

Mastering the Basics

Does National Certification Serve the Nation by Increasing Student Achievement?

By Dr. Michael Poliakoff



Dr. Michael Poliakoff

It's certainly true that you can't pay a great teacher enough, for nothing matters more to student achievement than the quality of instruction. But how do you find great teachers? A relatively new organization, the National Board for

Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), has harnessed millions of dollars in foundation funding toward the goal of identifying truly accomplished "master teachers." The board also awards a ten-year national credential to those who meet its standards.

The board was founded in 1987 as a private, nonprofit organization that sets voluntary national standards "for what accomplished teachers should know and be able to do." Governed by a sixty-three-member board of educators, the group was created in response to a 1986 Carnegie Forum report that called for "a profession of well-educated teachers prepared to assume new powers and responsibilities to redesign schools for the future." In the 1990s, as parents and politicians cast around for new ways to raise student performance, the idea of voluntary standards for teachers gained broad support, and the board certified its first slate of candidates in 1995.

But seven years and more than 5,000 certifications later, there are still nagging questions about the program's approach. Only recently has NBPTS sought to answer a very basic question: Do students learn more from the teachers it certifies than from comparable noncertified teachers? The fact is, nobody knows.

Failing Grade for Study

One thing is certain: Board certification is a windfall for teachers. In Columbus, Ohio, for example, state and local rewards for certified teachers total \$40,000 over the ten-year life of the certification. Dade County, Florida, offers an immediate \$7,500 bonus, plus a 10 percent salary increase. And the board itself has raked in millions of dollars from public and private sources. During 1988 hearings that would eventually garner it \$19.3 million in federal funding, board officials told Congress that it would be self-sufficient in three to five years. Yet, in fiscal 2001, it received another \$18 mil-

lion in federal funds, bringing total federal payments to more than \$108 million—all of this on top of the \$2,300 testing charge that the board commands from every candidate, a fee often paid by the state or school district.

Support for the NBPTS is broad and bipartisan, as shown by praise from former President Clinton; Senator Christopher Dodd, Democrat of Connecticut; and former New Jersey Republican Governor Tom Kean. The Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, the Lilly Endowment, the Ford Foundation, the Pew Charitable Trusts, the Rockefeller Foundation, and other foundations have lavished more than \$80 million on the organization. And it has strong support from the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association, both of which promote certification widely to their members.

Yet despite this broad support, hard data on student achievement remain unavailable. The board recently commissioned the University of North Carolina at Greensboro to conduct an "Accomplished Teaching Validation Study" to assess the effectiveness of its programs. A headline in the board's newsletter trumpeted, "Teachers with National Board Certification Outperform Others in 11 of 13 Areas, Significantly Enhance Student Achievement, Study Finds." This study played a major role in persuading the Pew Charitable Trusts that its \$9 million investment in the board was showing real results. "[O]f the many grants in professional development, NBPTS stands out by the success shown in its brief history," said a Pew report that accompanied approval of a third major grant.

But critics have noted weaknesses in the study. According to the report, National Board-certified teachers excelled in a number of areas, such as the ability "to improvise and alter instruction in response to contextual features of the classroom situation," or "generate accurate hypotheses about the causes of student success and failure." But when it came to how these abilities affected student performance—surely the most important measure of

effectiveness—even the board's own newsletter admitted that the review's solitary measure of student achievement, a writing exercise, "provided evidence that was less compelling."

In fact, the report's executive summary noted, "only students of National Board-certified middle childhood/generalist teachers obtained writing scores with statistical significance above that of nonboard certified teachers. Differences between the writing scores of the full complement of students, as well as students of English language arts teachers, while in the expected direction, were not statistically significant." So the students of board-certified English teachers did no better on a writing test than students of any other group of teachers, board certified or not.

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University of Missouri economist Michael Podgursky sharply criticized the study for failing to use evidence of student learning gains on state tests as a measure of teacher performance, a value-added approach used widely across the nation. Podgursky observes that many of the criteria that the board's study used to determine effective teaching attributes—for example, demonstrating "a high degree of 'withitness'"—are of questionable relevance to improving student achievement.

Faulty Standards

An important question is whether the board's procedures are even capable of identifying the sort of "master teachers" whom school districts should recognize and reward. Those with traditional views of curricula and standards accuse the board of paying little attention to determining whether teachers really know their subjects—an attribute at the very core of teacher effectiveness.

Most shocking is the board's tolerance of deficiencies in standard English in the work teachers submit for review. National Board for Professional Teaching Standards certification is based on an evaluation of a portfolio that applicants complete with the help of their colleagues, and the results of four tests.

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More than the Three Rs

By Edward Zigler and Sally J. Styfco

Head Start is, and has always been, a school-readiness program. In 1964, the project's planning committee convened and was charged with designing an intervention to help young low-income children begin school on an equal footing with their peers from wealthier families. There was little scientific evidence at the time to identify the needs of poor preschoolers or to suggest how to meet them. The planners, therefore, had to build a construct of school readiness relevant to the population Head Start would serve.

