

# EDUCATION REPORTER

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## NEA Dues Increase to Rescue Common Core

The three-dollar per year dues increase approved by delegates at the Atlanta National Education Association (NEA) convention in July of 2013 went directly to a “special fund” called “Great Public Schools.” NEA leadership allocated the extra three dollars per member to certain union affiliates for reasons and in amounts they determined. Delegates added the caveat that union leaders must inform them as to how this money was spent.

Mike Antonucci of the Education Intelligence Agency writes that “the ultimate authority to release the funds rested in the hands of two men”: NEA president Dennis Van Roekel and NEA executive director John Stocks. It turns out that of the thirteen Great Public Schools grants awarded, nine will be used to “ease the implementation of Common Core Standards.” (EIAonline.com, 1-27-14)

The union is experiencing a love/hate relationship with Common Core.

On the one hand, union leadership resists breaking with the Democrat establishment to which they contribute heavily and from which they receive heartily. But many teachers are displeased with the top-down Common Core standards, which were thrust upon them without their input. The union has been forced to speak out against Common Core. There was rank-and-file animosity toward Arne Duncan and Common Core at the NEA Convention; it is doubtful that convention delegates would have passed the dues increase had they known it would eventually

be used to shore up Common Core. Even the NEA president has had to admit that Common Core is “botched.” (See *Education Reporter* March 2014)

It is unfortunate that the NEA union teachers’ dues increase dedicated to the Great Public Schools fund actually contributed to the mediocre public school education that Common Core is offering to students.



## SAT Test To Align With Common Core

Common Core architect David Coleman, who has been the president of the College Board since 2012, says that organization’s SAT test has “become disconnected from the work of our high schools.” Announcing major changes to the SAT, Coleman states: “It is time for the College Board to say in a clearer voice that the culture and practice of costly test preparation that has arisen around admissions exams drives the perception of inequality and injustice in our country.” (*New York Times*, 3-5-14) Coleman’s stated intent is to align the tests with what students learn in high school and to eliminate any advantages gained by students who pay for tutoring and coaching before taking the test.

In the past, the SAT test was the gold standard for use by college admissions offices but it has been steadily losing ground to the ACT test. SAT changes announced include: eliminating “arcane” vocabulary words; focusing math questions on just three areas; returning to 1600 points total, 800 each available in reading and math; and the essay becoming optional. In addition, the College Board is launching several programs specifically aimed at giving advantages to low-income and minority students.

National Association of Scholars (NAS) President Peter Wood claims that the SAT changes are of a political nature and are part of Common Core’s march to lower standards of education in the na-

tion. The notion that “everyone should go to college” plays a part in the motives of Coleman, both in Common Core and at the College Board. But “college” becomes something different in the world of mediocrity that Coleman is attempting to create.

Peter Wood suggests that the College Board’s new “Access to Opportunity,” “All In Campaign,” and waivers for college application fees for low-income students are indicative of the College Board’s “preoccupation” with “social justice” politics, rather than a focus on determining academic excellence and ability to succeed in college.

There is evidence that SAT changes are an effort to make the test align with Common Core standards, developed by Coleman before he moved to the College Board presidency. Common Core sets “a ceiling on the academic preparation of most students,” according to Peter Wood of the NAS. (MindingtheCampus.com, 3-9-14)

### Lowered Standards

Many suggest that Common Core has lowered the standards for high school students and, consequently, Coleman needed to realign the SAT to those lowered standards. If the SAT test didn’t change, students taking the test after learning under Common Core education standards would show dismal results. Common Core defers algebra until 9<sup>th</sup> grade, with the result that students are unable to reach

(See SAT, page 4)

## Student Privacy Under Attack

With increased emphasis on computer analytics as a means to assess student progress and overall learning, particularly that demanded due to Common Core standards, wide-ranging personal information about students and families is stored on computer systems. Khaliah Barnes, a lawyer with a privacy watchdog group, the Electronic Privacy Information Center, claims that “Student privacy is under attack.” Her opinion represents that of a cadre of parents, advocacy organizations, school districts, and governmental agencies that fear student information is being used and abused due to carelessness, deceit, and subterfuge, sometimes for commercial profit.

inBloom, a \$100 million student data collection project funded by the Gates Foundation and the Carnegie Foundation, closed up shop in April after the nine states that signed up to use the service realized the security of personally identifiable student information could be at risk. The organization claimed its storage was secure but many doubted this.

