

EDUCATION BRIEFS

Fidget spinners are being banned in classrooms and entire school districts across the nation. Many educators say the low-tech manipulative toys “have become a major distraction to teachers and students.” Manufacturers claim they “enhance concentration, reduce anxiety, and stimulate learning.” The devices were originally intended to be used by students with ADHD or autism to help them focus better in the classroom. An Illinois elementary school principal says, “Frankly, we’ve found the fidgets were having the opposite effect of what they advertise; kids are trading them or spinning them instead of writing.” She says the spinners became a fad that blossomed “overnight” and that “they’ve caused conflict among students.” (*Chicago Tribune*, 5-2-17)

In March, Middlebury College was the site of a “disruptive protest” when conservative author and American Enterprise Institute scholar Charles Murray came to campus to speak. A Middlebury professor ended up in the hospital after protesters pulled her hair, resulting in a neck injury. The police chief said no charges would be filed against those who assaulted the professor and surrounded Murray’s car as she tried to leave because “... it was nighttime, many of the people had masks on and hoods covering their heads and identification was very difficult.” The college was apparently able to make some identifications; Middlebury “disciplined 67 students with sanctions ranging from probation to official College discipline, which places a permanent record in the student’s file.” Many believe the school’s action is a wrist slap rather than actual punishment. (*IJR.com* and *Time*, 5-24-17)

University of Virginia student Otto Warmbier died within days of being returned to the U.S. in a coma in June, after being held for nearly 18 months in a North Korean prison. He was arrested, convicted, and sentenced to 15 years of hard labor after he allegedly took down a propaganda sign in a hotel while he was on a tour of the Communist country on his way to study abroad.

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With ‘Thirteen Reasons Why’: Proceed With Caution

Can a book or TV series that deals with teen suicide lead to more suicides? This is the question being asked by those who are alarmed by an increasing number of teens and younger children committing suicide.

Teachers, parents, and grandparents should be aware of “Thirteen Reasons Why,” a Netflix series based on a novel of the same name by Jay Asher. The drama unfolds after a young woman’s death by suicide. The story is told via a series of videos she leaves behind to be played by those who tormented her.

Whether families determine that the show “Thirteen Reasons Why” is dangerous and must be avoided or decide to watch it together as a precursor to discussing a difficult subject, its popularity suggests parents should be aware that their children could be exposed to it. Most would agree that no one younger than age 13 should watch this show based on the young adult novel. In addition to suicide, it addresses other controversial or sensitive topics.

Banning the Book

In Colorado, the curriculum director for the Mesa County Valley School District initially decided to remove Asher’s *Thirteen Reasons Why* from school bookshelves. Seven students recently committed suicide in the 22,000-student district.

The April 28th ban was short-lived after it was determined that the book’s portrayal of suicide wasn’t as sensational or graphic as that of the Netflix show. At the time of the attempted ban, 19 of the school district’s available 20 copies of the book were checked out by students.

The Netflix series has heightened concerns about copycat suicides and suicidal ideation. “From upstate New York to the Midwest and California, school administrators have warned that the series sensationalizes suicide and does not provide a good roadmap for people struggling with mental illness.”

Some believe the show “romanticizes suicide” but others say this isn’t the case. According to one of the show’s creators, “Many people are accusing the show of glamorizing suicide and I feel strongly — and I think everyone who made the show — feel very strongly that we did the exact opposite.” Screenwriter Brian Yorkey continues, “What we did was portray suicide and we portrayed it

as very ugly and very damaging.” (*AP-news.com*, 5-16-17)

Looking at the Numbers

Data suggest that suicide is increasing among young people. Research also shows that internet searches for suicide-related topics increased in the time period following the airing of “Thirteen Reasons Why.”