The members represented a variety of professional disciplines, and each contributed the latest knowledge in his or her field. Together they crafted the comprehensive-services whole-child approach that has come to define Head Start. Because children cannot devote their full energies to learning when they are not in good health, Head Start would ensure access to medical care. Hunger can also take a child's attention away from schoolwork, so Head Start would provide nutritious meals and snacks and teach parents to do the same at home. Cognitive skills would be emphasized, of course, but children would also be taught social skills so they could learn to get along with others and follow social rules in the classroom. Special attention would be paid to their emotional health so they could gain the confidence and motivation to succeed in school. Because parents are the child's first and most influential teachers, they would be invited to participate in all facets of the pre-

school and in adult education and training as well. Finally, because poverty carries many stresses that can interfere with healthy functioning, social-support services would be available to children and their families.

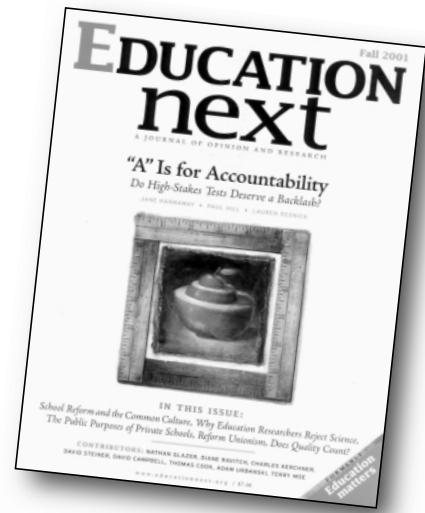
Nearly four decades later, these components of Head Start have come to define quality early care and education. The effectiveness of the model has been proved in a plethora of studies over the years showing that Head Start graduates are ready for school, and, in fact, show good progress in literacy, math, and social skills in kindergarten. However, their academic gains during preschool are not as great as they should be, leading some experts and some policymakers to propose making Head Start more academic and less comprehensive. Admittedly, Head Start teachers are not all well qualified, due in part to low salaries and community staffing patterns. However, recent revisions in the Program Performance Standards, which govern the quality of Head Start services, have begun to address weaknesses in teacher training as well as curricula.

Strengthening the preschool-education component in such ways is the appropriate response to calls to bolster the school readiness of children who attend Head Start. Focusing on this component to the exclusion of the others is not. Children who have uncorrected vision or hearing problems, who are ill or malnourished, who don't sleep at night because of

fear or hurt, or who have parents too preoccupied with their own problems to pay attention to them, will struggle with learning to read no matter how good the teacher. **EM**

—Edward Zigler is a professor of psychology at Yale University, and was one of Head Start's founders. Sally J. Styfco is the associate director of the Head Start section at the Yale Center in Child Development and Social Policy.

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Public Opinion Polls and School Choice

In independent public opinion surveys conducted during the last several years, Americans have expressed consistent support for school choice programs. Support is notable even in polls whose design might be questionable or expected to elicit negative views.

Here are examples of national independent polls conducted this past year and in 2000.

Blacks and Hispanics—The strongest support for school choice comes from low-income parents, especially African Americans and Hispanics.

The Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies conducts research on issues of special concern to black Americans and other minority groups. In its latest survey, a "majority (57 percent) of African Americans supported school vouchers. Among blacks, those under thirty-five (75 percent)...and those from households with children (74 percent) are most supportive...."

A July 2001 poll of Hispanic adults, conducted for The Latino Coalition & Hispanic Business Roundtable, found 73 percent agreeing that "the government should provide taxpayer funded

vouchers to help low-income families send their children to a better public, private, or church run school." The Latino Coalition conducts research on issues involving Latinos' overall economic, cultural, and social development.

General Public—School choice was a prominent issue in the 2000 presidential campaign. Representative findings of public opinion are illustrated in the following polls.

NBC News/Wall Street Journal Poll

"Let me read you two positions on school vouchers. Between these positions, which do you tend to side with more? Position A: Government should give parents more educational choices by providing taxpayer-funded vouchers to help pay for private or religious schools. Position B: Government funding should be limited to... public schools."

Pos. A	Pos. B
56%	38%

Pew Research Center/Princeton Survey Research Associates

"I'd like your opinion on some programs and proposals being discussed in this country today. Please tell me if you strongly favor, favor, oppose, or strongly oppose each one...federal funding for vouchers to help low- and middle-income parents send their children to private and parochial school?"

For	Against
53%	44%

Washington Post/Kaiser/Harvard: 2000 Election Values Survey

"Do you favor or oppose providing parents with tax money in the form of school vouchers to help pay for their children to attend private or religious schools?"

For	Against
49%	47%

Source—Marquette University, Institute for the Transformation of Learning, Office of Research (414) 765-0691.

Multiculturalism: Fact or Threat?

