the "discontent and skepticism about the public sector" that "can be characterized as a response to the nearly unbroken growth of government over the last three-quarters of the 20th century" have contributed to the "widespread perception that the state is overinvolved in the life of the citizenry." The author points to stories of incompetence, scandal, and inefficiency, as well as the growing cost of government, as reasons many parents and citizens are discontented.

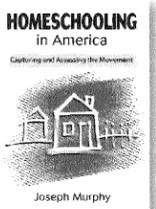
Referring to the bureaucracy that runs schools, including teachers unions, one expert states, "the current governance of public education makes effective action at the school level almost impossible." The author says that, "in the bureaucracy students can be taken for granted because it is adult concerns that matter."

While researchers try to graph whether "students can answer two or three more questions correctly on standardized tests than their public school peers," no one notices the broader "core outcomes" of homeschooling such as building strong families, avoiding social problems, and the teaching of values, because they simply aren't on most researchers' radar.

Homeschooling parents are on the whole somewhat better educated than public school parents. Murphy theorizes that parents can overcome any lack of pedagogical training through more engaged learning time, individualized learning approaches, and meaningful feedback. Evidence shows that homeschoolers are not suffering from isolation or social skill deficits, and colleges report they do as well or better than other enrolled students.

Homeschooling is simply another privatization initiative, not unlike charter schools, online schools, and voucher systems. Traditional public schools are broken and often pose risks of spiritual, social, emotional, and physical danger. Concerned parents are doing what they can to better educate their children.

As Common Core is washing over the nations' schools, this book gives evidence that citizens are less enthralled with government as a solution than ever before.



FOCUS: Head Start Evaluation Report Finally Released

By Lindsey Burke and David B. Muhlhausen, Ph.D.

Originally published by the Heritage Foundation on January 10, 2013.

In 2008, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) completed data collection for its third-grade follow-up study of Head Start, a federal preschool program designed to improve the kindergarten readiness of low-income children. Four years later, just before Christmas, the agency finally published the results of the congressionally mandated evaluation. The report's publication date reads October 2012, meaning the final product sat at HHS for two months before being released.

Since 1965, taxpayers have spent more than \$180 billion on Head Start. Yet, over the decades, this Great Society relic has failed to improve academic outcomes for the children it was designed to help. The third-grade follow-up evaluation is the latest in a growing body of evidence that should urge policymakers to seriously consider Head Start's future.

Head Start and Performance

The timing of the release raises questions about whether HHS was trying to bury the findings in the report, which shows, among other outcomes, that by third grade, the \$8 billion Head Start program had little to no impact on cognitive, social-emotional, health, or parenting practices of participants. On a few measures, access to Head Start had harmful effects on children.

Now that the report has finally been published, the findings of the scientifically rigorous evaluation that tracked 5,000 three- and four-year-old children through third grade should inform federal policymakers who allocate billions of dollars annually to Head Start. Moreover, Congress will soon vote on a supplemental aid package to Hurricane Sandy victims that includes \$100 million in additional Head Start funding. The Senate Appropriations Committee notes that 265 Head Start centers will receive the funding, which equates to more than \$377,000 per center.

2010 Head Start Impact Study

In 2010, HHS released the findings of the *Head Start Impact Study*, which tracked the progress of three- and four-year-olds entering Head Start through kindergarten and first grade. Overall, Head Start had little to no positive effects for children who were granted access.

For the four-year-old group, compared to similarly situated children not allowed access to Head Start, access to the program failed to raise the cognitive abilities of participants on 41 measures. Specifically, the language skills, literacy, math skills, and school performance of the participating children failed to improve.

Alarming, access to Head Start for the three-year-old group actually had a harmful effect on the teacher-assessed math ability of these children once they

entered kindergarten. Teachers reported that non-participating children were more prepared in math skills than those children who participated in Head Start.

Head Start also had little to no effect on the other socio-emotional, health, or parenting outcomes of children participating in the program. For the four-year-old group, access to Head Start failed to have an effect for 69 out of 71 socio-emotional, health, and parenting outcomes. For example, "Teachers reported that Head Start group children were more shy or socially reticent than the control group children." The three-year-old group did slightly better; access to Head Start failed to have an effect for 66 of the 71 socio-emotional, health, and parenting outcomes.

The Long-Delayed Third-Grade Impact Study

The third-grade follow-up to the Head Start Impact Study followed students' performance through the end of third grade. The results shed further light on the ineffectiveness of Head Start. By third grade, Head Start had little to no effect on cognitive, social-emotional, health, or parenting outcomes of participating children.

