



The Phyllis Schlafly Report



VOL. 11, NO. 5, SECTION 1

BOX 618, ALTON, ILLINOIS 62002

DECEMBER, 1977

What's Missing From Our Schools?

Consumerism and Education

The proposed Consumer Protection Agency is directed at the wrong target. The American private enterprise system produces a tremendous array of good products at reasonable prices that are the envy of the world. The area where we need consumer advocacy is not in business, but in education. The quality of the product turned out by the public school system is diminishing as fast as its price is rising.

Educationists have tried to hide this academic deterioration by the techniques of passing pupils every year even though they do not pass the tests, by eliminating grades that record achievement, and by giving higher and higher grades each year (a phenomenon known as "grade inflation"). This is rationalized on the ground that a search for academic intellectual excellence is incompatible with democracy, and that academic elitism is repugnant to an egalitarian society.

It is encouraging to note that there has been an eruption of protests from teachers, parents, and the media calling for remedial action. Not only do such articles bemoan the fact that the reading of the classics has virtually dropped out of the public school curriculum, but a recent article in *Harper's Magazine* even argued that "the only standard of performance that can sustain a free society is excellence" and that a "vision of excellence . . . may be essential."

Such an article is long overdue. If we want the benefits of the technological age, we must stimulate the minds and develop the intellectual skills that enable bright men and women to design and build the sophisticated products that make American living standards so much higher than any other country in the world.

Chicago District 9 Superintendent Albert A. Briggs made news by refusing to graduate 675 eighth graders -- more than half of those under his jurisdiction -- because they couldn't read even at a fifth-grade level. His new policy is "read well or else" -- you can't graduate. He summed up the basis for his decision with one short sentence: "Reading is the key."

Individual shortcomings are not usually the fault of that intangible mass called the "system." However, when children are allowed to grow up handicapped by a lack of reading skills, the school reading system is to blame.

In many big-city public school systems, students are

tested for reading before they enter high school. If they can't read at the seventh-grade level, they are required to take remedial courses each year until they pass the test. But passing the test is not a requirement, either for entrance into or graduation from high school. Hundreds of high school seniors are graduated who can't read at the seventh-grade level.

The parents of a Florida girl sued the school system to block her high school graduation, claiming that she has not been taught enough. In the absence of a consumer advocate to demand better quality in the teaching of reading, it is possible that more parents and students will appeal to the courts to force the schools to deliver the product for which the taxpayers are paying.

S.A.T. Scores

The Scholastic Aptitude Tests are the principal admissions examination used by most colleges because they show each individual's scholastic aptitude in relation to his or her classmates all over the country. For the last 14 years, the S.A.T. scores have been telling us something else that they certainly were not designed to show. Every year from 1963 through 1977 revealed a significant drop in average S.A.T. scores in both the verbal and the mathematics tests.

This steady drop in S.A.T. scores is an embarrassment and a puzzle to the educators who have been telling us that students have been getting smarter. The S.A.T. scores prove that the students of the 1970s simply do not do as well in verbal and mathematical skills as students in former years.

One cause could be that the children now watch television instead of reading books. A more basic cause is that, since students lack real proficiency in reading, it is not the pleasure that it ought to be.

When educationists eliminated phonics from the teaching of reading and substituted the look-say or whole-word method, and when they replaced drilling in multiplication tables with the new math, they handicapped our students as much as if they had put a blindfold over one eye of every child. When a student hasn't been taught phonics, he cannot spell and he has an artificially limited vocabulary. When a student hasn't memorized addition sums and multiplication tables, he cannot solve the simple arithmetic problems that confront him in everyday life.

Under the look-say or whole-word method of teach-

ing reading, first graders are subjected to volume after volume of boring, repetitious, stupid books from which they are taught to memorize a few dozen words by guessing at them from accompanying pictures. The children aren't taught the fundamental phonetics of the English language. The result is that many children do not learn to read at all, and many more do not learn to read well. They limp along from year to year, frustrated and discouraged. Reading is not a pleasure but a chore.

When they get to high school, they have had so many years of what is called the controlled vocabulary that they cannot read the classics; so they are fed great literature that has been rewritten in the vocabulary of the elementary grades.

It is easy for the doubting Thomases to measure the decline in reading skills by comparing currently used readers with the old McGuffey readers that were used in this country early in this century. McGuffey readers are about two years advanced over modern readers of the same grade level in all reading skills, including vocabulary, comprehension, spelling, writing, pronunciation, grammar, and intellectual and spiritual content.

It is no wonder that Dr. Sidney P. Marland, Jr., former U.S. assistant secretary for education, said that "Americans in significant numbers are questioning the purpose of education and the competence of educators." Our spending on education has increased seven times faster than our population, but we are getting less than ever for it.