By Dinesh D'Souza

There has been a remarkable demographic shift that has changed the complexion of American society over the last forty years. One reason for this change is the fact that most immigrants today come from Asia, Africa, and Latin America, rather than from Europe. A second contributing factor is birthrates: those of nonwhite minorities are substantially higher than that of whites." In this sense, we can speak of multiculturalism as a fact. But it is important to distinguish this fact from the ideology that goes by the same name. The ideology of multiculturalism demands the transformation of America's educational and political institutions in response to the new demographic reality. This ideology of multiculturalism, unlike the fact of multiculturalism, poses a threat to what is best and highest in America.

Multiculturalists insist that we change how we teach our children, in order to reshape how they think. Specifically, they must stop thinking of Western and American civilization as superior to other civilizations. The doctrine underlying this position is cultural relativism—the denial that any culture can be said to be better or worse than any other. Cultural relativists take the principle of equality, which in the American political tradition is applied to individuals in terms of rights, and apply it instead to cultures in terms of their value.

One approach taken by multiculturalists to extinguish feelings of cultural superiority is to revise reading lists in our schools to minimize the influence of those they deride as "dead white males." A few years ago the novelist Saul Bellow set off a controversy when he said, "Find me the Tolstoy of the Zulus, or the Proust of the Papuans, and I would be happy to read him." In the storm of outrage that followed, Bellow was accused of racism. But the charge was unjustified. Bellow was not saying, after all, that the Zulus and Papuans are incapable of producing great novelists. He was saying that as far as he knew, they hadn't. But just by raising the possibility that some cultures have contributed more, if you will, to the dining table of civilization, he had violated one of the chief tenets of multiculturalism.

Whence Western Civilization?

In carrying forth their case, cultural relativists must account for the obvious fact that for the last half millennium, it has been one culture—the culture of the West and now of America—that has dominated the world. Prior to 1500, China was the preeminent civilization, and Western civilization—then called Christendom—was a relative backwater. How did this backwater conquer the world? Multiculturalists explain it in terms of oppression. Western civilization, they say, became so powerful because it is so evil. The study of

Western civilization, they insist, should focus on colonialism and slavery, the distinctive mechanisms of Western oppression. But colonialism and slavery are not distinctively Western at all. They are universal.

The British conquered India and ruled it for 300 years. But before the British there were the Persians, the Mongols, the Afghans, and Alexander the Great. Indeed, the British were the sixth or seventh colonial invader to occupy a large part of Indian territory. As for slavery, it has existed in all cultures. It was prevalent in ancient India, in China, in Greece and Rome, and in Africa. American Indians practiced slavery long before Columbus set foot here. In point of fact, what is uniquely Western is not slavery but abolition. The movement to end slavery developed only in Western civilization. While people everywhere oppose slavery for themselves, never outside the West have slave-owners and potential slave-owners proclaimed principles condemning it, and expended blood and treasure ending it.

Western civilization is not distinguished by colonialism and slavery but by its institutions of democracy, capitalism, and science. These institutions were developed because of a peculiar dynamism in Western civilization—a dynamism driven by the combination of Western philosophy and theology. And it is these institutions, I believe, that comprise the source of Western strength and explain the West's long-standing dominance in the world. In keeping with this, and contrary to multiculturalist doctrine, America's unparalleled power in the present is sustained far less by military force than by the force of its ideas and institutions.

I should point out in passing that there is room in American education for an authentic multiculturalism. Reading lists can be anchored in Western thought and culture but include the great books produced by non-Western cultures as well. This, however, is not what the multiculturalists want. What they really support is tailoring education to promote the ideas and objectives of the political left.

Historical Perspective

To understand what is at stake in the multiculturalism debate, it helps to get a sense of historical perspective. There was a famous debate in the early part of the 20th century between sociologist W.E.B. DuBois, the first African-American to get a Ph.D. from Harvard,

and Booker T. Washington, who had been born a slave and went on to found the Tuskegee Institute. According to DuBois, blacks in America faced one problem: racism. In response to this problem he prescribed protest and agitation. Washington countered that there were two problems. Racism was one. But just as important was a cultural disadvantage that resulted from high crime rates, low rates of business formation, and fragile family structures. DuBois argued that these problems were traceable to slavery. Washington responded that although that might be true, blacks themselves were responsible for working such problems out. It was up to them to develop the habits and skills to take advantage of freedom, even while they were agitating for equal rights.

For the better part of the last century, the civil rights movement—led by the NAACP, which DuBois co-founded—implemented the DuBoisian strategy. This strategy ultimately succeeded in the mid-1960s, when American law was brought into accordance with America's principles and with the 14th and 15th amendments to the Constitution. At that point, having achieved legal equality for minorities, one would have expected a shift in the civil rights movement from the strategy of protest and agitation toward Booker T. Washington's strategy of encouraging and nurturing self-improvement. Unfortunately, that shift never occurred.

