



# The Phyllis Schlafly Report



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## Four Bad Ideas About Public Schools

### Bad Idea #1: Start Schooling Earlier

*Newsweek* magazine has cautiously opened the door to public controversy about how children age 5 through 8 are taught in public schools today and how new research indicates that most schools are using an entirely wrong approach. *Newsweek* phrases its criticism very timidly, but the meaning is clear.

The upshot of *Newsweek's* cover article called "How Kids Learn" is summed up in this quotation: "The idea of putting small children in front of workbooks and asking them to sit at their desks all day is a nightmare vision." Indeed, it is.

Children under age 10 need to be physically active. They are simply not ready for the long periods of physical inactivity, sitting at a desk, which is the routine demanded by teachers.

Normal children age 5 through 9 develop at a different pace, and a child's pace is almost impossible to predict. That pace bears no relation to the intelligence or competence of the adult.

Will we see this new research reflected in public school practices? Don't count on it. In a giant understatement, *Newsweek* admits that "changing the way schools teach isn't easy."

Let's be blunter about this subject than *Newsweek* dared to be. The entire public school system is built on forcing little children into classrooms at age 5 or 6, where they sit at desks for many hours every day, trying to perform repetitious verbal and pencil-and-paper tasks under the supervision of a teacher, usually female, who tries to require them to be quiet, orderly, and attentive.

If they are not, the teacher cites them for behavioral problems or "attention deficit" and refers them to the school counselor, the principal's office, or a doctor who sometimes prescribes a powerful drug called Ritalin to keep them quiet.

Forcing small children into a structured school environment is much more harmful to boys than to girls because boys' maturity level lags behind girls' by about a year at the age of school entry. The result is that, a few years later, boys outnumber girls 13 to one in learning failure classes and 8 to one among the emotionally disturbed.

Yet, there is not one of the 50 states that allows a differential for this late maturing of boys in mandatory school entrance age or in curriculum of the primary grades.

The teachers' unions and other education establishment groups are constantly lobbying state legislatures for a reduction

in the mandatory school entry age and for mandatory kindergarten. When they cannot get the legislature to pass a law making kindergarten mandatory, in some states they accomplish almost the same result by the devious rule that a child cannot enter the first grade unless he has previously attended kindergarten.

In recent months, these same groups have raised a ruckus demanding "early childhood education." That means putting little children in formal schooling at age 3.

There is no replicable research to prove the advisability of putting children in school at age 5 or 6, much less at age 3 or 4. Research shows that, when children are put in school at an early age, that is before age 10, they become peer dependent, which in turn induces bad habits and a loss of self-worth.

Developmental psychologist Raymond S. Moore, who has testified in dozens of states in defense of parents who homeschool their children rather than put them in structured institutions at an early age, believes that early formal schooling is burning out our children. He thinks that, because the child's various maturity levels — senses, cognition, brain development, sociability, etc. — don't come together until after the age of 8, the learning tools of the average child enrolled in school at ages 4, 5, 6, or 7 "are neither tempered nor sharp enough to cope with the academic litter that increasingly is tossed at them."

Dr. Moore says that mandating little children into formal, scheduled, structured work before they have had a chance to grow up naturally "can from one perspective be considered a form of child abuse." He adds, "The sheer dereliction of states that mandate little boys into school, and subject them to the same constraints as they lay on the more mature little girls, says something about the ignorance or selfishness of those who make laws."

Dr. Moore is scornful of those who say little children of this age need to be "socialized by their peers." He believes that such socialization is an undesirable, negative factor.

Dr. Moore cites a mountain of research to demonstrate that a late-starting child, given time to mature, will quickly catch up and usually pass children who have entered school earlier, and do so with less likelihood of insecurity, depression, neurosis, failure, and failure's twin — delinquency.

The current proposals to get children into school at a tender

age should be recognized for what they are — just devices to create more jobs for the teachers' unions. If we are truly interested in the well-being of children, we should be talking about deinstitutionalizing them under age 10, not trying to institutionalize them starting at age 3.

## School Is Better Late Than Early

"Older and wiser" may convey the image of a white-headed senior citizen uttering some truth he has learned from bitter experience. However, that's the conclusion of many parents who have found that entering their children into the school system when they are older does, indeed, make them wiser.

Private schools in trendy New York City are starting to reject the admission of children into kindergarten until they are nearly age 6. Research shows that older children are more likely to succeed during their school careers than those who start kindergarten at age 5 or 4-going-on-5.

The optimum entry age for school doesn't at all correlate with how bright the child is. The best age to enter school has a very great deal to do with physical and emotional development. It is a big disadvantage to the bright child to be put in a structured institutional environment, such as kindergarten or preschool, before he is physically and emotionally ready.

