

EDUCATION REPORTER

NUMBER 361

THE NEWSPAPER OF EDUCATION RIGHTS

FEBRUARY 2016

Republican-Dominated Congress Betrays Students

A Republican and a Democrat worked together to create education policy in hopes of improving student performance. The new bill is a disaster. It increases the federal role in education, it ignores the rights of parents to determine what's best for their children, and it expands the amount of student data collected and stored in an often unsecured manner.

Some might guess the described law is No Child Left Behind, a collaboration between President George W. Bush and Senator Ted Kennedy that never worked. But now it is the Every Student Succeeds Act, or ESSA, an equally misnamed law that will likely cause just as much chaos as No Child Left Behind did.

ESSA was cooked up by Republican Senator Lamar Alexander and Democrat Senator Patty Murray. It was passed by a Congress that at best can be called "White Flag," a term Eagle Forum uses when Republicans are willing to give in to whatever the Democrats want. Despite desperate pleas from parents who took the time to read the bill, the Republican-controlled House passed ESSA with a vote of 359 to 64. The Republican-controlled Senate passed the bill 85 to 12. Many believe those who are supposed to represent the people are actually deceiving them, or too lazy to read the bills they end up passing.

Congress claims that ESSA reins in the power of the Secretary of Education. But under ESSA, according to *Education Week*, "States would still have to submit accountability plans to the Education Department." Sounds like federal control. But not to worry because "a state could get a hearing if the department turned down its plan." (*Education Week*, 11-30-15)

The public won't know for a while how bad the law passed in December of 2015 is because they are being lied to by their representatives, by the press, and by many education think tanks and gurus that are praising ESSA as the undoing of NCLB. The talking points aren't borne out by an actual reading of the 1,061-page law, passed within hours of its release by the committee that reconciled the House and Senate versions. The reconciliation committee stripped out every conservative measure that was previously included.

While stating in a few places that the Secretary of Education doesn't have final say over what states decide about education, in statement after statement, the bill gives the final say and the purse strings to the U.S. Department of Education.

How They Lie to Us

Parents who begged their representatives to vote against the bill received responses full of misstatements, like those from North Carolina Senator Thom Tillis, a Republican who won his 2012 election by promising to govern as a conservative. Tillis wrote:

ESSA returns responsibility for education standards and accountability measures to where it belongs — the states. This bill ends the Common Core mandate and ensures that states

decide what academic standards they will adopt, without interference from the federal government. ESSA also repeals numerous federal mandates on standardized testing, allowing North Carolina and other states to test less frequently and customize testing strategies.

The bill doesn't do any of those things. Tillis concludes his letter with a thanks for contacting him, and, "Please do not hesitate to contact me again about other important issues." One wonders, "Why bother?" His vote might be explained by the fact that he was endorsed by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, a major cheerleader for Common Core. The Chamber of Commerce contributed \$2.7 million to the Tillis campaign. (*Triangle Business Journal*, 11-5-14)

Politico wrote an article titled, "How Congress finally killed No Child Left Behind." But they didn't kill it. Congress changed the name to an equally utopian sounding "Every Student Succeeds" and doubled down on federal control, mandated testing, and threw in a costly pre-school monstrosity that will harm young children.

"ESSA codifies a new \$250 million per year pre-K education program, thus asserting federal intervention even earlier in children's lives." (*HeritageAction-Scorecard.com*, 12-11-15)

The ability of parents to opt their children out of testing is effectively eliminated. Under ESSA, states must guarantee that 95% of students participate in testing. How parents will be cajoled and (*See Congressional Betrayal*, page 4)



Are Teachers Unions a State Agency?

On January 11, 2016, lawyers for ten California teachers who don't want to pay fees to a union that uses their money to support candidates and positions with which they disagree presented their oral arguments to the Supreme Court. They say forced payment results in a violation of their rights to free speech and to free association. The ruling will have far-reaching affects because teachers unions in 23 states collect compulsory union fees from all teachers, whether they choose to be union members or not. In the remaining states union membership and fees aren't mandatory.

George Will makes it clear that *Friedrichs v. California Teachers Union* is about political spending and much more. Will says:

In the 2014 off-year elections, the NEA was the third-largest political spender, almost entirely for Democratic candidates, groups or causes. In 36 states, from 2000 through 2009, teachers unions spent more on state elections than the combined spending of all business associations.