A November 2016 report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that the suicide rate for children ages 10 to 14 doubled from 2007 to 2014. The same report shows that in this age group, suicide now accounts for more deaths than do motor vehicle accidents. (*CDC.gov*, 11-4-16)

A study presented at the May 2017 Pediatric Academic Societies meeting “found that the number of children and teens admitted to children’s hospitals for thoughts of suicide or self-harm have more than doubled during the last decade.” (*USA Today*, 5-30-17)

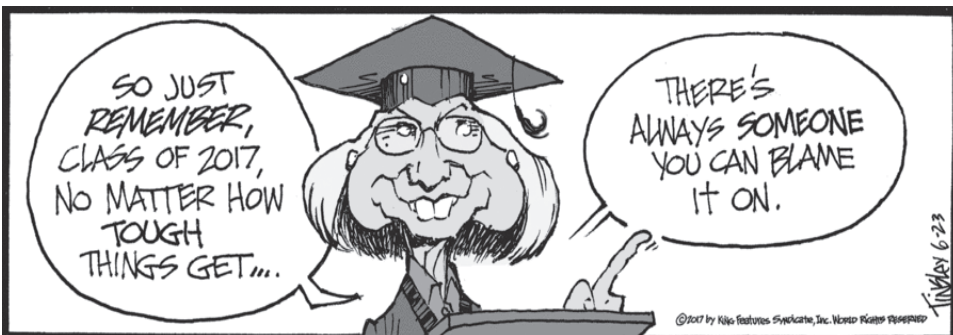
Five researchers from respected universities found that suicide-related internet searches increased in the wake of the “Thirteen Reasons Why” series debut. Their research letter, published online by *The Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)*, showed that for “12 of the 19 days studied, suicide queries were significantly greater than expected, ranging from 15% higher on April 15, 2017, to 44% higher on April 18, 2017.”

A particularly disturbing aspect of their report is that specific searches for “how to commit suicide” and “how to kill yourself” were “significantly higher” than would normally be expected according to controls and methodology used.

The researchers didn’t intend to prove that the online searches were done by children or teens nor did they try to show that any attempted or successful self-harm ensued. Their scope was “comparing internet search volumes after the premiere of ‘Thirteen Reasons Why’ with expected search volumes if the series had never been released.” They say, “Suicide search trends are correlated with actual suicides, media coverage of suicides concur with increased suicide attempts, and searches for precise suicide methods increased after the series’ release.” They conclude that the show “has both increased suicide awareness while unintentionally increasing suicidal ideation.”

(See *Thirteen Reasons*, page 4)

MALLARD FILLMORE / by Bruce Tinsley



Book of the Month



The Tuttle Twins and the Creature From Jekyll Island, Connor Boyack, Libertas Press, 2015, \$9.99



Connor Boyack, author of the Tuttle Twins book series, searched for resources to teach his young children about their nation. Finding few, he wrote his own.

After some references to the *Creature From Jekyll Island*, the Tuttle twins find out that what adults are talking about is a creature that is “eating people’s money.”

Like others in the series, this book is based on an adult book, *The Creature From Jekyll Island: A Second Look at the Federal Reserve*, written by G. Edward Griffin and originally published in 1994. Boyack writes that “a group of powerful people—some from the government who control the laws, and bankers who control money—” met in 1910 at Jekyll Island, Georgia. In what the author calls the “trickiest scheme of all time,” readers learn that the group created the Federal Reserve, which has “the power to actually make unlimited amounts of new money.”

The book includes the reappearance of the twins’ favorite neighbor, Fred. The group sets up booths at the county fair where Fred sells tomatoes and the Tuttles sell honey.

Children will learn that money is a “medium of exchange,” which means it’s used “to trade with somebody for things we want — and they can use it to get things they want.”

The storyline keeps the attention of younger people with beekeeping and collecting honey, a county fair, a 3-D superhero movie, and a gigantic octopus.

Learning about problems like inflation will engage older readers. Ethan overhears his grandfather telling his father:

I don’t know how I’m expected to make this work. My income isn’t going up, but the cost of everything is definitely going up. I’ve worked hard all my life, and now my savings is being stolen.

Most youngsters are eager to tackle complex ideas if given the opportunity. Terms that readers learn include barter, central bank, economy, fiat currency, inflation, and medium of exchange.