A growing body of research indicates that children who are older when they start kindergarten tend to receive better grades and score higher on achievement tests throughout school than those who begin kindergarten at age 4 or 5. Child psychologists David Elkind and Samuel Sava told the annual conference of the National Association for the Education of Young Children that more student problems result from starting children too early than from starting them too late. They said, "When children are force-fed early on, they become turned off with respect to education," and we find it "very difficult to turn these youngsters back on" to learning.

Despite the mounting evidence that later is better, public schools are rushing headlong in the other direction. New York Mayor Edward Koch and Board of Education President Robert Wagner, Jr., both bachelors who have no children and have the attitude of many childless people that preschool children ought to be regimented into prescribed behavior, are trying to impose their radical notions about education on children.

Mayor Koch set up an Early Childhood Education Commission which dutifully presented a report calling for "universal" schooling for 4-year-olds at an estimated annual cost of \$114 million plus increased federal and state aid. There was absolutely no demand from parents for this state intrusion into the lives of little children.

As the first step in this plan to institutionalize 4-year-olds, New York City opened 28 classes in September 1986. To the amazement of school officials, nearly half of the seats remained unfilled. Parents didn't want their toddlers to attend.

But the city government busybodies were unwilling to accept the parents' decision. The director of the early childhood education unit said, "We know they're out there somewhere," and warned that "the family-assistance people will be knocking on the doors looking for 4-year-olds."

All across the country, the National Education Association is turning up the political heat to force us to institutionalize little children as early as possible. The NEA is working for both mandatory kindergarten and early childhood education.

Yet, there is NO verifiable research which proves that kindergarten is better for children than homes. Dr. Raymond Moore says that he has looked for such evidence in more than 8,000 early childhood studies and found none.

There is not a single state where early school entrance mandates are based on replicable research or demonstrated need. Mandatory kindergarten and early childhood classes are enacted off the tops of legislators' heads without reasoned argument or evidence, simply to mimic what other states have done, or to accommodate employed mothers, or to create new jobs for teachers.

Kindergarten was originally designed for children disadvantaged by the lack of loving parents. It was never planned, until recent years, to displace parents of normal toddlers.

The extravagant misuse of some limited research about disadvantaged children in order to get tax dollars to compel normal children to accept the same programs is like forcing healthy children into hospital beds because hospitals have helped a few who are sick. Mandatory kindergarten and preschooling are worse than that, however, because we are not at all sure that the preschool programs for the disadvantaged have helped anybody.

Adverse consequences of kindergarten and early childhood education also include the new problems suffered by elementary school children: stress (hitherto unheard of among small children), and boredom (because the child has learned so little in comparison to the many hours and years he has spent in the classroom). Little children need time to grow before they are put under the stress of being expected to perform like super-baby in school.

## Bad Idea #2: Get Corporations Involved

A cover article in *Nation's Business* addresses the problem that so many young people are too illiterate to hire even for entry-level jobs, and challenges business to take on an effort to remedy the situation. Business is already spending \$30 billion a year to teach new workers the skills they failed to acquire in elementary and secondary schools.

No one can dispute the appallingly poor product produced by the \$200 billion-a-year public school industry. Secretary of Education Lauro Cavazos admitted in a recent article in *Principal* magazine that 27 million young adults are functionally illiterate, and another 40 to 60 million are only marginally literate. This means that about 77 million American adults can't read anything with a vocabulary more extensive than the couple of thousand words that pupils have been taught to memorize by the fifth grade.

Pardon me if I take exception to the whole notion that business can or should "get involved" in the public school morass. What business has done so far shows that it not only throws good money after bad, but compounds the problem by financing further failure and postponing real reform.

When business enters into some cooperative "partnership" with the public schools, business ends up being used as a fundraiser for the public school establishment, while the teachers' unions conduct the schools as usual. A review of the examples given in *Nation's Business* of business "cooperation" shows that business is mainly used as a Sugar Daddy to give or get more money for bad schools.

In South Carolina, businessmen were used to persuade the

legislature to vote a one cent sales tax increase. In Tennessee, the businessmen donated \$400,000 for television ads to persuade the state legislature to vote for a sales tax increase.

Business has also been persuaded to buy equipment, to finance classroom projects, to "adopt" a classroom, to "sponsor" a school or a tutor, and to "recognize" an outstanding teacher or student. All those things, of course, mean donating corporate money for projects peripheral to academic achievement.

In the so-called Boston Compact, business donated \$100 million over the last four years, and offered jobs for students upon graduation, on the promise that the schools would lower the dropout rate, raise test scores, and graduate pupils with a grasp of academic fundamentals. Businessmen have just called it quits and refused to finance a second four years because students' reading competency failed to improve.