But of equal importance, according to Will, is the fact that even the use of fees that support internal union activities such as collective bargaining is also unconstitutional. He says, "Unions, the dissident teachers say, bargain about issues that 'go to the heart of education policy' — teacher evaluation and tenure, class size, seniority preferences, etc. — as well as quintessentially political matters such as government's proper size, its fiscal policies and the allocation of scarce public resources." He emphasizes, "Private-sector collective bargaining

does not influence governmental policymaking." Teachers unions contracts do influence policymaking.

Will hopes the Supreme Court "is ready to undo 39 years of damage to the First Amendment rights of millions of government employees." (*Washington Post*, 1-8-16)

A ruling favorable to Friedrichs and her fellow teachers would herald changes in the 23 agency-fee states. But Mike Antonucci, director of the Education Intelligence Agency, points out that even more impact might be felt in the states that don't collect agency fees. He predicts, "[I]n places where they have never even heard of agency fees, teachers' unions will go from not being strong

to not being able to do much of anything at all."

Antonucci says:

Agency fee states have been so healthy for so long [that] their members have been propping up weak affiliates in non-agency fee states. When those revenues begin to dissipate, the struggling state affiliates have no reserves on which to draw. They will either begin to fail financially, or [the] National Education Association [union] will have to devote an increasing share of a decreasing pot of revenues to keep them viable. (*EIAonline.com*, 1-25-16)

Justices React

A ruling on the case won't be made

(*See Teachers Unions*, page 4)



Just Keep Reading

A University of Texas professor who studies reading says the consequences of online reading negatively influence comprehension, particularly of more difficult texts. Professor Andrew Dillon says, "We're spending so much time touching, pushing, linking, scrolling, and jumping through text that when we sit down with a novel, daily habits of jumping, clicking, and linking is just ingrained."

Maryanne Wolf, a Tufts University cognitive neuroscientist who is one of the world's foremost experts on the study of reading is concerned about what screen reading is doing to the brains of children. She and other researchers say there are major differences between online and print reading. Reading comprehension of paper books is better than that

observed when one reads from a screen. Wolf not only found her own ability to understand literature diminishing due to reading from screens but she also hears complaints from English department chairs who say current students are unable to understand classic literature. Experts worry that if this phenomenon of decreased comprehension occurs in adults, what harm can intensive screen reading cause to children's developing brains?

Print book sales increased modestly between 2014 and 2015, according to Nielsen BookScan. (*QZ.com*, 12-19-15) But there is no denying that screens will remain in children's lives. "There is concern that young children's affinity

(*See Reading*, page 4)

EDUCATION BRIEFS

The American Council of Trustees and Alumni released a survey that shows how little Americans know about civics. They found that nearly 10% of college graduates think the woman on the TV show “Judge Judy” is a Supreme Court Justice. A shocking “46% of college grads don’t know the election cycle — six years for senators, two years for representatives.” Among the general population, ACTA found that “54% of those surveyed cannot identify the Bill of Rights accurately . . . [and] over 1 in 10 of those ages 25–34 believe that the Constitution must be reauthorized every four years. (Go-ACTA.org, 9-8-15)

According to the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE), the number of colleges that “clearly and substantially prohibited” free speech dropped to 49.3%, the first time in FIRE’s history that the figure is below 50%. The number of schools awarded FIRE’s “green light rating,” meaning they have eliminated all speech codes that seek to quash the First Amendment on campus, has increased from 18 to 22 — unfortunately, that’s out of 440 schools. (TheFire.org, 9-15)

In order to stop teachers unhappy with work conditions from falsely calling in sick, which has resulted in about 700 lost instructional hours, Detroit Public Schools (DPS) asked a judge to “issue a restraining order and preliminary injunction to force teachers to . . . return to work.” Both motions name the Detroit Federation of Teachers union and its president. Only 8% of DPS’s 8th-grade students read proficiently. (CNN, 1-20-16)

Research on students in New York City public elementary and middle schools conducted between 2008 and 2013 found that access to cold water drinking fountains can reduce obesity rates and body mass indexes. “Results from this study show an association between a relatively low-cost water availability intervention and decreased student weight.” (*JAMA-Pediatrics*, 1-19-16)

Education Reporter (ISSN 0887-0608) is published monthly by Eagle Forum Education & Legal Defense Fund with editorial offices at 7800 Bonhomme Ave., St. Louis, MO 63105, (314) 721-1213, fax (314) 721-3373. Editor: Virginia Barth. The views expressed in this newsletter are those of the persons quoted and should not be attributed to Eagle Forum Education & Legal Defense Fund. Annual subscription \$25. Back issues available @ \$2. Periodicals postage paid at Alton, Illinois.