New York was the final state to withdraw from inBloom; “President Barack Obama’s Race To The Top education initiative, which awarded New York \$700 million, is heavily reliant upon data and statistics for teacher and student achievement.” New York and other states intended to use inBloom to fulfill federal data storage and sharing requirements. A New York school official claims inBloom’s “system was ‘untested and unproven.’” (*Newsday*, 4-21-14) The demise of inBloom is a victory for parents trying to protect their children’s privacy.

### Google Ogles Student Emails

Thousands of American K-12 schools and universities use Google Apps for Education, which is free and provides email, a calendar, cloud-based storage of student information, word-processing, spreadsheets, and other software applications. A lawsuit has been filed against Google by a student at the University of Hawaii and a student at the University of the Pacific in California. They are suing Google for “not only mining [their] email messages for keywords and other information, but also using resulting data — including newly created derivative information, or ‘metadata’ — for ‘secret user profiling’ that could serve as the basis for such activities as delivering targeted ads in Google products other than Apps for Education.” The lawsuit claims “that neither they nor any other users of Google Apps for Education consented to such practices.” Google’s claim that they don’t spy into student emails to gather data for advertising is contradicted by their own testimony in court. A representative of the Electronic Privacy Information Center stated, “Google’s sworn court statements reveal that the company has violated student trust by using stu-

dents’ education records for profit.” (*Education Week*, 3-26-14)

### Dept. of Education Privacy Belly Flop

In March, the Dept. of Education released a 14-page document intended to clarify student privacy issues titled “Protecting Student Privacy While Using Online Educational Services: Requirements and Best Practices.” No changes were made to protect students’ privacy. Education Secretary Arne Duncan is sticking with the administration’s previous easing of regulations made to the *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act* (FERPA), changes which have weakened FERPA’s ability to protect student privacy.

The Education Department’s guidelines clarification didn’t clarify anything. It was meant to respond to questions from schools about securing and sharing student data. But the only thing the Department clearly stated was: “it depends.” In fact, on page 2 of the newly released clarification it states:

**Question:** Is Student Information used in Online Educational Services protected by FERPA?

**Answer:** It depends.

The executive director of Class Size Matters, a New York City student advocacy group, stated: “In the process of encouraging a market in data-mining software and the outsourcing of education into private hands, [the U.S. Department of Education] seems willing to sacrifice our children’s privacy.” (*Education Week*, 3-5-14)

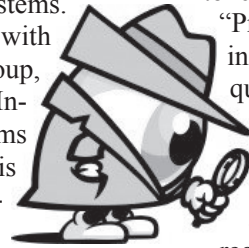
Partially due to increased federal government requirements for student information, all Common Core school districts have online longitudinal data systems about elementary, middle, and secondary school students. School districts store personally-identifiable student information, including Social Security numbers, health information, family structure, test scores, and more. Security breaches have occurred and caused actual and potential harm to students. Identity theft crimes may be perpetrated against children but may not become apparent until they try to establish credit as adults. Other leaks and instances of schools sharing private information have done more immediate harm to students.

### University Violations

At Indiana University, 146,000 students and recent graduates were informed in February that their names, addresses, and Social Security numbers were “stored in an insecure location for 11 months.” This was the result of careless online record maintenance, not a cyberattack.

Also in February, a “sophisticated cyberattack” was perpetrated at the University of Maryland. The Social Security numbers, birthdays, and university ID numbers of 309,000 students were leaked when “multiple layers of secu-

(See Student Privacy, page 4)



# EDUCATION BRIEFS

**When a 19-year-old engineering student leapt off a 4<sup>th</sup>-floor balcony in March while behaving “strangely hostile” after ingesting a legally purchased marijuana-laced cookie, the Denver coroner’s report indicated he had no history of mental problems or suicidal tendencies and that his death was linked to “marijuana intoxication.”** An associate dean at the Colorado School of Public Health expressed concerns about “the lack of research surrounding the higher potency of the drug’s current forms,” stating: “The marijuana of 2014 is not the marijuana of 1969.” (*Los Angeles Times*, 4-7-14)