Progressive educationists seem to adhere stubbornly to the dogma that anything new must be superior to whatever is old. It isn't, and the S.A.T. scores prove it. What education needs is a fresh willingness to replace the failures of the present with the successful teaching techniques of the past.

Report Card on Schools

The Scholastic Aptitude Test is taken every year by more than a million high school students. From 1963 to 1977, the average score of students taking the verbal test fell 49 points, and the average math score fell 31 points. The decline became so embarrassing that the College Board, which sponsors the test, appointed a blue ribbon committee funded with \$800,000 to find out why.

The decline in S.A.T. scores cannot be explained because more students from historically-disadvantaged groups are now college bound and hence taking the tests. In addition to the decline in average scores, there has been an alarming decline in the number of top achievers.

Many newspaper articles claim that the schools are doing a super job, and that the recent report by the national advisory committee on S.A.T. scores was really all wrong in blaming the 14-year decline on educational methods.

The excuses are unconvincing. If the schools are doing such a great job, how come the Navy has had to start a remedial reading course to try to raise the reading skills of some of their new seamen from the third to sixth grade level?

An inability of sailors to read urgent warnings has resulted in the costly mishandling of expensive and dangerous equipment. The Navy has to teach reading as a matter of self-defense. A recent study of 23,000 Navy recruits revealed that more than one-third could not read at the 10th grade level.

If the schools are doing such a great job, how come 17 percent of all student loans are in default? I'm not talking about the conscientious 83 percent who paid back their loans, or of the small percentage who are unemployed. I'm talking about the ones who could pay but haven't, either because they think the government doesn't need the money or they can get by without paying. Among the deadbeats are a basketball player making \$85,000 a year and a psychiatrist admitting to \$31,000 a year.

If the schools don't teach children the basic skill of reading, or the moral duty to pay their honest debts, then the taxpayers are being ripped off and the pupils are being defrauded.

The blue ribbon committee came up with a long list of explanations that includes many over which the schools have no control, such as the increase in single-parent families, Watergate, and the Vietnam War. However, the blue ribbon committee also put the finger on two areas that should receive priority attention from the schools.

The report was critical of the schools' "neglect of critical reading and careful writing," and their use of such modern methods as grade inflation, automatic promotion, tolerance of absenteeism, less meaty textbooks, and too many elective courses.

The committee was also right on target when it criticized widespread television viewing. The hours that the average child spends watching television are hours that he doesn't spend reading books. Television viewing doesn't merely use up valuable time -- it teaches habits that are hurtful to concentration, good study, and sustained academic activity.

In the early part of this century, schools had only a fraction of the money they have today, and teachers coped with classes that were twice as large and pupils from immigrant families who had language handicaps. But they all learned to read and write quite well. According to a recent poll, four out of every 10 parents now believe they can't depend on the schools to teach their children to read and write.

If the schools don't teach children the basic skills of reading, then the taxpayers are being ripped off and the pupils are being defrauded. It is clear that we are not getting our money's worth for the \$75 billion which Americans spent on education last year. The S.A.T. scores are an accurate report card on the school system.

New York Blackout

Many of the postmortems on the Great New York Blackout of '77 tried to target Consolidated Edison as the villain and the Federal Government as the hero who can ride to the rescue to shield us from such catastrophes in the future. There is no evidence that a Federally-run electric energy system would be any more efficient or sensitive to consumer comfort than the Federally-run post office, but that doesn't stop those who remain convinced that Uncle Sam is omniscient and all-efficient.

The tremendous economic loss from the blackout, however, was not caused by the electric power failure but by the moral failure of New York's teenagers and young adults. The damages from the looting and fires greatly exceed the losses from the lack of electricity. It is much more important to find out the cause of the criminal looting and arson during the blackout because that is a problem of far more probable reoccurrence than a major power failure.

The 10,000 New York policemen could not stop the orgy of stealing. Firemen could not prevent the 900 fires from being started. One policeman said, "People are sweeping through like locusts down here and wiping out complete thoroughfares." Television cameras filmed hundreds of criminals breaking store windows and carrying out stolen goods. They were so brazen that they had no fear of being photographed and used the TV lights to select their stolen merchandise.

During World War II, most European cities had blackouts every night. There was no looting. In the last year of the War, Japanese cities were regularly blacked out without looting. In the United States, we had four years of brownouts during the War without any looting.

During the 1965 New York City blackout, fewer than 100 persons were arrested. This time, 3,000 persons were arrested and most of the arsonists were not caught. As one policeman explained, "in 1965 you were dealing with human beings; now you're dealing with animals."

The blame for the night of robbing, looting and arson should not be placed on those who let the electric lights go out (inadvertently or even negligently), but on those responsible for driving morality out of our public schools.