Web site: <http://www.eagleforum.org>
E-mail: education@eagleforum.org

Handwriting Matters

Although Common Core fails to include cursive handwriting and replaces it with keyboarding, many states are returning to a requirement that children learn to write. Arkansas, California, Georgia, Kansas, North Carolina, and Tennessee include cursive in their curriculum for the 2015-16 school year. A Washington state legislator is trying to bring back cursive. One district in Ohio snuck cursive writing in under the guise of art curriculum. (IndependentJournalReview.com, 1-27-16)

Some districts and classroom teachers won’t let schoolchildren write in cursive and demand that they print. But children who learn the skill of writing in cursive are proven to be better readers, spellers, and thinkers. The physical act of forming and connecting letters helps the brain process and make sense of information. Keyboarding has no similar benefit.

In states or districts that fail to teach children to properly write, parents can fill in the gaping hole by making certain their children are fully educated, including having the ability to quickly and fluently record their ideas on paper. Parents can teach children handwriting at home.

The Zaner-Bloser Handwriting series is a good place to start. Parents could

move students through every Zaner-Bloser book if they wish, but many students will be able to skip right from the kindergarten book to Grade 2C, which includes some printing review then moves into cursive basics.

Most parents will find the teacher edition of the Zaner-Bloser books unnecessary.

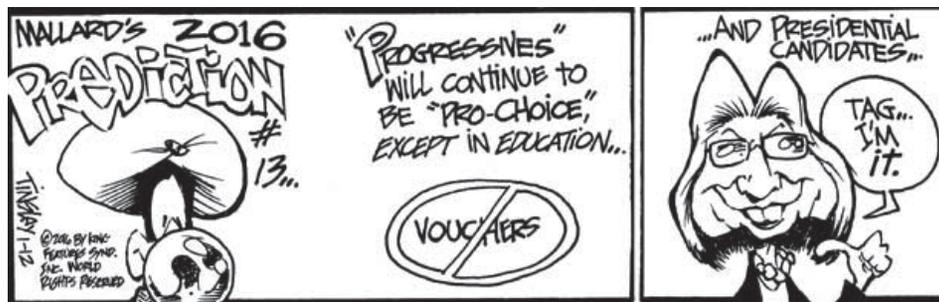
Their website suggests 15 minutes of daily practice forming letters but parents often find it difficult to keep their children from moving quickly through their handwriting books. It is helpful to provide three-line manuscript paper for additional practice because children enjoy exercising their skills.

These books can be purchased at the Zaner-Bloser website or through homeschool resources like the Rainbow Resource Center. Unused copies can sometimes be found at resale sites.

Another program that some might find useful is CursiveLogic. Linda Shrewsbury was helping adults learn to write when she realized that “each letter seemed to fit into one of four distinct categories.” She calls them “oval, loop, swing, and mound.” To help students learn quickly, she developed Cursive- (See *Handwriting*, page 4)



MALLARD FILLMORE / by Bruce Tinsley



Teaching Students About America

Princeton University’s James Madison Program in American Ideals and Institutions teaches undergraduates, graduate students, and postdoctoral candidates about America. It is named after the Princeton student who became the principal architect of the Constitution and the fourth President of the United States.

Some of the concepts central to the James Madison Program are:

- the nature of free political institutions and the cultural conditions for their establishment and maintenance;
- judicial independence and the scope and limits of judicial power;
- the place of religion and religiously informed moral judgment in American public life.

In order to understand these principles, students explore the writings of America’s founders and leading statesmen, including Madison, Jefferson, Washington, Adams, Lincoln, and King.

Students study the thinkers who shaped the Founding Fathers, like August-

tine, Aquinas, Calvin, Locke, Luther, and Adam Smith. They also examine outsiders’ commentary on American ideals, from people such as Tocqueville, Churchill, and Solzhenitsyn.

Some of the questions addressed in the Mission Statement and during a course of study in the James Madison Program are:

What is the proper relationship between government and civil society? What structures of government are most conducive to promoting the ideals embodied in the Declaration of Independence?

Is there a relationship between economic freedom and civil liberty?

The program sponsors visiting professors and promotes various scholarly collaborations.