**Twelve suburban Denver middle-school students were suspended after acting strangely at school when they ate marijuana-infused candies; the two students who supplied them were expelled.** A Children’s Hospital of Denver Emergency Dept. physician and toxicology expert “says his emergency room is treating one to two kids a month for accidental marijuana ingestion, mostly in the form of edibles such as brownies or candies.” He said the drug is particularly dangerous because it is “built into such an attractive, edible product.” (*USA Today*, 4-2-14)

**Gallup released a report on the State of American Schools in April that indicates 70% of teachers are not “engaged.”** The report’s definition of engaged includes being involved, enthusiastic, committed, and looking for ways to get better outcomes. “K-12 teachers scored last among twelve occupational groups in agreeing with the statement that their opinions count at work, and also last on ‘My supervisor creates an open and trusting environment.’” (*Hechinger Report*, 4-9-14)

**Parents at Harley Avenue Primary School in New York were notified by letter that the annual kindergarten show was canceled because of Common Core.** The letter from the principal and four teachers said: “We are responsible for preparing children for college and career with valuable lifelong skills and know that we can best do that by having them become strong readers, writers, co-workers, and problem solvers.” (*Washington Post*, 4-26-14)

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## Parents Say No! to Standardized Tests

It is spring, the season for standardized testing in schools across the nation. There are reports of massive numbers of students opting out of tests their parents consider improper, excessive, or damaging. The reasons for opting out vary:

- Parents object to huge, profit-making companies using their children as unpaid ‘guinea pigs’ to try out questions for the PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers) and SBAC (Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium) Common Core tests.
- The tests are not useful to teachers, parents, or students because they don’t assess important areas of learning; questions and answers are secret; and scores are not returned in a timely manner.
- Parents, teachers, and students object to spending millions of dollars on testing and computer infrastructure for online testing while schools suffer increased class size and cuts to arts, sports, and other engaging activities.
- As a result of stress and anxiety, students are crying, vomiting and soiling themselves during standardized exams. Children fear that if they fail, their teachers will suffer. Some justifiably worry they will be denied promotion to the next grade or graduation. (*Washington Post*, 4-15-14)



### “Computer Adaptive” Tests

Students usually take Common Core tests created by PARCC and SBAC on a computer. The tests are “computer adaptive,” which is described at the SBAC website:

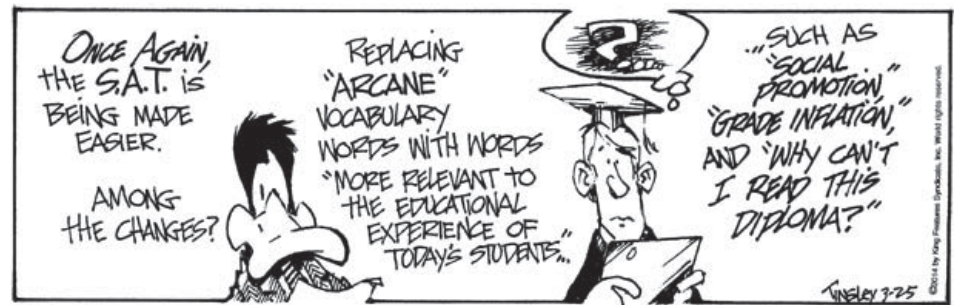
Based on student responses, the computer program adjusts the difficulty of questions throughout the assessment. For example, a student who answers a question correctly will receive a more challenging item, while an incorrect answer generates an easier question. By adapting to the student as the assessment is taking place, these assessments present an individually tailored set of questions to each student and can quickly identify which skills students have mastered. (*SmarterBalanced.org*)

The SBAC website claims this will give better information than “paper-and-pencil assessments” and provide “more accurate scores for all students across the full range of the achievement continuum.”

