

# Education Matters

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Ed School  
Shame

By Dr. Sandra Stotsky

**I**t has become increasingly clear that education schools as they now function are a major part of the problem and not the solution to improving public education and narrowing the gaps in student achievement. Indeed, they are responsible for three major problems facing the public schools.

## **Inadequate Background**

The first problem is that education schools supply far too many teachers with an inadequate background in the subjects they are licensed to teach. As one school administrator discovered when she examined her teachers' college transcripts while preparing a proposal for a *Teaching American History* grant, "Fully one-third of our middle school social studies teachers had zero hours in college history courses." Another 53 percent had fewer than ten hours of any college history, probably "survey courses, freshman level," she guessed. This administrator was talking about licensed, not tempo-

**The need to  
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rary, teachers. As every school district has found, most of their K-8 teachers require continuous professional development in the knowledge base for the subjects they teach. This is remediation, not enrichment or updating—which is what nurses, librarians, social workers, and other professionals undergo.

## **Inadequate Supply**

Second, education schools no longer supply public schools with enough academically qualified teachers for the subjects that must be taught in the secondary school. The usual excuses are starting salaries and the small number of academically proficient undergraduates interested in teaching, especially high school mathematics and science. However, a healthy dose of skepticism is in order here. The number of strong liberal arts graduates applying for admission to the Teach for America program continues to increase every year. In Massachusetts, the single biggest source of new secondary mathematics and science teachers from 1999 to 2002 was an accelerated program funded by the legislature for individuals changing careers and academically strong college graduates. In an independent evaluation of the program conducted for Massachusetts's department of education, most of these new teachers said they would not have considered going into teaching if



they had to enroll in a traditional teacher preparation program.

Anecdotal evidence also supports a skeptical stance. A charter school for grades 6-12 specializing in mathematics and science that opened in September 2005 in the Boston area received fifty-eight replies to its first advertisement for teachers in February 2005; twenty-one had master of science degrees, another thirteen had Ph.D.s. By law, charter schools do not need to hire licensed teachers or graduates of approved training programs. Because I serve on this school's advisory board, I know that the salary at this charter school is not the attraction. Thus, contrary to "common knowledge," it seems that a growing number of academically competent adults are interested in teaching in the public schools, and greater opportunity to enroll in an accelerated preparation program or to teach without having to take any education courses at all might attract even more of them.

### Inadequate Preparation

Third, education schools do not train prospective teachers how to teach. Instead, they arm new teachers with a host of pseudo-teaching strategies like small group work and with the philosophy that students should "construct their

own knowledge" and are more capable of shaping their own intellectual growth than teachers if they are sufficiently motivated by "inquiry." Education schools have been especially remiss in preparing new instructors with research-based knowledge for teaching beginning reading and arithmetic, two areas of professional training completely under their control. The funds now invested in professional development to train our current teaching force how to teach beginning reading and arithmetic are staggering. *Reading First*, a K-3 program that is part of the No Child Left Behind Act, is a major federal initiative to increase students' reading skills by improving the ability of K-3 instructors to teach reading using curriculum materials and pedagogical strategies that reflect a sound research base. To implement the program, elementary schools are not required to partner with an education school.

Our society cannot afford to continue supporting teacher training institutions whose educational philosophy promotes a bankrupt theory and its associated pedagogy in the name of social justice—or "inquiry"—in order to disguise their own intellectual bankruptcy. The important question is how to overhaul the current system of teacher preparation to: (1) ensure that prospective elementary teachers learn how to teach beginning reading, writing, and arithmetic; (2) stop the endless flow of academically underqualified teachers into the public schools; and (3) eliminate all of the empty, if not anti-academic, education courses required in approved training programs. Education courses have enjoyed such a dismal reputation for so long that they repel academically strong college graduates with an interest in teaching before they even take one. These individuals tend to want some pedagogical preparation; they just don't want courses in education schools, as the success of the Teach for America program strongly suggests.