Impacts on Cognitive Development. For cognitive development, the third-grade study assessed 11 outcomes for the original three- and four-year-old cohorts. Access to Head Start for each group had no statistically measurable effects on all measures of cognitive ability, including numerous measures of reading, language, and math ability.

Impacts on Social-Emotional Development. For social-emotional development, the third-grade study assessed 19 outcomes for each cohort. For measures of parent-reported social-emotional outcomes, access to Head Start for the three-year-old cohort failed to affect four of the five measures. For this cohort, Head Start failed to affect four measures of parental-reported problem behaviors. However, access to Head Start yielded a slight beneficial impact on children in the areas of social skills and positive approaches to learning.

For the four-year-old cohort, access to Head Start failed to affect four of the five parent-reported social-emotional outcomes. For the four-year-old cohort, access to Head Start is associated with a small decrease in aggressive behavior. However, access to Head Start for this cohort failed to affect parental reports of hyperactive, withdrawn, and total problem behaviors. In contrast to the finding for the three-year-old cohort, access to Head Start failed to affect children displaying better social skills and positive approaches to learning.

For third grade, access to Head Start had no statistically measurable effect on the 10 teacher-reported measures of social-emotional development for the three-year-old cohort. However, for the four-year-old cohort, out of ten measures, access to Head Start is associated with one harmful impact.

Teachers reported "strong evidence of an unfavorable impact on the incidence of children's emotional symptoms." Access to Head Start for this cohort had no beneficial or harmful impacts on the remaining nine teacher-reported measures.

For child-reported measures of social-emotional outcomes, access to Head Start had no statistically measurable effect on the four outcomes for the three-year-old cohort. On the other hand, access to Head Start for the four-year-old cohort appears to have had one harmful impact — children in the third grade with access to Head Start reported worse peer relations than their counterparts.

Impacts on Child Health Outcomes. For parent-reported child health, the study assessed five third-grade outcomes for each cohort. Access to Head Start had no statistically measurable effect on all five health measures for each cohort, including receipt of dental care, health insurance coverage, and overall child health status being excellent or good.

Impacts on Parenting Outcomes. For parenting outcomes, the third-grade study assessed ten measures for both cohorts. Access to Head Start had no statistically measurable effect on nine of the ten measures reported by parents and the two measures reported by teachers for the three-year-old cohort. However, parents of children in the three-year-old cohort with access to Head Start self-reported an improved authoritative parenting style (*i.e.*, high control and high warmth) compared to their counterparts.

Similarly, access to Head Start had

no statistically measurable effect on nine of the ten measures reported by parents and the two measures reported by teachers for the four-year-old cohort. Differing from the three-year-old cohort, parents of children in the four-year-old cohort reported to have spent more time with their children than their counterparts in the control group.

Conclusion

President Obama has pledged to use only one test when determining which education programs to fund: "It's not whether an idea is liberal or conservative," Obama stated, "but whether it works." HHS's third-grade follow-up evaluation makes it unequivocally clear that Head Start fails that test.

HHS has released definitive evidence that the federal government's 48-year experiment with Head Start has failed children and left taxpayers a tab of more than \$180 billion. In the interest of children and taxpayers, it's time for this nearly half-century experiment to come to an end. If the federal government continues to fund Head Start, policymakers should allow states to make their Head Start dollars portable, following children to a private preschool provider of choice.

Lindsey M. Burke is the Will Skillman Fellow in Education and David B. Muhlhausen, Ph.D., is a research fellow in empirical policy analysis at The Heritage Foundation.



President Promotes Universal Preschool

President Obama called for universal preschool education in his 2013 State of the Union Address. He said his administration plans on "working with states to make high-quality preschool available to every child in America." "Every dollar we invest in high-quality early education," Mr Obama maintains, "can save more than seven dollars later on — by boosting graduation rates, reducing teen pregnancy, even reducing violent crime."

Critics hope Obama isn't relying on the tired and tiny 1962-67 Perry Preschool Project for his predictive evidence. Results for 58 children in an excellent program, analyzed by individuals personally invested in positive outcomes, should not be used to predict any result that could actually or logically be obtained in a nationwide, federally funded program.

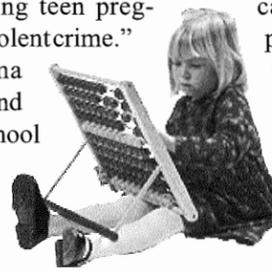
It is unknown whether the crime-stopping, budget-saving, academic-boosting program suggested is Head Start on steroids or an entirely new idea. If it is more Head Start, the evidence shows it is a bad investment. Obama has said, "It's not whether an idea is liberal or conservative, but whether it works." Head Start doesn't work.