The black anti-colonialist Frantz Fanon once wrote—and in a sense this is a perfect articulation of the principle behind both affirmative action and the idea of reparations—that ultimately a victim wants nothing more than to exchange places with his oppressor. This is the opposite of the view of Abraham Lincoln who said, "As I would not be a slave, so I would not be a master. This expresses my idea of democracy."

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Multiculturalism as currently practiced is a betrayal of these principles, and an enemy of black and minority advancement.

It is possible to devise a kind of multiculturalism that is essentially pro-American, and based on the principles of Madison, Jefferson, and Lincoln. Unfortunately, multiculturalism as currently practiced is a betrayal of these principles, and an enemy of black and minority advancement. **EM**

Dinesh D'Souza, the Robert and Karen Rishwain Research Fellow at the Hoover Institution, served as a senior domestic policy analyst to the White House from 1987-88. He has written extensively for newspapers and magazines. Mr. D'Souza graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Dartmouth College in 1983. The above article is an abridged version of Mr. D'Souza's speech at a Hillsdale College seminar on May 22, 2001, in Boise, Idaho. Reprinted with permission of Imprimis.

Will the President's Testing Plan Improve Education?

By Dr. Elizabeth Gressette



Dr. Elizabeth
Gressette

Have we in America's schools gone "test crazy"? Are we at the point of replacing good sound educational practice for high-stakes testing? Can the accountability movement make the difference in the quality of educational services provided to our nation's students?

In the past decade many states have moved to high-stakes testing. Students are being passed to the next grade or retained based on a single test score. Students who failed to pass an "exit exam" are not given high school diplomas. Access to gifted and talented programs is permitted or denied based on test scores.

No Child Left Behind

President Bush has authored a plan for education reform so that "no child is left behind." A cornerstone of his plan is to increase accountability for student performance by requiring all states to implement a testing program for reading and mathematics in grades 3-8.

Under the provisions of President Bush's plan, states, school districts, and local schools will be held accountable for ensuring that all students meet high achievement standards. States must develop a system of sanctions and rewards for schools and districts to ensure high academic achievement.

A major provision of the President's plan is to require annual assessments in reading and mathematics for every student in grades 3-8. Furthermore, these test scores will be released as public information. In addition to the math and reading tests, each year a sample of students in grades 4 and 8 will take the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) to demonstrate the reliability between the state tests and this nationally formed test. States may select and/or design their assessment program, the only requirement being that comparisons may be made from year to year.

Rewards will go to schools that are able to close the achievement gap between high-performing and low-performing students. States that move quickly to adopt the annual reading and mathematics assessments will receive one-time bonuses. Schools that are successful in making the greatest amount of progress with disadvantaged students will take part in a special award program.

Bush's plan calls for public reporting of the mandated assessments. In a move to enhance the accountability of these tests, this reporting must show the data disaggregated by race, gen-

der, English language proficiency, disability, and socio-economic status. While the general public favors testing programs, can they really understand the test data? Reporting data without prerequisite understanding leads to unfair comparison between the "haves and have-nots."

Is the President's Plan Necessary?

President Bush's plan to "leave no child behind" is intrusive and redundant. I feel that this emphasis is unnecessary—most states already have enough testing programs to last a lifetime. This push from the executive office is a "day late and a dollar short."

Most states have already taken the initiative to begin assessing their students' progress. An annual test required by the federal government will not ensure that what is taught is more rigorous, that all students are being taught, or that standards between and among states do not differ substantially. Requiring states to adopt the federal model could seriously impede, rather than advance, the education reform efforts.

Education—The State's Responsibility

There is no mention of providing a system of education in the U.S. Constitution or the Bill of Rights. Because education is a responsibility of the state and not the federal government, there should not be a national testing system.

Each state should initiate its own assessment system, based on state-adopted standards. Requiring a national testing system on top of a state system would be overkill, rather like the gardener who kept pulling up his new rose bush to see if the roots were growing.

Focusing a testing program strictly on reading and mathematics tends to narrow the curriculum. Because of the increased focus on the basic skills, policy makers, and school administrators are most likely to reduce funding to programs like fine arts and foreign languages, which aren't being assessed. Extracurricular activities, clubs, teams, and even recess can become the targets for administrators who are looking for blocks of time to dedicate to test preparation.

A major flaw in the move toward a national testing system is that performance and learning aren't the same thing. Focusing too intensely on results diminishes the amount of learning and the excitement of learning, while the quality of thinking declines. Are we fore-

going the assessment of high order thinking skills (problem-solving, reasoning, and communicating) for the quick and easy way to score a test? The corporate world needs well-educated workers, but they also need problem-solvers. Today's students may be able to regurgitate answers for multiple-choice tests, but they are not able to approach problems effectively and thoughtfully.

Education is Everyone's Business

The entire community must accept the responsibility of making schools better. Leaders in the community must be identified and encouraged to run for seats on the school board; businesses should adopt neighboring schools to provide resources and volunteers. Everyone—not just parents of school-aged children—has a stake in their community's schools. We are educating our future.