But how can student achievement be compared in an effective manner when all students in a grade are not taking the same exam? A computer-adaptive process that makes questions easier or harder can work in a blended learning environment in order to help a student achieve mastery before moving on to more difficult subject matter. It can also allow a student to advance more rapidly if the student has mastered the topics in a

(See *Parents Say No!*, page 4)

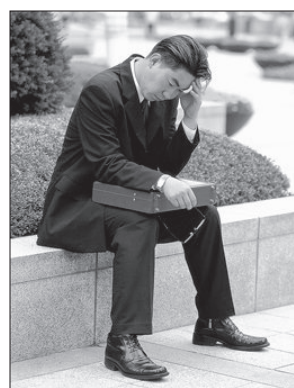
### MALLARD FILLMORE / by Bruce Tinsley



## Professors on Food Stamps

Even as the price of attending college has soared, those who actually teach students are sometimes not even making minimum wage. It is estimated that over 3/4 of those who teach students are not full-time professors. Instead, they are lecturers and instructors who have no permanent position, no tenure track, no medical or retirement benefits, and no job security.

In January of 2014, the House Education and the Workforce Committee released a report that turns attention to these adjunct professors. The Congressional



report, “The Just-In-Time Professor,” found that in 1969 fewer than 19% of college professors were part-time. From 1975 to 2011 there

has been a 300% increase in the contingent workforce in higher education. Adjuncts, part-time professors, and graduate students make up over 75% percent of the instructional workforce at colleges and universities, a total of 1.3 million individuals, according to the Department of Education.

Whether or not students suffer because of the tenuous employment and economic condition of their teachers is debatable. Parents certainly expect their children to have the best professors teaching their students. But dedication to students and subject matter is not determined by tenure or benefits; adjunct professors may exhibit excess dedication simply by their willingness to continue to teach amidst undesirable conditions.

An essay in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* suggests that an adjunct teaching a “15-week course means 45 face-to-face hours and at least three hours

(See *Professors*, page 4)

## Book of the Month



**Strings Attached: One Tough Teacher and the Gift of Great Expectations**, Joanne Lipman and Melanie Kupchynsky, Hyperion, 2013, \$24.99



After the death of a New Jersey music teacher, whose instructional formula involved “discipline, repetition, and hollering,” 100 of his former students came from all over the nation to play in an orchestral performance at his memorial. They expressed gratitude and admiration for the man who demanded more of them than they thought they could offer. But Mr. Jerry Kupchynsky would likely not be allowed to teach today; parents and school administrators would find him too demanding, harsh, and likely insist his techniques were detrimental to the psyche of students.

*Strings Attached* author Joanne Lipman describes changes that have taken place in education as: “progressive politics fed into a new paradigm of teaching that emphasized building up children’s self-esteem and that replaced discipline with praise. The teacher-led model of the classroom morphed into a student-centric model.”

Does coddling and over-praising help children? Recent psychological and physiological research indicates limited expectations harm children and that they are the first to spot false praise. Praise should be saved for actual accomplishments achieved through diligent work.

Co-author and daughter of “Mr. K,” Melanie writes that one of the first lessons she learned from her father was: “Work hard, but don’t whine if you lose. And if you do lose, pick yourself up and try harder next time.” A central tenet of Mr. K’s philosophy was that hard work leads to happiness, but he didn’t need to say it; he pushed students to find it out for themselves.

Mr. K’s music students auditioned for regional orchestras and were successful; although they experienced pressure, stage fright, and even Mr. K’s yelling, the challenges they faced made them capable of handling what life sent their way as adults.

Mr. K survived the Nazi and Soviet occupations of the Ukraine. Once he came to America he suffered more hardships, but remained undaunted.

The authors are childhood friends who had Mr. K as their teacher; his daughter is today a violinist for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. Lipman is a former *Wall Street Journal* editor.

Lipman states that Mr. K’s classroom attitude was: “You are going to fix this problem. . . . It is just a matter of trying and trying and trying some more. He yelled not because we’d never learn, but because he was absolutely certain that we would.” She writes: “there was something intoxicating about a teacher who had such absolute confidence — faith really — in my ability to do better.”

# FOCUS: Course Choice Proving a Promising Ed Reform Approach



by Dave Inman

First published by the Lexington Institute on November 4, 2013 and reprinted with permission.

The first of its kind and scope in the United States, Louisiana's Course Choice program presents a promising opportunity to reduce achievement gaps while providing significant new educational options for families, without drastically affecting traditional public school budgets.