Head Start has been shown to be a 48-year, \$180-billion-dollar boondoggle, so will it be discontinued as a federal program? Head Start claims to provide not just academic readiness for school, but a "comprehensive services" program for children from birth through kindergarten, including expert help in socio-emotional development, health care/health status and parenting practice, but the program has little to no positive results to back up its extravagant claims.

Neuroscience and sociological knowledge increasingly show the importance and long-term effects of experiences in a child's early years. However, there is no evidence that experiences in a school setting are necessary in these early years.

The actual value of preschool is debatable. Worldwide, "some enthusiastic providers of preschool education like Sweden, Norway, France, Belgium and Denmark do not score particularly highly on attainment in later education." Further, "establishing the precise link between time in preschool and later achievement is difficult." (*The Economist*, 02-09-13)

(See *Preschool*, page 4)



Educators Indicted *(Continued from page 1)*

throughout [Atlanta Public Schools],” reported the *AJC*.

Also charged in the Grand Jury indictment are other administrators, principals, and teachers. According to the indictment, they “conspired to either cheat, conceal cheating or retaliate against whistleblowers in an effort to bolster CRCT scores for the benefit of financial rewards associated with high test scores.” CRCT is the annual Georgia assessment, or Criterion-Referenced Competency Test.

Cheating educators were highly motivated since at schools that met 70% of their annual target every employee received a bonus, as low as a few hundred dollars to over a thousand.

One of the special investigators said, “This is nothing but pervasive and rank thuggery.” The district attorney referred to “a single-minded purpose, and that is to cheat,” and said, referring to Hall specifically, “She is a full participant in that conspiracy. Without her, this conspiracy could not have taken place, particularly in the degree it took place.”

The prosecutor denounced “the crimes that have been committed against the children of the city of Atlanta.” Remedial assistance for students in need was not given because altered test scores

showed they were doing well. Anecdotal evidence of students who were cheated out of an education was provided in the *AJC*. A mother who had concerns because her daughter received the lowest score on one reading examination, but later exceeded reading standards on the state achievement test, met with Superintendent Hall who assured her that her daughter “tested well.” The student is now in 9th grade, but “reads at a 5th grade level.”

Verdaillia Turner, president of the Georgia Federation of Teachers union blamed education reform for the criminal activity of educators. She told MSNBC, “We don’t condone cheating, but when you have high-stakes testing, which are one-shot deals that don’t tell you whether a child is going to fail or succeed, the whole setup in terms of No Child Left Behind was unfair to children, unfair to educators.” (04-01-2013)

The mantra in Atlanta under Hall’s reign was “No exceptions and no excuses.” The justice system should apply that same standard to those convicted of cheating students for personal gain. It is also hoped that all states will seek out and prosecute cheating by educators as seriously as Georgia is doing.

(Atlanta Journal Constitution, 03-29-2013)

Kansas City Schools *(Continued from page 2)*

by the *National Review* claim that Kansas faces a \$267 million deficit (01-25-13).

All across America, reformers are giving parents and students options. Charter schools, voucher programs, and homeschooling are improving educational outcomes. The old and tired option of

throwing more money at education has been debunked. KPI’s Trabert says that in Kansas, “State assessments show that after decades of hard work by dedicated teachers and billions more in aid, only 56% of 11th grade students read grade-appropriate material with full comprehension.”

Preschool *(Continued from page 3)*

Many American parents are concerned that a comprehensive federal program may result in eventual mandates to send even very young children to school. Some states have already lowered the age of mandatory attendance at schools. Finland, which is considered the educational leader of the 40 developed countries, using various measures including international test scores and graduation rates, doesn’t start formal learning until a child is seven years old. Although most Finnish families take advantage of free pre-K offerings, before age seven children only play at “school” and there is no reading or math presented to them.

Another problem with preschool is that it can stress children not ready for formal learning. For example, Florida pulls out and individually tests the 184,000 4-year-olds in state-provided pre-K, using a new standardized assessment that only measures academic readiness: “literacy, numeracy, and language development.” Problems also arise in that these assessments include no measures of social or emotional development. (*Education Week*, 09-26-12) This early focus on academics and testing is exactly what successful Finnish schools do not do. In fact, Finnish schools do not believe in “the culture of testing.”

Some of the foreign high-achieving countries do rely on early introduction of academics and heavy testing, but some would argue that American culture is more closely aligned to Finland than to

the mainly Asian countries that rely on long school days, heavy testing, and one-size-fits-all instruction.