Many businesses in our state are adopting schools and districts to provide leadership, mentoring, library and lab supplies, as well as academic tutoring. These next few years will show the efficacy of these programs. I believe that they will make a difference. I believe that teachers want all of their students to succeed academically, but many times they don't have the training or confidence they need to help children with special learning needs. Providing continuous professional development along with adequate resources and rigorous instruction will make a difference.

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Bush's plan for rewards and sanctions only exacerbates the situation by making these tests truly "high stakes." Grading schools, teachers, and administrators on a single test score is like basing a huge business decision on a single bit of data. What if the surgeon's decision to perform major surgery was based solely on the patient's temperature? High-stakes testing leads to increased stress on students and teachers. Students become frustrated, and teacher morale dips lower and lower. The teacher shortage is amplified because many veteran teachers leave the profession rather than suffer the stress and agony. I thought this idea was expressed nicely on a tee shirt that read, "High stakes are for tomatoes." EM

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NCLB Testing Can Only Help Teaching

By Jeanne Allen



Jeanne Allen

After much debate about how best to assess the education of America's children, Congress and the President finally agreed on a system designed to provide accountability and to ensure, as the name of the act makes clear, that no child is left behind. However, despite bipartisan agreement to use the National Assessment of Educational Progress, or NAEP tests, as an audit of state assessments, testing opponents continue to balk at using a national test to gauge the true progress of American students.

Opponents to using national tests for any reason are an odd coalition of liberals and conservatives: Liberals seem opposed to anything with the word "test"; conservatives seem to oppose anything with the word "national." But on the basis of recent reports from around the country, it's clear that both need to put aside their opposition for the sake of our children and implement the testing provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act.

There is a consensus that the NAEP exams are an accurate reflection of student achievement. And without a "national audit" of state tests by an accepted national tool, parents will be left to wonder whether their state's examination is a good one. Consider—

- Mandatory annual testing was first proposed by Senator Robert Kennedy (D-NY) in 1965. It was then that he urged that the new Elementary and Secondary Education Act include a provision that districts report

testing results to the federal government. Unfortunately, because it was left to districts to decide, it didn't work and, according to historian Diane Ravitch, the tests were spotty and not consistently applied.

- Having a national benchmark can reveal which standards work well and which do not: The most recent NAEP reading scores reveal that in Virginia, where there is a rigorous set of Standards of Learning, the Minority Student Achievement gap has decreased. Meanwhile, in Maryland, where the curriculum and the tests trend more toward the "touchy-feely" constructivist approach, the gap between high performers and low performers has widened and scores have swung wildly.
- This phenomenon isn't new: Because of NAEP, we know that many state tests really do not tell us anything about how our children are performing. Even as far back as 1997, there were massive differences between NAEP scores and the state tests. That year, parents in South Carolina were told that 82 percent of the students were passing, but when they looked at the NAEP exam they discovered that only 20 percent were meeting a rigorous standard. The same "credibility gap" existed for other states: In Louisiana, there was a 70 percent difference in seventh grade math exams; in Oklahoma, there was a 50-point gap between pass rates; and in Wisconsin, 88 percent met the state's reading standard, but only 35 percent hit NAEP's reading standard.

State tests—and a national audit of those tests—are vital to educating students in high-poverty inner-city areas. Research shows that "A" students in high poverty schools test at about the same level as "C" or "D" students in

wealthy communities. For children in low-performing schools, an intense focus on well-defined measurable educational outcomes is long overdue. Without a standardized test, there will always be the concern among college admissions officers and employment counselors that if a student went to school in Harlem, his grades are going to be inflated.

It is true that the testing provisions of the NCLB are not precision tools capable of diagnosing all that ails our schools. But the act's accountability system is an important improvement over the hodge-podge of often bad local, state, and federal standards that have existed until now, hampering teachers' efforts to prepare students for the future.

Perhaps Education Secretary Rod Paige responded best to the charge that students will be "tested to death": "That's a charge made by people who feel that testing is somehow external to teaching. But it isn't. It's the other side of the same coin. If you don't assess where you are, what the students have learned or not learned, you're teaching in the dark. That's analogous to driving at night without headlights. Do you ever hear anyone saying we're teaching them to death?" **EM**

Jeanne Allen is the President of the Center for Education Reform (CER), an organization she founded in 1993. Allen is consulted regularly by lawmakers and national leaders in efforts to improve America's schools. The CER is a national, independent, nonprofit advocacy organization providing support and guidance to individuals, community, and civic groups, policymakers, and others working for fundamental reforms. For more information, visit www.edreform.com, or call 1-800-521-2118.

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For the portfolio, which carries the greatest weight toward certification, teachers submit examples of their assignments and their students' work, along with their comments on that work and an essay reflecting upon their broader goals and teaching practices. Candidates also submit videotapes of themselves interacting with their classes and documentation of their activities with students' families and local communities.