Program Director Robert P. George and an advisory board from “the worlds of law, business, philanthropy and the academy” make sure that future generations of leaders understand the ideals and the principles upon which the nation was founded so that it will continue to flourish.



Book of the Month



Social Justice Isn’t What You Think It Is, Michael Novak and Paul Adams, Encounter Books, 2015, \$27.99

Leftists in education and society have appropriated the term “social justice,” stolen it from Christian thinkers, Popes, and others who believe that society could improve and take care of the most fragile among us, doing so without “the state” calling the shots.

Teachers unions take pride in being “social justice warriors.” Union leadership and some members promote extremely liberal notions, causes, and policies. They hope to indoctrinate schoolchildren in their personal belief system that government is the answer to almost any problem.

The first part of this book is an historical overview of the social philosophy of justice. Christian social justice begins with the belief in a good and loving God. It values liberty and freedom, and opposes those who believe the only higher power is the state.

Secular humanists don’t see social justice as a virtue, but rather as a weapon. According to the authors, “Social justice advocates seldom attempt to change minds and hearts one by one. Instead, they use political muscle to change laws and to coerce mass compliance.” Leftist activists hope to use social justice to attain their goal of government guiding lives instead of individuals living self-determined lives.

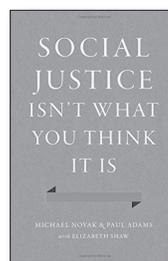
Teachers unions support “sins committed in the name of compassion,” such as their unwavering support of the misnamed “reproductive rights,” which actually means promoting abortion. True compassion would mean *not* killing the unborn.

Pope John Paul II wrote that he was “a philosopher of liberty.” Novak interprets the Pope’s writings thus: “It is an affront to human dignity for a social system to repress the human capacity to create, to invent, and to be enterprising.” Many federal programs meant to “save” people actually result in repressing them.

In his writings, Pope Leo XIII recognized “the moral obligation of providing material and external help for the poor,” but he also emphasized the “evils of socialism” and provided reasons it is always doomed to fail.

The second part of this book explains how to put Christian social justice into practice in relationships like marriage and throughout our communities, through moral ideals like conscience and duty.

It may be too late for the word “gay” to mean jovial. Hope remains that the rainbow isn’t forever hijacked by advocates of non-traditional sexual lifestyles. In this book, the authors do what they can to educate readers about social justice, as they attempt to rescue the concept.



FOCUS: On Woodrow Wilson: Princeton Students Hold Civil Debate

First published by the National Association of Scholars at NAS.org on December 29, 2015. Reprinted with permission.

by Russell K. Nieli

I have long been telling parents, prospective college students, and others that Princeton is in some ways the least hostile Ivy League campus for students with socially conservative values, traditional religious orientations, or right-of-center political views. I choose my words carefully. While all but a small fraction of the faculty and high level administrators hold left-of-center views on the most controversial social and political issues of the day, there is a core culture of civility that has worked to the advantage of those students whose views lie outside the political and cultural mainstream. There is also one high profile senior faculty member, Robert P. George, who is an unabashed and unapologetic conservative, and whose James Madison Program in American Ideals and Institutions regularly invites to campus speakers with socially, politically, and religiously conservative viewpoints. Though the campus atmosphere is clearly to the left, in comparison with most other Ivy League institutions Princeton is a place where conservative students do not feel constantly beleaguered. Compared to places such as Brown and Yale, where the left completely saturates and overwhelms the campus environment with little countervailing pushback, Princeton is a place where conservative students can survive and even flourish.

This culture of civility and respect

for dissenting views was seriously challenged, however, when a group of black students in late November of 2015, under the direction of an organization calling itself the Black



On Wednesday night, some protesters slept inside President Eisgruber's office while others camped out on the steps of Nassau Hall or in tents nearby. (Mary Hui '17)

Justice League (BJL), forcibly occupied the office of Princeton President Chris Eisgruber, refusing to leave until Eisgruber committed himself to meeting a number of the students' demands. These demands included acknowledgment that Princeton's past president Woodrow Wilson was a racist and that his name should be stricken from the public policy school and the residential living quarter named after him. The students also demanded imposition of a requirement that all faculty and staff take a mandatory "cultural

competency" course, that an additional required course be added to the university curriculum on the history of "marginalized people," and that a "safe cultural space" be set aside for blacks on campus.