Course Choice affords students in underperforming schools (or any schools with limited course offerings) the ability to attend virtual, in-person, or blended classes from providers outside their assigned schools. Louisiana's 42 approved Course Choice providers consist of five Louisiana public school districts, all Louisiana public colleges and universities, and various for- and

not-for-profit organizations. In this first year of operation, 2,400 students attend classes in core academics, Advanced Placement, dual enrollment, and career and technical education.

By targeting the highest-need curricular areas in the lowest performing schools, Course Choice gives students and schools a new way to address areas of unmet need for individual students in specific content areas. With its inception, Louisiana now offers every student in the state access to Advanced Placement courses.

Leveraging the scalability and border-busting impact of technology, many Course Choice offerings provide students in failing schools with highly qualified teachers they otherwise would not have. In 2011-12, over 100 school sites in Louisiana lacked a certified Algebra I teacher. Unbound by physical barriers, Course Choice can eliminate

that problem. Moreover, especially with the virtual and blended instructional models, content can be personalized, self-paced, and focused on mastery of material, rather than being rushed by a traditional pacing chart.

At an average cost of \$800 per student per class, Course Choice provides schools low-cost courses they wouldn't otherwise offer and delivery that may be more suited to diverse learning styles in 21<sup>st</sup> century classrooms. Importantly, Louisiana has taken major steps to ensure the financial sustainability of the program by implementing a performance-based funding plan, in which 50% of tuition is withheld from providers until students complete their courses successfully and on time.

For students seeking career or technical education opportunities, Course Choice also affords broader opportunities for hands-on learning, internships, and vocational training.

A commitment to quality control and

efficiency in shutting down providers who don't meet targets will be critical to the long-term success of the program in Louisiana; and such rigorous standards for selecting, reviewing, and paying providers will be key to the growth and sustainability of Course Choice programs nationwide.

As more states look to Course Choice to expand quality options for otherwise underserved students, there are many reasons to be optimistic about the approach as a valuable reform in new jurisdictions as well. Replicating the successes and learning from the challenges of Course Choice in Louisiana, states could address achievement gaps and expand educational options for all families in a fiscally sustainable way.

*Lexington Institute adjunct scholar Dave Inman is an experienced teacher, administrator, board member, and businessperson. He serves as program director of Breakthrough New Orleans.*

## Snow Days Need Not Get in the Way of Learning

by Mary Reiner

First published by the Lexington Institute on March 25, 2014 2013 and reprinted with permission.

Pennsylvania kids wishing for snow days might soon come into a shock while parents breathe a sigh of relief. That's because the Pennsylvania State House of Representatives passed the Online Education Initiative, a proposal that could replace the Xbox with online classes on snow days.

Replacing snow days with learning days is just one of the many possibilities of this Course Choice proposal. Representative Ryan Aument says that winter illustrates the power of online education and there is no reason for a snow day to stand in the way of learning.

Course Choice is one great way for students to be able to do actual schoolwork without chipping away at holidays or shortening summer vacation.

The plan calls for the Department of Education to establish an Online Course Clearinghouse of vetted and approved virtual, face-to-face, or blended learning classes for all students in grades six through 12. Parents, this means that your children will have the opportunity to participate in a greater number of courses that your school district did not previously offer.

In this day and age of shrinking school budgets (state per-pupil spending in Pennsylvania is down 5.9% from 2008 according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities), the Clearinghouse affords a creative way for districts to share resources and keep the eye on the ball of student achievement. It follows in the footsteps of Louisiana's highly lauded Course Choice program and is

inspired by Open Campus Pennsylvania, a partnership between three Lancaster County school districts.

The idea is to use the power of technology to provide greater course choices to students and schools who do not have access to them. Louisiana's program demonstrates the potential of this law by opening up Advanced Placement courses for all of its students, when less than half of them could take advantage before. Imagine the opportunities this could create for Pennsylvania's rural, low-income urban, and smaller school districts. Kids in Susquehanna County could take Advanced Placement (AP) Physics and Biology from Seneca Valley School District. It'd be a win for the kids and a win for the Susquehanna school district as it bypasses all of the costs associated with building and maintaining AP programs.