Businessmen seem to lose all their usual business acumen when they go into negotiations with the teachers' unions. The businessmen simply fail to tackle the real problems: lack of accountability for results, the overloaded bureaucracy, the political power of the teachers' unions, the failure to teach reading by the proven phonics method, the filling up of the school day with offensive psychological curricula, the hostility to parents, and the high cost of \$5,000 per student.

Some businessmen get so woolly-brained and intimidated that they fall for the most outrageous tactic invented by the teachers' unions to create more jobs for their members: putting little children in school at age 3, commonly known as "early childhood education."

Those businessmen fall for what former Secretary of Education William Bennett calls "the 14-egg omelet fallacy." That's the notion that an inedible 12-egg omelet served up by a bad chef with a lousy recipe can be made into something delicious by adding two more eggs.

Businessmen, face up to reality. You are no match for the conniving, tax-salaried teachers' union negotiators who intimidate you by labeling themselves "the experts," speak a jargon you don't even understand, and play you for a sucker with a deep pocket they can pick. Here are a couple of suggestions for the next business "summit" with the education establishment.

Unless you hold the schools accountable for teaching pupils to read in the first grade, the entire rest of schooling — all eleven other grades — is a waste of time and a fraud on students, parents and taxpayers. Administrators should be reduced by at least half. Public schools have 30 to 40 times as many administrators per student as parochial schools, which turn out a superior product.

Xerox board chairman David T. Kearns, who has made some constructive suggestions for reforming public schools, ridicules most businessmen's attempts to help education. He derisively called them "feel-good partnerships" because they are like doing your child's homework. It's a misdirected kindness.

Kearns accurately says that these business forays into education "hurt more than they help because they keep shoring up a system that needs deep structural changes. And the longer those changes are delayed, the greater the agony will be when the inevitable day of reckoning comes."

### **Bad Idea #3: National Teacher Certification**

Americans spend almost \$200 billion per year on education,

a truly impressive sum. If any group could control that spending Goliath, it would have incredible power because it would control not only buildings and books and personnel, but also control the minds and behavior of our nation's youth.

That's why the fundamental ideology of what we affectionately call "the American way of life" demands that public schools be locally controlled. That's why, when federal aid to schools became part of our education infrastructure, Congressmen wrote into the law a provision that prohibits the Federal Government from exercising any "direction, supervision, or control over the curriculum, program of instruction, administration or personnel of any educational institution, school or school system."

The Carnegie Corporation of New York is one of the few institutions in America wealthy and influential enough to dream of controlling education in the United States. Obviously, anything that promotes centralization or nationalization of education policy or personnel would make it easier to influence what transpires in our 15,500 school districts.

In 1986, Carnegie released a 77-page report called "Teaching As A Profession — Teachers for the 21st Century" — an innocuous title for a far-reaching strategy for taking control of public school education policies, plus a political plan to achieve that objective. Carnegie sold 35,000 copies of this report and its task force members traveled to 29 states that year to sell its ideas.

In a nutshell, the Carnegie elite want to nationalize American education. The game plan to achieve this goal, using Carnegie's ample financial resources, is to define the problem so that it will point to a Carnegie-engineered "solution," establish a "partnership" with prominent business leaders to give verisimilitude to Carnegie-written proposals, and then persuade selected Governors to push Carnegie's proposals through Congress and reluctant state legislatures.

The Carnegie report was unveiled at the 1986 Governors' Conference at Hilton Head, South Carolina. Carnegie's sop to the business community was the first sentence in the report: "America's ability to compete in world markets is eroding." Prior to that, no one had thought that the number-one purpose of education should be to enable American business to compete in world markets.

The Governors who seem willing to promote Carnegie's proposals, and even present them as their own, are former North Carolina Governor James Hunt, New Jersey Governor Thomas Kean, former Tennessee Governor Lamar Alexander, Kentucky Governor Wallace Wilkinson, and Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton.

The Carnegie report calls for what it labels "sweeping changes in education policy." The principal changes are the creation of a national certification board for teachers and the restructuring of schools to accept performance goals.

National teacher certification would be the fulcrum of control. Colleges would inevitably try to train teachers so they would be accepted by the national certification board.

The Carnegie proposal would also significantly alter the organization of the public school. It would eliminate the position of school principal and replace him with autonomous decision makers called "lead teachers" (with salaries ranging up to \$72,000) *provided they are nationally certified.*

There is no evidence that centralization or nationalization

of public school policies or personnel will solve any of the problems we face today. Indeed, there is considerable evidence that a major part of the problem is the nationalization that has already occurred as a result of the two powerful national teachers unions.