This book teaches the difficulties of bartering, the history of using precious metals as money, and that ridges on coins were originally intended as a means to gauge whether coin edges had been shaved.

The author offers concrete examples of how inflation starts. When too much money is created, it makes all money worth less. An example given is the Zimbabwe bill worth \$500 trillion Zimbabwe dollars. Students learn that when governments print too much money, it becomes nearly worthless.

FOCUS: Obama Tried to Make Nice With Rebellious Students. It Backfired Miserably.

by Walter E. Williams, Ph.D.

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Nationally, black junior high and high school students are suspended at a rate more than three times as often as their white peers, twice as often as their Latino peers, and more than 10 times as often as their Asian peers.

According to former Department of Education Secretary Arne Duncan, the “huge disparity is not caused by differences in children; it’s caused by differences in training, professional development, and discipline policies. It is adult behavior that needs to change.”

In other words, the Education Department sees no difference between the behavior of black students and white, Latino, and Asian students. It’s just that black students are singled out for discriminatory discipline.

Driven by Obama administration pressures, school districts revised their discipline procedures by cutting the number of black student suspensions.

Max Eden, senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute, has written a report, “School Discipline Reform and Disorder: Evidence from New York City Public Schools, 2012-16.”

The new discipline imposed on public schools is called restorative justice. Rather than punish a student through exclusion (suspension), restorative jus-

tice encourages the student who has misbehaved to reflect on his behavior, take responsibility, and resolve to behave better in the future.

The results of this new policy are increased violence, drug use, and gang activity.

Eden examines the New York City School Survey of teachers and students and finds that violence increased in 50% of schools and decreased in 14%. Gang activity increased in 39% of schools and decreased in 11%.

For drug and alcohol use, there was a 37% increase while only 7% of schools improved.

It’s not just New York City where discipline is worse under the Obama administration’s policy. Eden reports:

One Chicago teacher told the *Chicago Tribune* that her district’s new discipline policy led to “a totally lawless few months” at her school. One Denver teacher told Chalkbeat that, under the new discipline policy, students had threatened to harm or kill teachers, “with no meaningful consequences.” ... After Oklahoma City Public Schools revised its disci-



Dr. Walter E. Williams

pline policies in response to federal pressure, one teacher told the *Oklahoman* that “[w]e were told that referrals would not require suspension unless there was blood.”

Eden reports that in Oklahoma City a teacher said: “Students are yelling, cursing, hitting, and screaming at teachers and nothing is being done but teachers are being told to teach and ignore the behaviors. These students know there is nothing a teacher can do. Good students are now suffering because of the abuse and issues plaguing these classrooms.”

In Buffalo, a teacher who was kicked in the head by a student said: “We have fights here almost every day. The kids walk around and say, ‘We can’t get suspended—we don’t care what you say.’”

Ramsey County attorney John Choi of St. Paul, Minnesota, described how the number of assaults against teachers doubled from 2014 to 2015 and called the situation a “public

health crisis.”

Testifying before the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, a former Philadelphia teacher said that a student told him, “I’m going to torture you. I’m doing this because I can’t be removed.” Eden’s report cites similar school horror stories in other cities.

Since most of the school violence and discipline problems rest with black students, there are a few questions that black parents, politicians, academics, and civil rights advocates should ponder.

Is academic achievement among blacks so high that black people can afford to allow miscreants and thugs to sabotage the education process?

For those pushing the Obama administration’s harebrained restorative justice policy, can blacks afford for anything to interfere with the acquisition of academic excellence?

Finally, how does the Obama restorative justice policy differ from a Ku Klux Klan policy that would seek to sabotage black education by making it impossible for schools to rid themselves of students who make education impossible for everyone else?

Education Insanity



by Walter E. Williams, Ph.D.

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Some credit Albert Einstein, others credit Benjamin Franklin, with the observation that “the definition of insanity is doing the same thing year after year and expecting different results.”