This sharing of resources is already at play in Lancaster County where many teaching positions have been eliminated because of budget cuts. Hempfield students can now take astronomy from Penn Manor's astronomy teacher and Penn Manor students can now take Latin from Hempfield's Latin teacher.

The best online and blended learning courses customize content and meet the needs of students where they are, whether they are advanced or falling behind. Students move on at their own pace once they have demonstrated mastery of the material. In the Open Campus Pennsylvania model, high school students, many of whom work after school, can even take the courses on their own time in odd hours during the week or on weekends.

Accountability is built into the Online Course Clearinghouse. Course participants provide feedback and there is a

(See *Snow Days*, page 4)



## KIPP Posts Transformative Outcomes in Los Angeles

by Don Soifer

First published by the Lexington Institute on August 30, 2013 2013 and reprinted with permission.

One of the most innovative elementary schools in the country produced some of the strongest results in California's state assessment system, and the takeaway for public schools across the nation may prove game-changing.

KIPP: Empower Academy, a public charter school a short walk from the Harbor Freeway in South Los Angeles, posted a score of 991 on the state's 2013 Academic Performance Index — the highest score achieved in Los Angeles County this year and among the highest in California.

The school was founded as a charter school in 2010, joining the high-achieving KIPP national network. It began serving kindergarten students and is in the process of adding one grade each year through the fourth grade. More than 90% of the school's students are eligible for the free or reduced-price lunch program — 87% are African-American and 12% Latino.

In its first year with students eligible for standardized testing (California's assessment system begins in second grade), 70% scored at the advanced level in English Language Arts, with another 25% scoring proficient. In math, 82% scored at advanced levels, and 16% scored proficient.

The school is a national pioneer in blended learning, with technology fully integrated into classroom instruction. It uses a Classroom Rotation model where students move between sessions of teacher-led instruction, small group or self-paced work, and online learning.

Children rotate through stations using different modes during each class period.

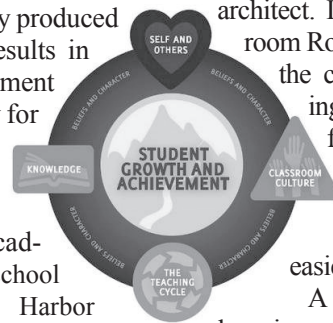
The model was created through consultation with Education Elements, a Silicon Valley-based firm which is widely regarded as the nation's top blended learning architect. Its leaders note that the Classroom Rotation model works well within the constraints of a school's existing architecture, while allowing for personalized instruction. Because the model doesn't require significant changes to traditional classrooms, it is easier for any school to implement.

A powerful feature of blended learning programs such as KIPP: Empower's is its use of data from students' work to help teachers target instruction and interventions. Students receive instruction from a variety of adults, including lead teachers, designated intervention teachers, and instructional assistants.

As students work on different online content chosen strategically by school leaders, their progress via correct and incorrect responses is captured and provided in real-time to teachers in easily-accessed format. This valuable support allows teachers to effectively personalize learning to each child's strengths and weaknesses.

As these latest outcomes demonstrate, the resulting instructional efficiency is proving to be a powerful tool in addressing achievement gaps rampant in most American public education, and especially in urban settings.

*Don Soifer is Executive Vice President of the Lexington Institute, a nonpartisan think tank headquartered in Arlington, Virginia, where he directs the institute's research programs in domestic-policy areas, including education. Soifer has served since 2008 on the District of Columbia's Public Charter School Board and is also on the board of Carpe Diem, a network of charter schools that has received national recognition.*



## Student Privacy *(Continued from page 1)*

city were compromised.” (*Christian Science Monitor*, 2-26-14) A University of Maryland official stated that, although they doubled their Information Technology department staff and expenditures in 2012, schools are fighting a constant battle against hackers who become ever-more sophisticated.

### Sinking Teeth into Students' Private Info

An unexpected consequence of collecting private student data, lax control of the information, and sharing of information with third parties has been unnecessary dentistry done on children. Mobile dentists come to schools to perform services such as x-rays, teeth cleaning, fillings, and other procedures. These practices often serve low-income clients and the services are often paid for by Medicaid. Some practices and practitioners are subpar.