It isn't just coincidence that the presidents of those two unions, Mary Futrell of the National Education Association and Albert Shanker of the American Federation of Teachers, as well as John W. Gardner, founder of the liberal activist organization Common Cause, were members of the Task Force that produced this power-grabbing Carnegie report.

A National Board for Professional Teaching Standards has already been created with generous funding from Carnegie. Two-thirds of the 64 board members just happen also to be members of the two top teachers unions, including Futrell, Shanker, and other senior NEA and AFT officials. Isn't that cozy?

Before it starts certifying teachers, however, the board says it needs \$50 million for ten categories of research and is lobbying hard to get half of that amount from the taxpayers via a bill sponsored by Senators Chris Dodd (D-CT) and Claiborne Pell (D-RI).

The whole scenario sounds like a game of expanding the influence of a wealthy foundation and the political power of the teachers unions at the expense of the U.S. taxpayers. Incidentally, there would be no benefit to children or their education.

#### **Bad Idea #4: Drug Ed and Sex Ed Courses**

Should the schools provide drug education and sex education? Most public opinion surveys report overwhelmingly positive replies. However, the real questions we should ask are, what is being taught and do the courses have a positive or negative effect?

A psychologist has provided a professional answer to these questions. Dr. William Coulson of the U.S. International University in San Diego has been giving speeches that explain what happens in the classroom when these subjects are presented.

Dr. Coulson describes the common pedagogical practice of making education "child-centered." Adults are cautioned to stop lecturing and to start listening, while classrooms are dominated by group discussion and the fad called peer counseling, especially on the subjects of drugs and sex.

Dr. Coulson cites as an example a booklet provided for use in public schools by the Tobacco Institute called "Helping Youth Decide." Its message is that schoolchildren should make their own decision about smoking while parents and teachers abdicate their authority to tell children what is right, healthy, and legal.

"Try not to lecture," says page ten of this booklet. "React to your child as you would to an adult friend. . . . Become a better listener, for your child's sake."

This self-serving advice is in stark contrast to cigarette advertising, which uses a stern and powerful voice of command. Examples are Marlboro's "Come to where the flavor is," and R. J. Reynolds' "Dare to be More."

The Tobacco Institute's self-serving advice to parents and teachers thrusts decision-making onto minor children without any instruction or guidance by responsible adults. The child is thus left prey to the salesman who peddle a powerful and persuasive line.

Dr. Coulson shows that the same type of self-serving

courses serve the commercial interests of the contraceptive manufacturers. "Straight Talk" is the name of a sex education course provided free to public schools by Ortho Pharmaceutical Corporation, a major manufacturer of contraceptives.

The centerpiece of the "Straight Talk" curriculum is a video. "It clearly sells the sponsor's products," Dr. Coulson says; "the manufacturers make no money off abstinence."

On the video, a friendly physician-narrator from a women's health center in San Francisco, says, "Hi, I'm Dr. Mike Policar. I'm here to give you some important information about how to prevent pregnancy. You're told you can't vote till you're 18. And in many states, you're told you can't drink until you're 21. But the decision to have sex is your own, and it's an adult one. That means that you, and not anyone else, decide when and if you're ready for sex."

Dr. Coulson explains that the message which impressionable youngsters receive from this video is: You are told you are too young to vote and too young to drink, so, if you want to be an adult, try sex; you're ready for sex if **you** say you are.

The video gives 50 seconds on postponing sex; the tone is, "that's okay, too." Then follows a sales pitch, eight times as long, in favor of the contraceptive products that just happen to be sold by Ortho.

"The bottom line is," according to this friendly face brought into the classroom by the video screen, "if you're not ready for pregnancy and the responsibilities you'd face as a parent, then use birth control every time you have sex."

The teacher's manual states that it is bad educational form for a teacher to have opinions. "Ideally," the guidelines say, "your role in the discussion should be minimal. We suggest that you appoint a student discussion leader from your class to conduct the talk."

Dr. Coulson asks, "For whom is such an arrangement 'ideal'? The answer has to be Ortho. It's clear that sexual experimentation is more likely to follow when the class is led by peers than when it is led by the teacher."

The practice of demoting teachers to the status of facilitators and replacing teaching with peer-group discussions is, unfortunately, very widespread in public schools today. Dr. Coulson warns that this means "a system of classroom interaction in which the recommended stance of the responsible adult is to refuse to teach. And what **that** comes down to is a better shot at our children by the peer group and dealers."

So we come back to the original question. In classroom drug ed and sex ed, **who** is doing the teaching and **what** is being taught? Is it simply a softening up experience that falsely makes a minor child believe he has the ability to make adult decisions but leaves the child with no psychological defenses against hard-sell advertising by the peddlers of illegal drugs and illicit sex?

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