To answer this most important question, I propose a number of reform measures that address the source of these problems.

Their roots, philosopher Sidney Hook suggested in 1958 in "Modern Education and its Critics," lie in the early part of the twentieth century in the institutional separation of teacher training programs from the scholars and researchers in the discipline the prospective teacher must master. In Hook's eyes, scholars and researchers abandoned the training of public school teachers and forsook grappling with the problems of "mass education in a democratic society." With the founding of education schools, prospective teachers were now isolated from the scholars who should have been responsible for the level of academic knowledge they brought to their first jobs. And teacher educators were now isolated from the scholars who could have worked with them to orient K-12 pedagogy and resolve K-12 curriculum questions in ways appropriate for the discipline. These eight suggestions attempt to correct problems created almost a century ago. It's never too late.

### The Solution

1. Transfer accountability from education schools to the academic departments that teach the knowledge base prospective core subject teachers must learn. The relevant academic departments should be held responsible for their preparation and at the graduate level. States should require prospective teachers of grade five and higher to complete either one of the following: (1) master of arts in teaching (MAT) degree program in the subject they plan to teach, which typically includes an apprenticeship in the schools as well as real graduate work in the subject; or a (2) master of science (MS) or master of arts (MA) degree program in the subject (a common requirement for secondary school teachers in Europe), followed by an apprenticeship in the schools.

2. Require approval of these MAT programs by the university's own internal procedures for master's degree programs in the arts and sciences, by a professional organization for the discipline such as the American Mathematical Society, or by the Teacher Education Accreditation Council

(TEAC), rather than by a professional educational organization using chiefly pedagogical criteria, in order to maintain the integrity of their academic content. International standards as well as a state's K-12 standards in that subject should serve as one set of criteria for accrediting these MAT programs. Does the program offer coursework that gives prospective teachers the academic knowledge needed to address state and international standards, especially in science and mathematics? Presently, most of the professional educational organizations that help the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) to accredit education schools are inherently incapable of making these judgments—they do not include recognized scholars in the discipline as reviewers.

3. Attach discipline-specific pedagogical faculty (ideally, effective high school teachers) to each department offering a MAT program. Their home base must be the academic department, not an education school. The intellectual benefits for these educators would be enormous. They would collaborate with their academic colleagues in designing pedagogical coursework and supervising student teaching. They would also attend some of the graduate courses that future teachers of the subject take, in order to keep current.

4. Under no circumstances count un-

dergraduate education courses toward an undergraduate or graduate degree for core subject teachers of grade five and above. Allowing undergraduate education courses to count for either degree turned out to be one of the major flaws in the five-year training programs implemented after the release in the mid-1980s of the Holmes report, *Tomorrow's Teachers*, which intended to reform teacher preparation. Many prospective teachers ended up taking more education courses than before instead of capping a four-year liberal arts

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education with a master's degree in education. That loophole must be eliminated.

5. Require all pedagogical training to take place in the real world—the classroom. In charge, as they should be, would be experienced master teachers, the local school board, and parents—not an out-of-touch faculty in a pedagogical ivory tower promoting such pseudo-teaching strategies as cooperative learning groups, “reader response” in the literature class, and “invent-your-own-algorithms” during mathematics.

6. Make full licensure and renewable five-year contracts available to beginning teachers after three years of satisfactory evaluations by a school supervisor. No need for education coursework of any kind or a formal performance assessment for full licensure. Just frequent observations and a recommendation by a school supervisor—a process similar to the one used in British schools today. Salary increases should be contingent chiefly on graduate coursework in the arts and sciences completed during the summer. How much content is there apt to be in a mathematics education course for professional development credit entitled “Teaching Mathematics for Social Justice”?