ReachOut Healthcare, Church Street Health Management, and other corporate dental chains in 23 states were investigated in 2013 by the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee in response to complaints. Among other findings, the Committee determined that two-thirds of the baby root canals done by Church Street Health Management (later renamed CSHM) were “likely unnecessary.” CSHM dental clinics are called Small Smiles; CSHM gets potential patient information from school records and some dental work is done on school premises.

ReachOut Healthcare's practice is to “make friends with employees on [school] campuses, particularly those in administrative or nursing offices, take them to lunch, and thereafter ask for student information databases,” according to Arizona state Sen. Kimberly Yee who sponsored a bill to “strengthen procedures related to the release of student directory information — which typically includes name, address, and phone number — to third-party vendors.” (*Education Week*, 1-22-14)

### More Security Breaches

Other recent data breaches include those below, which occurred in the last two months of 2013:

- In New York, the names, ID numbers, and free-lunch designations of 15,000 former students in the Long Island, New York, Sachem Central School District were posted online by a 17-year-old student who hacked and downloaded the information.
- The names, birth dates, sex, and eye exam results of 2,000 students

in Chicago were posted online after they received free vision exams at school.

- In Virginia, a New York vendor “inadvertently uploaded and left unprotected directory information including students' names, addresses, telephone numbers, dates and places of birth, course schedules, and attendance histories.” (*Education Week*, 1-22-14)

According to the *Christian Science Monitor*, “The ever-broadening potential uses of student data, for everything from marketing to federal tracking of the effectiveness of education policies, continues to concern privacy advocates.” (2-26-14)

### Who Needs All The Data?

Some educators question the need for so much computerized student data to be collected and stored. Undoubtedly computers can be useful to educators. But is technology the be-all and end-all of education? Are people still the most important factor in educating children? Reacting to the shutdown of inBloom, teacher Michelle K. commented at the *Washington Post* website:

On any given day, I can say exactly where each of my students is academically because I am a professional, I know my job and I know my kids. I don't need a computer to analyze the data and my students.

The role of teachers in classrooms is being discounted. There is constant pressure to use technology to teach and to measure student achievement. Commercial entities are being invited into classrooms via computers far too often and too much data about students is being shared.

The Dept. of Education website reveals troubling information about data-tracking systems on page three of the guidelines released in March. (Ed.gov) Not only can third parties mine emails for keywords in order to send *relevant* ads to students but they also have the ability at our schools to record how long a student *hovers* over a question before answering. Third parties record a student's time spent online, success rates, and even keystroke information. If the U.S. Dept. of Education guidelines are faithfully observed, the students' information, though personally identifiable when it is shared, should have personally identifiable information removed before a third party uses it outside the school setting. This seems to be exactly the Big-Brother style snooping on students that privacy experts have been warning against and about which parents have concerns.

## Professors *(Continued from page 2)*

of preparation for each class session, if you're a very fast grader. That's about \$7 an hour.” (3-27-13) National Public Radio reports that most adjuncts are “paid an average of \$2,000 to \$3,000 per class with few to no benefits.” (2-6-14) Adjuncts often teach several courses, sometimes at more than one college, traveling between campuses to make a subsistence wage. Some reportedly teach as many as ten courses.

As is the case with many other occupations, the Affordable Care Act has only made adjunct professors' situation worse. Colleges have responded to

Obamacare's requirement that large employers offer full-time employees health insurance or pay a fine by cutting the course load the professors teach, making them part-time and ineligible for coverage. One adjunct reported, “I was supposed to teach three courses this fall, but the university canceled one of my courses in August, the week before the semester started. The reason was to avoid having to give me any benefits, including health care, due to the Affordable Care Act.” (InsideHigherEd.com, 1-24-14)

At City University of New York (CUNY), Rosalind Petchesky is a tenured

## Snow Days *(Continued from page 3)*

rating system that is displayed publicly. A performance-based funding plan withholds 40% of the per-course fee to providers until the course is completed.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education is already on board with this new program and to show its good faith, it has vetted and approved more than a dozen providers of Algebra I and Biology, two courses necessary for the Keystone Exams. And for those districts worried about potential start-up costs, the Governor has conveniently added a \$10 million line item in the education budget

for hybrid-learning grants. The plan's next stop is the Pennsylvania State Senate.