Whomever we credit, he was absolutely right. A perfect example of that insanity is education in general and particularly black education.

Education Next has recently published a series commemorating the 50th anniversary of James S. Coleman’s groundbreaking 1965 report, “Equality of Educational Opportunity,” popularly referred to as the “Coleman Report.” In 1965, the average black 12th grader placed at the 13th percentile of the score distribution for whites in math and reading. That means 87% of white 12th graders scored higher than the average black 12th grader. Fifty years later there has been a slight narrowing of the math gap leaving the average black 12th-grade student at the 19th percentile of the white distribution; 81% of white 12th-grade students score higher. The black-white reading gap has narrowed such that the average black 12th-grader scores at the 22nd percentile of the white distribu-

tion, meaning 78% of white 12th-graders score higher.

Eric A. Hanushek is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University and research associate at the National Bureau of Economic Research. His *Education Next* contribution is “What Matters for Student Achievement: Up-



dating Coleman on the Influence of Families and Schools.” Hanushek concludes, “After nearly a half century of supposed progress in race relations within the United States, the modest improvements in achievement gaps since 1965 can only be called a national embarrassment. Put differently, if we continue to close gaps at the same rate in the future, it will be roughly two and a half centuries before the black-white math gap closes and over one and a half centuries until the reading gap closes.” I would like to know what

American, particularly a black American, can be pleased with that kind of progress and the future it holds for black people.

Many see smaller class sizes and more money as part of the general solution to our nation’s educational problems. It turns out that since 1955 the average number of students per teacher has fallen from 27 to 16. During the same period real per-pupil expenditures have increased more than fourfold. Today, expenditures per pupil in the United States exceed those of nearly every other country in the world.

The Program for International Student Assessment, or PISA, ranks 15-year-old student academic performance in 34 OECD countries. In 2012, the U.S. students performed below average in mathematics and ranked 27th. In reading, U.S. students ranked 17th; and in science, they ranked 20th. Such a performance gap suggests that smaller class sizes and bigger budgets, in and of themselves, are not a cure to our nation’s educational malaise, particularly that of black students.

The most crucial input for a child’s education cannot be provided by schools, politicians and government. As such, continued calls for more school resources will produce disappointing results as they have in the past. There are certain minimum requirements that must be met for any child to do well in school. Someone must make the youngster do his homework, ensure that he gets eight to

nine hours of sleep, feed him breakfast, and make sure that he behaves in school and respects the teachers. If these minimum requirements are not met, and by the way they can be met even if a family is poor, all else is for naught.

What the education establishment can do is to prevent youngsters who are alien and hostile to the educational process from making education impossible for those who are equipped to learn. That is accomplished by removing students who pose disciplinary problems, but the Barack Obama administration is even restricting a school’s power to do that. You might ask, “Williams, what are we going to do with those expelled students?” I do not know, but I do know one thing: Black people cannot afford to allow them to sabotage the education chances of everyone else.

Dr. Walter E. Williams has served on the faculty of George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia, as John M. Olin Distinguished Professor of Economics since 1980. Born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Dr. Williams holds a B.A. in economics from California State University, Los Angeles, and M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in economics from UCLA. He has also served on the faculties of Los Angeles City College, California State University Los Angeles, and Temple University in Philadelphia, and Grove City College, Grove City, PA. Dr. Williams is the author of over 150 publications and has made scores of radio and television appearances. He is also on numerous advisory boards including Cato Institute, Landmark Legal Foundation, Institute of Economic Affairs, and Heritage Foundation. He has frequently given expert testimony before Congressional committees on public policy issues.

ESSA (Continued from page 1)

tion Week points out that this is “a big deal, because more than a dozen states have written AP into their plans.”

Vocational programs and dual enrollment are other measures states are using to “gauge college readiness,” and those programs aren’t equally available in every school.

Nevada was told to “remove science tests as indicators of core academic achievement, school quality, and student success.”

New Mexico was directed to put a plan in

place to ensure low-income and minority students and their better-off counterparts have teachers with similar experience, qualifications, and teaching outcomes.