7. Put federal teeth behind such state regulations (and prod states to adopt them) by classifying core subject teachers for grade five and above as “highly qualified” only if they have completed a master's degree program in the subject they teach. There should be no other professional meaning for this phrase today. Legislators might classify as “qualified” those teachers without a master's degree (for instance, those having changed careers) who were hired to teach a core subject, passed an appropriate subject matter test to obtain their provisional license, and passed a performance assessment within two years.

8. Train future teachers of preschool to grade four in two- or three-year pedagogical institutes, approved by a state department of education or office of early child care, as they are in many countries around the world. Four years of post-secondary education capped by a university degree are not necessary for teaching at this educational level, especially if

we want to upgrade the diverse staff serving as paraprofessionals in elementary schools or preschools, or enrolled in associate in arts (AA) programs in a community college. Education courses for future K-4 instructors should focus on beginning reading, writing, and arithmetic pedagogy, and these prospective teachers should be expected to pass two subject matter tests for licensure: in arithmetic and beginning reading pedagogy. If we restructured education schools as three-year pedagogical institutes and made faculty accountable for children's achievement in literacy and numeracy in their graduates' classrooms, we would place accountability precisely where it belongs and start to reduce the deficiencies in those who teach the crucial beginning years of education.

**Concluding Remarks**

Requiring a true graduate degree for future core subject teachers from grade five on would accomplish several goals simultaneously. First, it would guarantee that all new core subject teachers have a strong background in the subject they teach.

Second, eliminating all undergraduate licensure programs in core subjects would

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enable future teachers to spend all four undergraduate years on academic coursework and free them from having to spend one-fifth to one-half of their time on intellectually empty education courses.

Finally, requiring a master's degree for entry into the profession would free new teachers from completing a master's degree in education to obtain salary increases while working full-time and allow them to concentrate on improving their classroom management skills. Whatever the MA, MS, or MAT degree cost would be offset by not having to incur the cost of obtaining a master's of education degree while teaching. The federal or state government might also give stipends to the students in a MA, MS, or MAT program who commit themselves to teach for five years, especially in subject areas with shortages and in hard-to-staff schools. Policymakers worried about adding an

additional year or two to a future teacher's education may not realize that an increasing number of teachers today complete their initial licensure program in a post-baccalaureate program.

The eight recommendations outlined above would totally restructure teacher education in a way that would ensure that new teachers in the public schools are academically competent. Needless to say, these recommendations cannot cure all the staffing issues in K-12. Keeping new teachers in the public schools for longer than three to five years is a different challenge. The reconstruction of school discipline and teachers' (and principals') moral authority, as well as raising the ceiling for teachers' salaries and improving professional working conditions, must also take place if the public schools are to attract and retain a much higher number of academically competent teachers than they

now do. But none of these measures can substitute for the long overdue restructuring of our current system of teacher education. ■

*Sandra Stotsky, Ed.D., was senior associate commissioner in the Massachusetts Department of Education from 1999 to 2003 and supervised the revision of the state's regulations for teacher licensure and program approval.*



## PEACE OF MIND



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# Why Johnny Can't Read

## Schools Favor Girls Over Boys

By Robert Roy Britt

Studies have long shown that boys in the United States and around the world do not read or write as well as girls. There are several reasons, according to the common wisdom: Girls mature more quickly; boys are more likely to suffer dyslexia and other reading disorders; and race and poverty play a role.

However a new study finds that the problem cuts across socioeconomic lines and pins part of the blame on schools whose techniques cater to the strengths of girls and leave boys utterly disinterested.

### Below Basic

Research by psychology professor Judith Kleinfeld at the University of Alaska, Fairbanks finds that nearly one-quarter of high school seniors across the United States who are sons of white, college-educated parents have woeful reading skills, ranking “below basic” on a national standardized test.

“These boys cannot read a newspaper and get the main point,” Kleinfeld told LiveScience. “These boys cannot read directions for how to use equipment and follow them.”

And the problem is getting worse.

The federal government's 2002 National Assessment of Educational Progress reported that 26.3 percent of high school seniors scored below basic in reading skills.