What works in Finland is “well-trained teachers and responsible children. Early on, kids do a lot without adults hovering. And teachers create lessons to fit their students.” (*Wall Street Journal*, 2-29-2008)

One suggestion for better academic and personal outcomes for children is improved elementary schools, with excellent and motivated teachers, where kindergarten and first-grade classrooms allow students to blossom into the little readers and mathematicians they can be, according to their individual abilities. Sound idealistic? No more so than Obama’s unsubstantiated, unfounded and expensive promises.

Kansas School District *(Continued from page 2)*

matter before moving on. An assessment card tracks student progress from kindergarten through high school graduation. Individualized intervention is started once deficiencies are noted. Intervention includes specialist teachers and community volunteers who help students.

The school superintendent, Jeff Travis, says the district doesn’t follow education trends. He says, “We don’t believe in the next biggest thing or the next biggest theory.” (Yahoo News, 10-20-2011) Teacher salaries are not tied to test performance and students do not have iPads.

Teacher commitment is high, with

Common Core *(Continued from page 1)*

Gawande goes on to say in this text exemplar:

Advocates of a public option say government financing would save the most money by having leaner administrative costs and forcing doctors and hospitals to take lower payments than they get from private insurance. Opponents say doctors would skimp, quit, or game the system, and make us wait in line for our care; they maintain that private insurers are better at policing doctors. No, the skeptics say: all insurance companies do is reject applicants who need health care and stall on paying their bills. Then we have the economists who say that the people who should pay the doctors are the ones who use them. Have consumers pay with their own dollars, make sure that they have some “skin in the game,” and then they’ll get the care they deserve. These arguments miss the main issue. When it comes to making care better and cheaper, changing who pays the doctor will make no more difference than changing who pays the electrician. The lesson of the high-quality, low-cost communities is that someone has to be accountable for the totality of care. Otherwise, you get a system that has no brakes.

Gawande’s article is an assertion that there is no one better to be “accountable” for the “totality of care” than the federal government. But the truth is that it is far from clear that a taxpayer-funded system in which decisions are removed from patients, doctors, and the people actually footing the bill has the “brakes” he points out that we need. Who is putting the brakes on our runaway federal budget and our many other bloated and ineffective federal programs?

Sustainability Text Exemplar

Another informational text suggested by Common Core is “Executive Order 13423 of January 24, 2007: Strengthening Federal Environmental, Energy, and Transportation Management.” This document, signed by President George Bush in 2007, is a sweeping call for sustainability, greenhouse gas control, use of renewable resources, and recycling at all federal agencies. It incorporates green standards, such as renewable energy generation projects on agency property for agency use, meaning wind and solar.

The Executive Order states that “‘sustainable’ means to create and maintain conditions, under which humans and na-

ture can exist in productive harmony, that permit fulfilling the social, economic, and other requirements of present and future generations of Americans.” Sustainability is also a leftist buzzword and rooted in the United Nations Agenda 21, which calls for developed nations to decrease energy usage. It aims to control the West, especially the United States, economically and politically. Another interpretation of Agenda 21 would be, “from each according to their ability, to each according to their need,” as stated by Karl Marx.

The executive order also mandated creation of a new job at each federal agency: a senior civilian officer to be responsible for implementation of environmentalist requirements. These government employees at the CIA, the FBI, the Department of Education, and every other federal agency, are paid at level IV of the Executive Schedule, which was \$155,500 in January 2012. These individuals obviously require a sizeable staff to implement the changes, oversee their success, and file the required reports to multiple other agencies. The order requires compliance at each agency, by all contractors outside the government with which the agency does business, by tenants or concessionaires, and even makes provision for standards to be met in foreign locations.

If educators or parents object to students being indoctrinated at school in the leftist environmentalism and sustainability represented by this reading, it will surely be pointed out that it was a Republican president who signed this order.

A better decision in this time of economic uncertainty, the massive burden on taxpayers, and our unprecedented national debt to foreign countries such as China, would have been to appoint an overseer of cost effectiveness at each department. This person could approve “sustainable” activities only when feasible and cost-effective.

A critical reading of this executive order could lead more astute students to realize the federal government’s propensity for wasting money and complicating everything. Since it was precisely this disregard for cost that allowed government interference in health care to create the inflated system we had before ObamaCare, it is questionable whether the massive and definitive takeover of healthcare by the federal government is the right direction for America — but students given scanty information from a skewed perspective are very unlikely to question it.

As Ronald Reagan said in 1964, “outside of its legitimate functions, government does nothing as well or as economically as the private sector of the economy.” Will students, parents, and citizens also question whether the massive and definitive federal takeover of education that Common Core represents is the right direction for America?

While parents in the district work long hours and are often not available to help children with homework, attendance at teacher conferences is near 100%. Parents care about education and expect that their children will succeed and go on to college.