Direction from the Top

If Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos wants her words to match what is being prescribed from within her department, she needs to take over the reins more fully, and consider getting rid of holdover employees from the previous administration.

At the June 20, 44th annual meeting of the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), DeVos told attendees, “States are best equipped to solve the

unique problems each of them faces.” With state legislators, lobbyists, and representatives of private companies in attendance, she said, “My job is to get the federal government out of the way so you can do your jobs.”

DeVos further said, “Overreach in the previous administration shouldn’t be countered by overreach in this administration.”

Specifically speaking about ESSA, she said states should “break away from the compliance mentality” and that the ED is “looking forward

to reviewing and ultimately approving every [ESSA] plan that meets the law.”

State boards of education, school administrators, teachers, and parents would likely side with DeVos. Schools are bogged down by excess regulation, drowning in paperwork, and are required to jump through too many federal hoops. DeVos can make the necessary changes that would put the focus of education back on teaching children. But many wonder if the federal government will ever give up the control it has seized from states.

(*Education Week*, 6-20-17 and 7-13-17 and 7-17-17) (*The74Million.org*, 7-4-17)

**Thirteen Reasons** (Continued from page 2)

(*JAMANetwork.com*, 7-31-17)

A Mother’s Observations

Writing at *The Federalist*, one mother suggests all parents should be aware of the popular Netflix show. She suggests that parents watch it.

Karla Jacobs wrote the article after her teenaged daughter told her about “Thirteen Reasons Why.” Jacobs, who is the current chair of the Georgia Commission on Women, was told by her daughter that “Everyone is watching it, and everyone is talking about it.”

Jacobs says that “the show is compelling and a must-see for parents of middle school and high school students.” She is concerned about children who will hear about or watch the program and not discuss it with their parents. She believes “parents should consider watching this show, with or without their teens.” She suggests that, after viewing the show themselves, parents can better decide whether their children should also watch it. (*TheFederalist.com*, 4-27-17)

If parents feel the need to open up this sort of discussion with their teen, another option would be to read the book together. The images in the Netflix series are more graphic and disturbing than those presented in the book.

Modern Bullying

As the storyline progresses, it is apparent that one reason the young woman in the series ends up taking her own life is because of incessant bullying. Social media has increased and changed bullying to something unrecognizable by previous generations.

It used to be that rumors were spread by conversations. Now, photographs and online posts spread at an alarming rate of speed and often exhibit a previously unheard of viciousness.

Both online and in-person bullying can result in depression. According to the CDC, merely observing “bullying behavior without participating in it” makes students feel “more helpless and less connected to parents and schools than those who have not witnessed bullying.” (*USA Today*, 5-30-17)

Karla Jacobs says, “Smartphones and social media amplify everything now.” She continues:

Your most embarrassing moment can be seen and shared by hundreds before you even know it’s out there. For adolescents who already feel like they live in a fishbowl, the new bullying campaigns can be devastating.

Graduates (Continued from page 1)**Oprah — Please Translate**

At her May speech at Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, New York, billionaire Oprah Winfrey offered advice to graduates. Some of her speech at the private liberal arts college encouraged service to others. Other statements were confusing, while one could be construed as promoting narcissism.

Oprah told graduates, “It’s a big, bad world out there.” Then she said, “There is nothing more powerful than you using your personality to serve the calling of yourself.” She didn’t explain what “the calling of yourself” means. Did she mean they should simply do whatever they feel like doing? That’s a component of narcissism, a tendency that doesn’t need to be encouraged.

“I have been so blessed to live inside the dream of God.” Again, Oprah offered no explanation of what that means. She suggested students should listen to their “inner truth” and gave examples of times when that turned out well for her. Some were left wondering if inner truth is the same as actual truth.

Pence Goes After Political Correctness

When Vice President Mike Pence spoke to graduates at the Catholic university in the state he formerly governed, he said, “It’s deeply humbling for me to participate in the 172nd commencement in Notre Dame’s 175th year.”