Yet for this high-stakes assessment, the board explicitly instructs its graders to ignore errors in spelling, punctuation, and grammar, and simply to concentrate on evidence of pedagogical skills and proper attitude. Although NBPTS vice president Mary Dean Barringer has called this practice "inexcusable," it apparently continues. This led Joe Nathan, director of the

Center for School Change at the University of Minnesota, to pose a very basic question: "Is it too much to expect teachers to know how to spell and punctuate?"

Focusing on Quality

Yet even critics of the National Board recognize its innate appeal to donors. Ed Donley, a member of both the Pennsylvania State Board of Education and the Council on Higher Education Accreditation, objects to the board's low standards but understands its success as a manifestation of the growing view that teacher quality is so important that anyone offering an approach to improving it is likely to find support.

Lew Solmon, former dean of UCLA's graduate school of education, notes that in the rush to do anything to improve instruction, funders may not focus sufficiently on criticisms of the board.

In this era of accountability in education, the spotlight is certain to be on NBPTS to prove its

worth with rigorous and valid procedures. Stated very simply, will this nearly \$200 million investment repay the country with teachers who produce better students? And with the number of certified teachers growing—15 percent of American teachers will be board certified by the end of this decade if trends continue—the time has certainly come for a serious longitudinal study of the program's effectiveness.

There is a broad national consensus that we need to reward outstanding teachers, but there may be a need to find some other means of certification—perhaps a process that is more hard-nosed and attentive to basic competencies. **EM**

Dr. Michael Poliakoff is president of the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) in Washington, D.C., which advocates for alternative certification programs and other education reforms. Visit www.nctq.org, web-site of NCTQ.

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Signs of the Times



California Teacher Union Spent \$570,000 in Recent School Board Races

The California Teachers Association (CTA) dropped almost \$570,000 in the coffers of some 200 school board candidates—the most prominent of those being Valerie Fields, who lost her seat on the Los Angeles school board despite contributions of over \$116,500 from CTA alone. This figure does not include indirect contributions or additional contributions made by CTA's large local affiliates in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and San Diego. For example, CTA donated about \$115,000 to political action committees in those areas.

Other tens of thousands of CTA dollars were banked by county Democratic (and some Republican) parties, in addition to the \$25,000 CTA gave the state GOP and the \$594,000 it gave the state Democratic party. Additional thousands went directly to candidates for statewide and legislative offices. The idea that somehow the teacher union is lacking a strong enough "voice" in any aspect of state or local policymaking (a recent CTA claim) seems incredulous to those in the know. **EM**

Launching Fifty New Latino Charter Schools

Without fanfare, the National Council of La Raza (NCLR), the country's largest constituency-based Hispanic organization, is embarking on a \$25 million project to open fifty new Latino charter schools over the next five years. Behind the effort is Anthony Colon, who worked for twenty years in the bureaucracy of the New York City public school system before becoming principal of a charter school in Oakland. An article by Jonathan Rauch describes the plan and profiles Nueva Esperanza, a charter school that sprang from, and serves, Philadelphia's Latino community. While some will be uncomfortable with the idea of an ethnic charter school, the founders believe that community ownership creates a sense of pride and purpose, and supporters note that what makes these schools special is that the people who run them believe the kids

are capable of great achievement. For more, see "Charter Schools: A New Hope for America's Latinos," by Jonathan Rauch, *Jewish World Review*, October 1, 2001, <http://www.jewishworldreview.com/1001/rauch.html>. **EM**

Source—Education Gadfly, e-mail news and analysis from the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation. www.edexcellence.net/gadfly.

More Good News about Charter Schools

California public charter schools are outperforming traditional public schools when it comes to educating low-income students, according to a California State University, Los Angeles study. Yet the charters receive 15 to 20 percent less state funding.

The *Los Angeles Daily News* reported that a three-year study found that charter schools with a majority of low-income students improve their academic scores more quickly than traditional campuses with comparable demographics.

"They are catching up faster in charter schools than in regular schools," said Simeon Slovacek, the study's lead author and education professor at California State University, Los Angeles, which released the report. The study also found that charter schools serve proportionately more low-income students than traditional schools. A separate study by Los Angeles Unified School District found greater gains for students enrolled in charter schools. **EM**

NEA Gay Task Force Marches Boldly in Place

The National Education Association has never been good at choosing between two conflicting positions. Choosing is divisive, and the union prizes solidarity over all other values—even over consistency and logic. Does the union favor Democrats? No, union officials say, we're bipartisan, endorsing pro-education candidates. Is NEA a professional organization or a labor union? We're both. Do union policies favor teachers over students? No, their interests are the same.