Snow days aside, parents and policy makers alike should take note. Pennsylvania could join the ranks of other states like Louisiana, Utah, Georgia, and Florida in launching one of the most important policy innovations in K-12 education that's great for kids and easy on the checkbook.

*Lexington Institute adjunct fellow Mary Reiner is founder of the America's Future Foundation and a founding board member of DC School Reform Now.*

## SAT *(Continued from page 1)*

the level of pre-calculus or calculus in high school. Completion of calculus is the norm for admission to competitive colleges. This furthers the claim that Common Core only prepares students for two-year community colleges.

Peter Wood suggests that clever parents whose students aspire to attend elite universities will work around the limitations of the Common Core and find alternative ways for students to complete calculus in high school, but “a large percentage of bright and capable students in ordinary American schools are going to be short-changed in math.”

Students who have a strong vocabulary will be unable to gain recognition for their extensive reading and study because challenging words are being removed from the verbal portion of the SAT test, “replaced by words that are common in college courses, like ‘em-

pirical’ and ‘synthesis.’” (*New York Times*, 3-5-14) Examples of words now deemed *arcane* are “depreciatory” and “membranous.” This gives further credence to the assertion that the SAT has been dumbed down to align with Common Core.

The changes will do little to eliminate the throngs of students who pay for help to prepare for SAT tests or the advantages gained by those who are ready to take the test. A vice president of Kaplan Test Prep told the *New York Times*, “People will always want an edge. And test changes always spur demand.”

NAS Pres. Peter Wood sums up Common Core and the SAT changes in his commentary at *MindingtheCampus.com*: “We are embarking on a great expansion of the left's long-term project of trading off our best chances to foster individual excellence for broadly-distributed access to mediocre education.”

## Parents Say NO! *(Continued from page 2)*

certain segment of the curriculum. But it fails as a way to determine what all students at a grade level or in a particular course of study know.

### You Have No Right

The Fordham Institute, an organization that fiercely defends all things Common Core, maintains that parents have no right to opt their students out of testing. Fordham claims that parents *may* decide if they want their child to attend public or private school or *can* choose to homeschool them. Then Fordham proclaims, “But when [parents] expect the state to educate their children at public expense, the public has a right to know whether those children are learning anything . . . ; whether taxpayers are getting a decent ROI (return on investment) from the schools they're paying for; and whether their community, their state, their society will be economically competitive and civically whole in the future as a result of an adequately educated populace.”

Continuing its comments aimed at parents who wish to decide what is best for their children, the Fordham Institute claims opting out is “not a legitimate form of civil disobedience. And it's probably not legal, either.”

professor, while Marcia Newfield is an adjunct. Both are in their seventies and both have taught for decades. While Newfield is paid a little better than most adjuncts, whose nationwide average is \$2,987 per course, she earns nowhere near the \$144,000 that a full professor like Petchesky earns at CUNY. Newfield explains, “To students, everyone is just

They suggest to parents: “If you really find state tests odious, put your money and time where your mouth is — and stop asking taxpayers to educate your children.” Many parents would remove their children from public school if they were given vouchers or tax credits to be used toward sending their children to private schools.

No one asked parents if they wanted their children to be educated under the strictures of Common Core. No one asked them if high scores on standardized testing should be the ultimate goal of their children's education. Parents are taxpayers, too, and deserve to have a say in the way their children are educated.

While many believe grades on class work are a better measure of student learning than standardized tests, Fordham proclaims that “teacher-conferred grades” or “promotions and graduations” do not “prove that learning occurred.” (EdExcellence.com) The Fordham Institute suggests that *only* standardized tests can do that. Yet Fordham justifies the use of Common Core tests, which are computer adaptive and are changed for each student. Unfortunately, such tests fail to tell taxpayers whether students have learned.

‘professor,’” but adjuncts “are poor. There's no other way to explain it.” (NBC News, 1-20-14)

The Congressional report concludes, “adjuncts and other contingent faculty likely make up the most highly educated and experienced workers on food stamps and other public assistance in the country.”