From the beginning of our country until about fifteen years ago, American schoolchildren were taught obedience to God's laws as well as the three R's. In the early 1960s, the U.S. Supreme Court suddenly invented a new interpretation of the First Amendment and used it to drive every mention of God or His laws out of the public school system.

The pictures of the New York blackout looters show that most were young enough to have received most of their schooling after the Supreme Court chased God, prayer, Bible reading, and reference to His Commandments out of the schools. These criminal teenagers and young adults have grown up in a permissive school system which failed to teach them what is right and wrong.

Moral education is a basic necessity for civilized living. To abdicate this obligation is to resign our cities to the law of the jungle, and to allow people to be terrorized and property to be destroyed by young savages who feel no guilt when they commit crimes, and whose only remorse is in being caught.

It is even more important that children know and obey the Ten Commandments than the alphabet or the multiplication tables. Children should have instruction and examinations in morality. When judges are questioned by the Senate before appointment to the Federal courts, they should be asked: "Do you agree or disagree with the Warren Court decisions that drove God and His Commandments out of our public schools?"

Campus Morality

Some concerned alumni of one of the well-known eastern colleges have published a booklet called "Sex on Campus" which examines the consequences of the prevalent position of moral neutrality. The college shall be nameless here because its Pontius Pilate attitude is typical.

The booklet cites a recent poll of students showing that 28 percent of undergraduates believe it is "all right" to carry on two or more intimate sexual affairs at one time. Another 12 percent are uncertain whether such behavior is right or wrong. A shaky majority of

only 59 percent still feels that sexual relationships should be exclusive. No report was given on what percent believe that sexual relationships should be reserved for after-marriage; that may be an irrelevancy on today's campuses.

Although college regulations and state laws prohibit cohabitation, many unmarried undergraduate couples share a dormitory room. In response to inquiry, a college official said, "I don't think we'd want to do anything about it unless someone complained." The college imposes no sanctions for fornication, adultery, promiscuity, cohabitation, homosexuality, abortion, or venereal disease.

The attitude of the college administration and of the college counseling service is that a student's sex life is entirely his or her own concern, and the college cannot and should not serve in loco parentis. In practice, however, this amounts to a position not only that each student may determine his or her own behavior, but also that whatever the student does must be right for him or her. If the student chooses promiscuity or homosexuality, then that is right for him or her.

This is not neutrality but an undermining of Judeo-Christian ethics. The Ten Commandments are an objective moral code, not subjective or situational.

Some argue that the college authorities should keep their hands off because sex is a private matter involving consenting adults who are not interfering with the rights of others. Just to cite one type of interference with the rights of others, many students are evicted from their own rooms by a roommate who wants to enjoy a private tryst.

Moral codes represent the best efforts of a society to regulate itself in a decent and orderly way. A society is held together by the sharing of an ethical system. If the best and the brightest refuse to respect any objective standards of morality, then our nation will decline as rapidly as has Washington, D.C., where abortions and illegitimate births now outnumber legitimate babies.

Illegitimate Births

Tucked away in the pages of big city newspapers in recent months has been a succession of items more depressing even than the accounts of hideous crimes. The headlines over these news stories read like this: "A Third of All Births Illegitimate" or "1 Birth in 3 Here is Out of Wedlock."

The leader in these dismal statistics is Washington, D.C., where there are more illegitimate births than legitimate. In Chicago, 33 out of every 100 babies are born out of wedlock. New York's figure is 30 out of every 100. When you translate the percentages into actual numbers, the total is staggering. Chicago, for example, has a population of about 200,000 fatherless children who have been born since 1965. That's more than live in any other city in Illinois.

Illegitimate births are the result of social and financial irresponsibility, not the poverty of people too poor to afford marriage. The evils of fatherless children are everywhere apparent. The tremendous increase in crime has been most striking among boys aged 16 to 26. Child abuse has become a social problem of enormous proportions. For the first time in history, we are beginning to read about a significant and growing number of suicides among teenagers and even younger children.

Illegitimate births are only one manifestation of the accelerating immorality among our people. Many cities have apparently almost abandoned enforcement of the

laws against obscenity and prostitution. The obscene movies and bookstores and swarms of prostitutes openly ply their trade within a few blocks of the White House in our nation's capital, as well as in the downtown areas of many major cities.

Sex Rock

One of many causes of illegitimate births, according to the Reverend Jesse Jackson, is the phenomenon called "sex rock" -- the term for popular songs with suggestive lyrics that many young people listen to by the hour. These lyrics promote illicit sex and the use of obscene words, and they graphically describe sexual acts and various bizarre conduct.

Several years ago, local radio stations would cancel the airing of offensive songs once they realized what they meant, or sometimes fussy up or blur the suggestive lyrics. Today there appears to be no restraint, even though the songs have become sexually directive and give explicit instructions.