The Hill and many other news outlets reported that a “large group of graduating students walked out” as the Vice President began his speech. But that was fake news; anyone who watched the actual video would see that possibly 100 students left while over 3,000 graduates remained; they listened attentively and in a well-mannered fashion.

Pence mentioned specifics about some of the graduates, saying, “We have with us a two-time Olympian, two Rhodes Scholars, two Truman Scholars, 15 Fulbright Scholars, a quadruple-Domer, national champions in fencing and soccer, the Indiana Campus Compact Wood Award winner, and most impressive of all – I say with gratitude that 38 of you will leave here and serve as officers in the United States Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force, and we thank you for your service.”

Pence said:

This university is a vanguard of freedom of expression and the free exchange of ideas at a time, sadly, when free speech and civility are waning on campuses across America. ...While this institution has maintained an atmosphere of civility and open debate, far too many campuses across America have become characterized by speech codes, safe zones, tone policing, administration-sanctioned political correctness, all of which amounts to nothing less than suppression of the freedom of speech. These all-too-common practices are destructive of learning and the pursuit of knowledge, and they

are wholly outside the American tradition.

Pence also said, “As you, our youth, are the future, and universities the bellwether of thought and culture, I would submit that the increasing intolerance and suppression of the time-honored tradition of free expression on our campuses jeopardizes the liberties of every American. This should not and must not be met with silence.”

President Trump: Gratitude and God

President Trump gave the commencement address at Liberty University, in Lynchburg, Virginia. At the Christian school founded by Jerry Falwell, Trump told graduates that while each of them should “take immense pride” in what they have achieved, “There’s another group of amazing people we want to celebrate today and they are the ones who have made this journey possible for you. ... They’re your parents and your grandparents, don’t forget them.” Trump also gave a “really extra special thanks to the moms” on that day before Mother’s Day.

Trump continued, “Just think for a moment of how blessed you are to be here today at this great, great university, living in this amazing country, surrounded by people who you love and care about so much. Then ask yourself, with all of those blessings and all of the blessings that you’ve been given, what will you give back to this country and indeed to the world?”

The president told graduates, “Remember this, nothing worth doing ever, ever, ever came easy. Following your convictions means you must be willing to face criticism from those who lack the same courage to do what is right.”

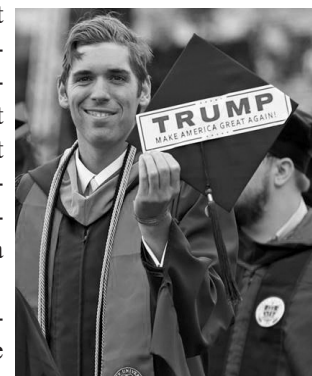
Saying he’s seen that the “system” in Washington is “broken,” Trump told gradu-

ates, “A small group of failed voices who think they know everything and understand everyone want to tell everybody else how to live and what to do and how to think.” He suggested that graduates shouldn’t “let other people tell you what you believe, especially when you know that you’re right.”

Trump said, “When the Founders wrote the Declaration of Independence, they invoked our creator four times, because in America we don’t worship government, we worship God.”

President Trump advised graduates, “Carry yourself with dignity and pride. Demand the best from yourself and be totally unafraid to challenge entrenched interests and failed power structures.”

He concluded his uplifting speech: “America is better when people put their faith into action. As long as I am your president, no one is ever going to stop you from practicing your faith or from preaching what’s in your heart. And as long as America remains true to its values, loyal to its citizens, and devoted to its creator, then our best days are yet to come.” (*NPR.org*, 5-26-17) (*FoxNews.com*, 5-20-17) (*The Hill*, 5-21-17) (*Time*, 5-13-17)

**IN THEIR OWN (GOOD) WORDS**

“No government ever voluntarily reduces itself in size. Government programs, once launched, never disappear. Actually, a government bureau is the nearest thing to eternal life we’ll ever see on this earth!”

— Ronald Wilson Reagan
In his October 27, 1964 speech
titled “A Time for Choosing”