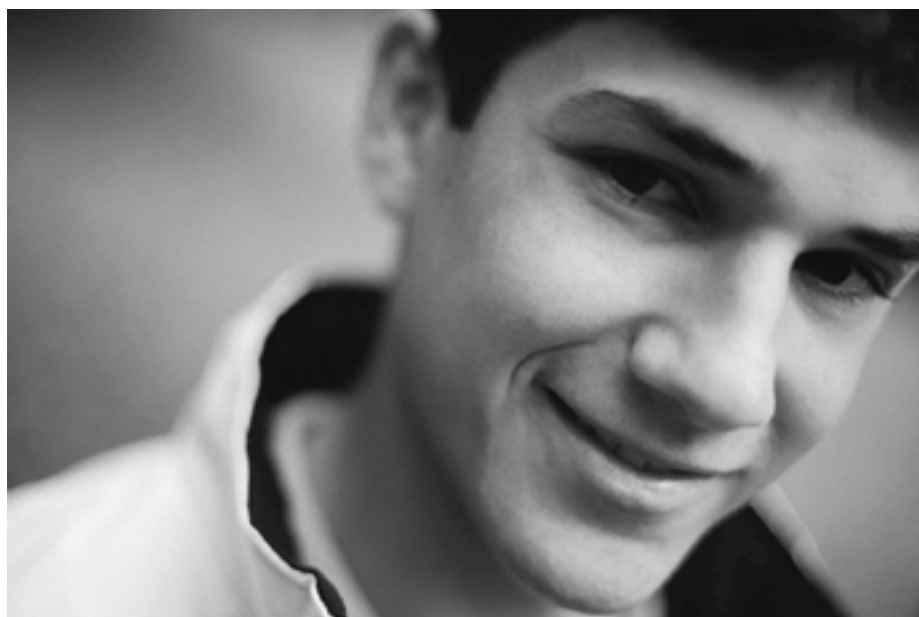
In a finer analysis of that data, Kleinfeld found that 23 percent of white sons of college-educated parents scored below basic, up from 13 percent in 1992. (Among girls with white, college-educated parents, only about 6 percent fall into the below-basic category.)

Kleinfeld presented her results at the

White House Conference on Helping America's Youth in Indianapolis. She has not yet submitted the findings to a journal for peer review.

the supplies they need.”

In an interview, one boy summed up the problem for Kleinfeld. He said: “Why would anyone want to read novels? They aren't even true!”



**“These boys cannot read a newspaper and get the main point.”**

### Lack of motivation

The problem is partly developmental, Kleinfeld said.

“Girls mature more quickly than boys,” she said. “They enter school with bigger vocabularies and better fine motor skills, so it's easier for them to learn to write.”

In addition to this, as boys enter junior high and high school, their motivation wanes.

“Many boys are disengaging from school,” Kleinfeld says. “The U.S. Department of Education's surveys of student commitment

show that boys are far less likely than girls to do homework or to come to school with

### What schools should learn

In separate research that Kleinfeld is also preparing for publication, she has possibly gotten to the root of the problem.

“Here's a fascinating fact,” she said. “There is no literacy gap in home-schooled boys and girls.”

“Why? In school, teachers emphasize reading literature and talking about character and feelings,” she said. “This way of teaching reading does not turn boys on. Boys prefer reading nonfiction, such as history and adventure books. When they are taught at home, parents are more likely to let them follow their interests.” ■

*Robert Roy Britt is the Managing Editor of [www.LiveScience.com](http://www.LiveScience.com). © LiveScience*



## Michigan Teachers Union Loses in Court Battle

*Teachers Union has 'Not a Shred of Real Evidence' in Attack against Charter Schools*

Michigan's Court of Appeals has thrown out an ongoing lawsuit pursued by the Michigan Education Association (MEA) to keep a tribal college in the Upper Peninsula from authorizing charter schools.