And so, when the union's Gay and Lesbian Caucus proposed a new resolution last year that would have placed the union in support of a wide range of gay education issues, NEA officials had a serious problem. Is the union a leading champion of the full panoply of gay rights, as its more progressive elements would like to think, or is it an organization that respects the will of the majority of its members, no matter what that will might be? NEA couldn't make that choice last year. At the 2001 Representative Assembly in Los Angeles,

the NEA Resolutions Committee listened to emotional delegates on both sides of the issue. Some felt the new resolution would be a courageous stand in support of gay rights. Others felt the resolution would drive members from the organization and weaken NEA's advocacy for its education agenda.

Faced with a contentious debate, the union punted, appointing a special task force of NEA officers to study the issue and recommend actions for the Resolutions Committee. After a number of meetings, the NEA Committee on Sexual Orientation submitted its report to the Board of Directors in March, which quickly approved it. And in the finest NEA tradition, the report calls upon the Resolutions Committee to do... nothing.

The Associated Press story was headlined "NEA OKs Resolution to Protect Gays." The NEA's own press statement was headlined "NEA Board Adopts Plan to Make Schools Safer." But a closer reading reveals the truth: The recommendations "clarify" NEA policies and "enhance" NEA programs. They would "continue and expand" NEA efforts to provide "information." Everything emphasizes safety and protection against harassment.

In actuality, the task force proposed no new resolutions, saying that NEA's current resolutions adequately address the issue. In the real world, we would call this a clear rejection of last year's resolution. But for NEA to do so would be divisive. So we get a press release emphasizing all the clarifying and enhancing actions NEA will now take, while the union distributes talking points to its affiliates—especially in those states opposed to last year's resolution—emphasizing the fact that no new resolution on the issue will be introduced, preserving the *status quo ante*.

Recognizing that this will cause some cognitive dissonance between now and July's Representative Assembly in Dallas, NEA is recommending its affiliates direct all media inquiries to NEA President Bob Chase, who is best qualified to square the circle.

The task force performed its assigned role in NEA's political theater. The union can now answer both yes and no—depending on the audience—to the question: "Is NEA championing gay rights in the classroom?" And like those under the heading of new unionism, NEA's policies on gay, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered persons are bold new stances...that the union has held for many years. **EM**

Source—Mike Antonucci is the president of The Education Intelligence Agency (EIA), which conducts public education research, analysis, and investigations. More information about EIA may be found at <http://members.aol.com/educationintel/>.

Character Lessons for Life!

A New High School Character Curriculum Offered by Gene Bedley

The core curriculum in most schools falls far short of providing the core ethical virtues that make us who we are, or should be. All that is measured and treasured by school leaders and curriculum commissions excludes what matters most. The fundamental skills to make ethical decisions are what our children need now more than ever.

A truly educated person must possess more than the knowledge and the standards that fill our classroom agendas today. He must have wisdom, make ethical choices, be courageous, have faith, and be focused on others.

Character Lessons for Life goes far beyond presenting the philosophical rationale for character building; it takes students through fifty-two lessons that give life purpose and direction.

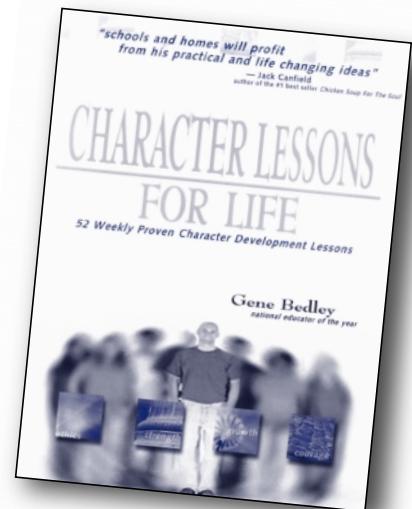
Gene Bedley has taught and provided leadership in promoting comprehensive character development over the past thirty-five years. For twenty years he was prin-

pal of a public school that is an alternative school with a focus on value-based education. The parents who camped out overnight were determined to enroll their kids in his school because of his reputation and the reputation the school's graduates carried with them as they entered middle and senior high school.

Gene was presented the "Keeper of the Dream" award for his contributions to leadership and developing positive school climate. He was chosen as National Educator of the Year by the PTA for his innovative and creative solutions and strategies for promoting character education in schools. His numerous awards include the prestigious Milken Family Foundation National Educator award for value-based education. His Teen Respect seminars have brought him national acclaim for making a major difference in American high schools.

What others are saying:

Gene Bedley has not only identified the seven core ethical virtues that empower people



to live purposeful lives, but he has also given kids everywhere the tools and techniques that contribute the most to making ethical decisions.

—Jack Canfield

Author of Chicken Soup for the Soul, #1 Bestseller

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Court Watch

Catholic Public School Teacher Sues Teacher Unions over Family Planning Fees

ARROM Catholic gym teacher is suing his local, state, and national teacher unions for requiring him to pay fees he says support abortion and birth control policies. In a lawsuit filed in U.S. District Court in Springfield, MA., Gerard O'Brien says the "family planning" positions taken by the Springfield Education Association, Massachusetts Teachers Association and National Education Association go against his religious beliefs.