Displaying the weakness of will and general cravenness typical of college presidents in such situations, Eisgruber bowed to the threatened disruptions, agreeing to negotiate with the students rather than having them evicted from his office for illegal trespass and subjected to university disciplinary procedures. As a condition for getting the students to leave his office, Eisgruber agreed

1. to have the Board of Trustees solicit opinions about the legacy of Woodrow Wilson from the university community and make a final decision whether his name should continue to appear on university buildings;
2. to have a mural of Wilson taken down from one of the undergraduate eating facilities;
3. to set aside four rooms in the Carl Fields Center (a large university building on Prospect Street) for black and other "Cultural Affinity Groups" to have a safe space to congregate;
4. to discuss ways to develop better cultural competency training among university staff; and
5. to consider the possibility of a diversity enhancement requirement to be added to the university's core curriculum.

While Eisgruber's cowardly capitulation was in sync with that of univer-

sity leaders at other institutions — including the University of Missouri, Occidental College, and Claremont McKenna — it can be said that compared to some others he wasn't quite as accommodating to the dictates of campus bullies. Eisgruber refused, for instance, to endorse the demand for cultural competency training for Princeton's faculty, and refused to endorse the demand for a required course on marginalized people.

What was most distinct about Princeton's black protest, however, was not the weak-but-not-completely-capitulatory response of its president, but the very mixed, and often quite hostile response by substantial numbers of Princeton stu-

dents and alumni.

Soon after the Nassau Hall sit-in, other Princeton students and alumni circulated internet petitions objecting to the bullying and intimidation tactics of the BJL and its supporters, as well as to many of the BJL demands. While campus opinion was divided, an internet poll of Princeton students suggested substantially more negative assessments of the protesting students' actions than positive ones.

An *ad hoc* student group calling itself the Princeton Open Campus Coalition (POCC) came into existence in opposition to the BJL sit-in that in a

carefully worded statement called for "increased dialogue and the creation of a process that properly considers the input of all students and faculty, not merely those who are the loudest." In its robust response to the bullying and intimidation tactics of the black demonstrators, the POCC clearly distinguished itself from the tepid acquiescence and silence that many college students on other campuses displayed in response to similar demonstrations. There was a culture of civility and mutual respect at Princeton that needed to be preserved, the POCC members believed, and the disrespect shown to the university president and his office by protesting students was not to go unchallenged.

"We are concerned mainly with the importance of preserving an intellectual culture in which all members of the Princeton community feel free to engage in civil discussion and to express their convictions without fear of being subjected to intimidation or abuse," the POCC group declared in an open letter to Princeton's president. "Thanks to recent polls, surveys, and petitions," they continued, "we have reason to believe that our concerns are shared by a majority of our fellow Princeton undergraduates."

What was most heartening to those of us who prize civilized discourse and open debate was the panel discussion among Princeton's undergraduates that Professor Peter Singer held earlier in December in his very popular course on Practical Ethics. Singer invited two members of the BJL and two members of the POCC to address the recent sit-in demonstration with special refer-

ence to the issues of civil disobedience and the memorializing of historical figures. Singer himself was the neutral moderator, though he did make two comments that, while not intended to be partisan, probably did favor one side in the debate over the other. He told the audience that until the recent protests he had never known anything about Wilson's racial views or pro-segregationist past, and gave credit to the BJL group for bringing that fact to public attention. (Singer, an Australian national, may be forgiven for his lack of knowledge about America's past presidents). He also raised a question

about the desirability of removing Washington's name from our national capital since Washington was a slaveholder — a question those calling for removal of Wilson's name from Princeton's buildings do not like to hear.

The panel discussion and the subsequent questions from the audience proceeded in a civil manner as befits the best of Princeton's traditions. Perhaps the most interesting of the four student panelists was the POCC member Allie Burton, a junior, who as a black woman explained that there were many blacks on campus like herself who disagreed with the BJL in terms of both its tactics and the substance of its demands. Even if Woodrow Wilson held racist views, she inquired, who should determine whether this is a serious enough flaw to warrant removal of his name from university buildings? Her unstated answer was, "Surely not the BJL or those who resort to bullying and intimidation tactics."

Having attended the panel discussion and talked with many students after the event, I can say that my faith in Princeton's capacity to maintain a culture of civility was at least partially restored. Despite its serious flaws and weak leadership at the top, Princeton is still probably the best of the Ivies for students who stand outside of the leftist hegemony that reigns on the majority of American college campuses.