The three presiding judges declared the MEA has no standing in this case because it has provided "not a shred of evidence"

that schools chartered by Bay Mills Community College cause injury to anyone. They dismissed the MEA's sole claim that the schools reduce the wages of MEA members and indicated it's impossible to assume that if the schools did close, their funding would be funneled directly into MEA salaries.

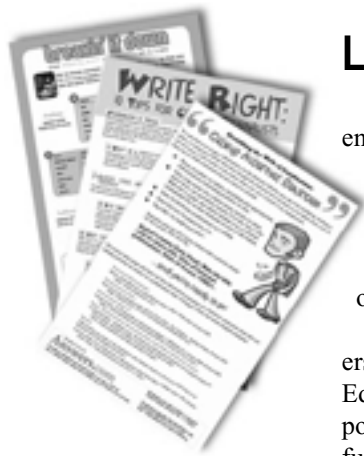
"The judges have reaffirmed the absolute absurdity of this case," said Dan Quisenberry, president of the Michigan Association of Public School Academies. "MEA testimony has repeatedly shown a self-interested organization consumed with money—an organization willing to sacrifice public schools and education for what will be 11,000 students this fall, in an outrageous grab for more dues.

"This case is repulsive to parents and should alienate MEA members and teachers, who dedicate their lives not to their salaries, but to the children they serve," he said.

Quisenberry noted the irony of the MEA tapping its coffers for this case while also single-handedly funding the cost of the K-16 ballot initiative that would mandate automatic increases in state funding to schools. That K-16 initiative is opposed by entities such as the state police and fire fighters associations, who argue that their essential community services cannot be sacrificed to the greed of the MEA, especially when the state's economy is in turmoil.

"It's shameful the MEA is trying build its coffers by closing down new, high-quality schools that give Michigan families that choice," Quisenberry said.

*Source—Michigan Association of Public School Academies (MAPSA)*



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### JUST FOR LAUGHS!

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- George:** Here it is!
- Teacher:** Correct. Now, class, who discovered America?
- Class:** George!

## The ABCs of Stuttering

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## The Injustice of Teaching “Social Justice”

Teaching social justice in school sounds like a dandy idea until you examine what it really means. Sol Stern’s superb essay in the summer issue of *City Journal* does precisely that—and does so with Stern’s customary fearless clarity. Besides skewering Bill Ayers, the former violent revolutionary turned ed school professor, Stern shows how the dubious “social justice” idea is spreading through U.S.

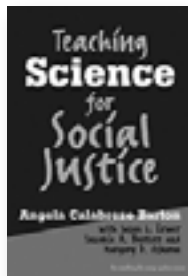
colleges of education with the enthusiastic backing of the American Education Research Association and NCATE.

What, exactly, is the problem with it? Stern points out over fifteen New York City “new small high schools that either are explicitly named as social justice schools or whose mission statements declare that their curricula center on social

justice concerns.” There you will find kids learning to protest and make revolution rather than to read and write and cipher. “Social justice teaching,” Stern shows, “is a frivolous waste of precious school hours, grievously harmful to poor children, who start out with a disadvantage. School is the only place where they are likely to obtain the academic knowledge

that could make up for the educational deprivation they suffer in their homes. The last thing they need is a wild-eyed experiment in education through social action.”

*Source— www.edexcellence.com referencing “The Ed Schools’ Latest—and Worst—Humbug,” by Sol Stern, City Journal, Summer 2006. To read the full article, visit www.city-journal.org.*



*For those in the “social justice” movement, everything is political.*



## This is About Teaching?

### AFT Goes on Record in Opposition to War in Iraq

Over the summer, American Federation of Teachers delegates approved Resolution 31, which states they “oppose the war in Iraq and call upon our country’s leaders to withdraw all troops, bases and military operations in a rapid and timely manner and to put a stop to the unending military presence that will waste lives and resources, undermine our nation’s security and weaken our military.”