Apparently, among many teenagers, sex rock can become an addiction much like alcohol, tobacco, drugs, gambling, or pornography. It is a secret communication system understood only by those tuned in to its rhythm. Hour after hour, the rock beat and the lyrics pound on their stream of consciousness, formulating their ideas and attitudes towards life and love.

Some industry officials in the billion dollar record business defend sex rock as merely an honest reflection of a permissive society. They argue that "singers are only expressing what people are doing all around us."

The Reverend Jesse Jackson says that teenagers should be considered the victims of sex rock, rather than its audience. He cautions: "The deadliest poisons are colorless, odorless and tasteless toxins with the power to penetrate anywhere, undetected." That's exactly what sex rock is.

Judicial Activism

The seeds of judicial legislation begun by Supreme Court Justices Hugo Black and William O. Douglas are now yielding weird fruit. A Federal judge recently held unconstitutional a New Jersey law requiring public school students to stand during the Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag. The judge did not justify this by a written opinion, but announced it orally.

In making this decision, the judge said he was extending the U.S. Supreme Court decision of 1943 which held that a student could not be compelled to recite the Pledge of Allegiance against his will. The First Amendment right of free speech was the issue in that case.

But there was no free speech issue in the present case. The issues were class discipline, courtesy, and respect for a patriotic exercise by others. The 16-year-old girl who was the plaintiff in this case, and whose picture in a low-cut semi-dress appeared with the article in the *New York Times*, accurately summed up the decision in her own words: "Everybody has the right now to do what they want. There's no mandatory sitting or standing -- you're free to do what you see fit."

And so it is. If a teacher can't tell the pupils when to stand up and when to sit down, no wonder there is no discipline in the schools today. A school in which "everybody has the right to do what they want" is a school where everybody's rights are violated by those

who lack self-discipline, courtesy, and respect for the life, property and values of others.

In another recent example of judicial activism, a New York State Supreme Court judge issued an injunction that prohibited the U.S. Tennis Association and the Women's Tennis Association from excluding Richard Raskind from playing in the world's richest women's tennis tournament at Forest Hills.

Richard Raskind, who now calls himself Renee Richards, says he is a woman. He had a sex change operation in 1975. However, Renee Richards refused to take the standard Barr Body Test in order to qualify for the Forest Hills tournament. This test has been used since 1968 to determine whether athletes qualify for women's events in the Olympic Games.

The purpose of this test is to prevent the unfair competition that would result if men masquerading as women were permitted to enter the women's athletic events. Renee Richards is six feet two inches tall, and obviously has a big advantage over the women tennis stars such as Tracy Austin who is only five feet tall.

When a male-female competition was staged last year by television promoters, tremendous handicaps had to be imposed on the men to make the game fair. The male players were allowed only one serve, required to hit in the singles court, and forbidden to rush the net. The female players were allowed two serves and permitted to hit in the alleys.

Apparently, the New York judge believes that he is better able to determine whether a person is really a man or a woman than the internationally-accepted physical test, and that, based on his conclusion, he then has the right to tell privately-financed athletic associations whom they must permit to compete.

When judges give speeches at public meetings, they often complain about their heavy work load, their backlog of cases, and how their salaries have not kept pace with inflation. It usually takes years for any case to get to trial. Part of that problem could be solved if the judges would refrain from assuming such tasks as deciding whether teachers may tell their pupils to stand up or sit down, and who must be allowed to compete in private-financed tennis tournaments.

Phyllis Schlafly taught all her six children to read at home by the phonics method, and then entered them in school in the second grade. Their subsequent records in schools and colleges testify to the success of her "home and phonics" project.

Phyllis Schlafly earned a B.A. with Honors from Washington University in St. Louis and a M.A. from Harvard University in Political Science. She is a member of Phi Beta Kappa and Pi Sigma Alpha, the political science honorary society. She has received numerous awards including nine Honor Medals from Freedoms Foundation of Valley Forge, Woman of Achievement in Public Affairs by the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, the Brotherhood Award of the National Conference of Christians and Jews, and Honorary Doctor of Laws Degree from Niagara University. Mrs. Schlafly was named in a 1977 *Associated Press* survey as one of the ten most powerful persons in Illinois, and in the *World Almanac's* new listing of the 25 most influential women in America.

The Phyllis Schlafly Report

Box 618, Alton, Illinois 62002

Published monthly by Phyllis Schlafly, Fairmount, Alton, Illinois 62002.

Second Class Postage Paid at Alton, Illinois.

Subscription Price: For donors to the Eagle Trust Fund -- \$5 yearly (included in annual contribution). Extra copies available: 15 cents each; 8 copies \$1; 50 copies \$4; 100 copies \$8.