Russell K. Nieli is a lecturer in Princeton University's politics department and is author of *Wounds That Will Not Heal: Affirmative Action and Our Continuing Racial Divide*, published by Encounter Books in 2012.



Speakers Seek to Save Education

The “It’s About The Child” Conference was held in Houston, Texas, at the end of January. Eighteen speakers from across the nation exposed dangerous federal education policies that are hurting children and families. They also offered encouragement and hope to those who are trying to enact reforms that truly benefit students.

Utah teacher, activist, and blogger Christel Swasey says, “We can defend children’s rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happy education; that is, time-tested, soul-enlarging, non-Common Core education.”

Dr. Duke Pesta, an administrator and professor of literature and administrator at Freedom Project Academy, spoke about the “devious history of Common Core” and equally sneaky passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act.

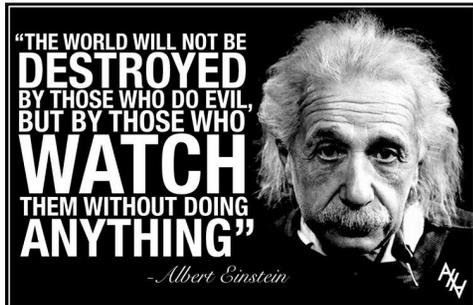
Daisy Whisenant of Christian Educators Association International, the Christian teacher’s union, reminded conference attendees that separation be-

tween church and state is designed to prevent governments from promoting one religion, not to shut down religious discourse.

Troy Towns, an Alabama minister and political activist, spoke about why people should be actively involved in the fight against Common Core and against other false reforms.

Utah therapist, Joan Landes said that “the problem with government initiatives like Common Core and its web of tests and controls is that it hurts human relationships.” She offered suggestions to fight against the evil Saul Alinsky-like tactics used by those who seek top-down federal control and psychological interference in children’s lives.

This is a small sampling from the varied experts who emphasized citizen awareness and involvement in education. The entire conference can be watched online with a \$7 donation to ItsAboutTheChild.com. (WhatIsCommonCore.wordpress.com, 2-8-16)



Congressional Betrayal (Continued from page 1)

forced to cooperate is unclear, but suffice it to say there will be an enormous amount of pressure on them to comply or be blamed for the loss of federal funding that will follow.

Education Week says, “States would have to take low testing participation into consideration in their accountability systems. Just how to do that would be up to them.” Note that this is the same *accountability system* that must be *approved* by the federal Dept. of Education.

Sen. Tillis and many others claim that states can test less. They’re wrong. *Education Week* says, “The testing schedule would be the same as under NCLB. But in a twist, up to seven states could apply to try out local tests, with the permission of the U.S. Department of Education.”

Permission.

The Thomas Fordham Institute, which claims to be conservative but has never understood the problems that parents have with Common Core, celebrated ESSA passage, saying, “Thankfully, it’s now a matter of settled law.” Fordham proclaims about ESSA, “The action is finally moving out of Washington.” Fordham somehow believes that Common Core is no longer mandated because the standards are no longer called “college and career ready,” code words for Common Core. The federal language has mostly changed to “challenging” academic standards. This heralds no change because Common Core is already established in most states. Fordham has received about \$6 million from the Gates Foundation, the largest private funder of Common Core, since the push for Common Core began.

Education Week says that under ESSA “the U.S. Secretary of Education is expressly prohibited from forcing or

even encouraging states to pick a particular set of standards.” Most would ask what good does that do since the horse is already out of the barn? Common Core, the only set of standards available when Arne Duncan and President Obama goaded and enticed the states into adopting standards, are already cemented into most states and are almost impossible to ditch, as state after state is finding out.

The idea that ESSA gives control back to the states and local communities is ludicrous. Most of the bill consists of federal regulations that must be obeyed. The lengthy document is written in such an unclear manner that many already admit the details will need to be sorted out by court rulings. There are hearings already scheduled to try to determine what the law means.