## The Lost World

### States’ standards show scant enthusiasm for teaching about the world

At a time of rapid globalization, most states don’t even try to provide young Americans with a solid grounding in world history, concludes a report by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute.

Renowned historian and foreign policy expert Walter Russell Mead conducted this first-ever review of states’ academic standards for K-12 world history—the blueprints that outline what students are expected to know in a given subject. Fully two-thirds of states earn a “D” or an “F,” while only eight (California, Massachusetts, Virginia, Indiana, Georgia, New York, Minnesota, and South Carolina) earn an “A.”

The National Geographic Society recently reported that students don’t think learning about the world is all that important.

Mead finds that only a handful of states require students to pass a world history test to graduate or get promoted to the next grade. Given educators’ preoccupation with subjects tested under the No

Child Left Behind Act, this only increases the chances that world history will be “narrowed” out of the curriculum.

“A working knowledge of world history is socially, politically, economically, and culturally indispensable for young Americans,” said Mead.

Several problems were ubiquitous in the standards of poorly performing states:

- Little or no historical content;
- Alternatively, so much content that teachers couldn’t possibly begin to cover it all;
- An excessive focus on modern European history and neglect of significant non-Western cultures in Latin America and Asia;
- Alternatively, an extreme multiculturalism that treats all nations and cultures as equally significant;
- Standards that are buried in the murky non-subject of “social studies.”
- Standards that provide students with

no logical timeline, relying instead on trendy “themes” without regard to the story of history.

*Source— www.edexcellence.net.*



# Thinking Skills

## Why lower-order thinking makes higher-order thinking possible

By Eric Buehrer

Today you hear a lot about higher-order thinking skills. The jargon generally goes something like this: Skills for workers in the twenty-first century require students to focus more on higher-order thinking skills and less on lower-order thinking skills. We must move away from drill-grill-and-kill teaching and allow students to explore more creative and critical thinking skills.

First let's define the terms. Lower-order thinking skills generally means memorization of facts such as dates, formulas, and scientific principles, and drilling on the basic skills such as grammar and punctuation. Sure we need to teach those things, the reasoning goes, but we really need to push students into the more advanced level of higher-order skills. Generally, this means interpreting facts, analyzing for bias, synthesizing one idea with another, and applying the learning to new areas.

However, before we trash those old-fashioned lower skills (the very term "lower order" reflects some educators' low regard for them), we need to reexamine their crucial role in helping students reach "higher," more creative levels of thinking.

Research in thinking skills has found one thing that separates experts in a field from very good but less-than-expert practitioners. That is that experts are so skilled at the basics they can quickly move to more advanced and creative problem solving.

For instance, it was found that the most advanced chess players had played so much and seen almost every conceivable pattern of playing that, when their opponents moved a piece, they were already familiar with the move and what it could lead to. They could, therefore, concentrate on creatively outmaneuvering their opponents.

Likewise, in a study comparing professional physicists with high-achieving college physics majors, it was found that the professionals were more creative in their problem solving because they had a stronger grasp of the fundamentals. This enabled them to quickly move to more analytical and creative approaches to the problem.

Many of today's students have not mastered basic academic skills and are thus handicapped in reaching skill levels necessary for real success in our high-technology society—what educators often refer to as higher-order thinking skills. These skills depend upon proficient use of basic skills and knowledge. Picture two gears. If the lower gear is missing teeth, it will not smoothly engage the higher gear. The higher gear will move occasionally but not efficiently.

If, for instance, a student does not read with a high level of proficiency, he will focus a majority of his energy on simply



trying to decipher the meaning of a text. He will have little mental energy left to elaborate on how to apply the text's information or how it correlates with other information outside the text.

For all the well-intentioned talk of higher-order thinking skills, too many students don't have enough of a grasp on basic skills and knowledge to adequately function at higher levels. ■



*Eric Buehrer is the president of Gateways to Better Education ([www.gtbe.org](http://www.gtbe.org)) and author of Creating a Positive Public School Experience.*