Robust Federal Authority

Executive Director of Eagle Forum Glyn Wright says, “While the American people thought this would be a public debate, the final bill was put together behind closed doors by committee leaders and their staff. It doesn’t look like any of the reforms pushed by the grassroots [organizations] survived the process.” (*School Reform News*, 1-2016)

Education Week asked Congressional staffers who worked on the bill whether it gives control back to states and limits the federal Department of Education’s role. A Democratic staffer responded:

While there are new limitations on proactive rulemaking, Democrats would not have supported legislation that completely removes the department’s authority to interpret and implement the law. . . . I cannot predict what the Department of Education will or won’t do via regulation — our intent was that regulatory authority, while limited, remain robust enough to ensure the de-

Teachers Unions (Continued from page 1)

until June, but two remarkable things happened during the oral arguments and deserve mention.

The first is that the questions asked by some of the Justices seem to signal their inclination to agree with the California teachers who argue that it is a violation of their First Amendment rights to freedom of speech and of association. The more conservative Justices’ grilling of the union lawyers indicates at least a firm understanding of the teachers’ complaints.

As one of the California teachers explains, “In our view, paying fees to a union should not be a prerequisite for teaching in a public school.” Harlan Elrich, one of the ten plaintiffs suing the California Teachers Union (CTU), continues, “No one in the U.S. should be forced to give money to a private organization he or she disagrees with fundamentally.” (*Wall Street Journal*, 1-3-16) The CTU is associated with the National Education Association union

The second notable event during oral arguments was that liberal Justice Sonia Sotomayor questioned whether the teachers union is, in fact, a private organization. Her questioning indicated that she believes unions are, instead, a part of

the state governing body. She cited from the legal case: “When recognized as the exclusive bargaining representative, a union assumes an official position in the operational structure of a school.”

Then Sotomayor suggested that the government could subsidize the union’s collective bargaining efforts and that union dues might be considered as a sort of tax, saying, “. . . can’t they assess all of their employees a tax for that contribution?” The plaintiff’s attorney Michael A. Carvin explained to her that would be a violation of the National Labor Relations Act.

Later revisiting this issue, Justice Samuel Alito asked California Solicitor General Edward C. Dumont, “Do you think that the California Teachers Association is an agency of the State of California?”

Many were astonished by Sotomayor’s claim, (or was it an admission), including Mike Antonucci. (EIAonline.com, 1-12-16) Antonucci commented, “Some of us here in California have often worried that the California Teachers Association [union] was a de facto part of the government.”

Read the November, 2015 *Education Reporter* for more background on this case.

Reading (Continued from page 1)

and often mastery of their parents’ devices could stunt the development of deep reading skills.” Children need to know how to manage both print books and online access.

Former English professor Deb Werrlein has found one solution that pulls her own children away from screens and other distractions is to read aloud with them. She keeps sharing books with them, even as they become young adults. Werrlein says:

It’s well known that reading aloud benefits infants, toddlers, and emerging readers. Aside from introducing children to a love of

literature and storytelling, reading exposes them to written language, which differs from the spoken word. Writing contains more description and typically adheres to more formal grammatical structures than speech. When you choose books that exceed your child’s independent reading level, you promote language acquisition, increase vocabulary, and improve comprehension. These benefits foster literacy in young people, but the pluses don’t diminish just because the kids grow up. (*Washington Post*, 4-6-14 and 6-2-15)

Handwriting (Continued from page 2)

Logic, a 96-page, full-color workbook that contains both parent/teacher instructions and student practice pages for the price of \$29. (CursiveLogic.com)

The gift of handwriting holds proven cognitive, neurological, com-

partment can interpret and implement the law. (*Education Week*, 1-12-16)

In his State of the Union address, President Obama said he’s pleased by the passage of ESSA, as he touted pre-kindergarten for all students.

Utah Republican Senator Mike Lee described the process used to pass the ESSA in remarks on the floor of the Senate once the procedure was decided. He said, “Beneath the surface we know that all of this has already been pre-arranged, pre-cooked, pre-determined . . . by a select few members of Congress, working behind closed doors, free from scrutiny. And we know that this vote was scheduled on extremely short notice, so that it

pre-hension, and artistic benefits for children. Despite shortsighted policymakers who eliminate handwriting from schools, parents can step in with supplemental work at home to set their children up for success.

would be difficult — if not impossible — for the rest of us to influence the substance of the conference report through motions to instruct.” (Lee.Senate.gov, 11-28-15)

This is not the way a forceful, transparent, and conservative Republican majority would operate. This isn’t what parents expect when they turn out to vote for Republican candidates. Throwing a white flag to the Democratic party and giving the federal government control over children’s education isn’t what they want or what will get them to the polls to support candidates in the future.

ESSA goes into full effect in the fall of 2017.