O'Brien, who teaches gym to students with physical disabilities at different Springfield schools, says abortion is wrong and opposed by his church. He says he should not be forced to give money to groups advocating abortion rights or condom distribution.

He's not a union member, but he's required to pay an agency fee of about \$500 a year. Agency fees are reduced payments for workers who don't want to support political activity by a union beyond normal labor issues.

O'Brien wants to send all his fees to a charity—something he claims the SEA has allowed in the past. "I don't want to support the unions in any way. If I give them money for anything, it looks like I'm supporting them," says O'Brien.

While the SEA has not taken a formal stand on abortion or birth control, it does funnel money to the state and national teacher unions. The MTA supports health education programs that include information on birth control and family planning. According to a NEA resolution, that group supports the "right to reproductive freedom" and "urges the government to give high priority to making available all methods of family planning to women and men unable to take advantage of private facilities."

"Mr. O'Brien is not anti-union," his lawyer, Gregory Hession, said. "He's against paying for a union that violates his deeply held religious beliefs." O'Brien's religious discrimination case dates back to 1985, when he first refused to pay fees to the SEA. O'Brien, a Springfield teacher since 1975, instead put the money in an escrow account that now has about \$6,000. But refusal to pay the fees violates the school department's policies, and O'Brien says he was suspended for one week without pay in 1995 and in 2001. His lawsuit, which also names the City of Springfield as a defendant, seeks payment for lost wages and his attorney fees.

MTA officials say they've tried to accommodate O'Brien. Laura Barrett, a union spokeswoman, said the MTA offered to let O'Brien use the money saved in escrow to cover his attorney fees and lost pay, and give whatever was left over to a charity of his choice. But O'Brien says he shouldn't use his own money to cover his personal costs. "I've been saving this money since 1987 for a charity," he said. "It's an issue of principle to me." **EM**

Source—The Associated Press wire service story.

When is a Cut in Funding Really a Cut in Funding?

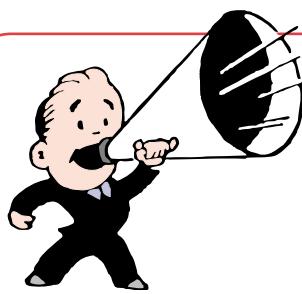
Here we go again! The National Education Association (NEA) has been running radio ads claiming that President Bush is cutting teacher quality funding. In an accompanying press release, NEA President Bob Chase says to leave no child behind is "a great goal for America," and then adds, "But if we are serious...then we must also be serious about leaving no teacher unqualified—and no mandate unfunded." Translation—The NEA is vexed that the

President does not support NEA's proposal that it determine what constitutes a "highly qualified teacher." President Bush's No Child Left Behind Act designates a "highly qualified teacher" as one who has a certification from, or has passed a licensing exam administered by, a state department of education—period.

In addition, the President's plan calls for upgrading teacher colleges—a shot across the bow the NEA-dominated NCATE.

"To provide the resources to meet the President's goals, President Bush signed legislation providing nearly \$3 billion, an increase of 35 percent over last year's budget," said Rep. John Boehner, through a statement issued by the House Education and Workforce Committee. Boehner added, "The NEA attacks are misleading and false." **EM**

Source—EdFacts, a weekly publication of Family Research Council, www.frc.org.



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It is important that we have your most current e-mail address so that you will receive any important announcements and survey questions.

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ON THE LIGHTER SIDE Talk Like the Pros, Learn Edubabble!

Many people are frustrated by their inability to understand education jargon. They wear out brain cells trying to make sense of it all. Mike Antonucci at the Education Intelligence Agency (EIA) has a remedy—

Now, you too can make education jargon right in your very own home. It's easy when you use EIA's exclusive Jargon Builder! The first step is to make sure you begin with an acceptable verb form, such as "facilitate," "engage in," or "foster." Then add to this menu one each from Columns A, B, and C:

<u>Column A</u>	<u>Column B</u>	<u>Column C</u>
cognitive	constructivist	awareness
formative	holistic	inter-relatedness
normative	integrated	congruence
facilitative	developmental	implementation
qualitative	externalized	clusters
adaptive	core	differentiation
supportive	perceptual	mastery
connective	conceptual	validation
summative	contextual	modules
proactive	structural	indicators

Should you require even further elaboration, there are a host of prefixes and suffixes from which to choose. "Meta-", "multi-", "post-", "sub-", or "self-" are all very versatile, as are "-oriented," "-faceted," "-centered," and "-based."



This handy tool will enable you to build sturdy structures in edubabble, such as "We're facilitating meta-normative structural modules, while engaging in a multi-summative developmental inter-relatedness, with an eye towards self-facilitative contextual awareness, all of which, of course, is core-based and mastery-oriented."

Act now and EIA will throw in an attachment to help you use jargon to inflate your job title. Tired of being a mere "deputy superintendent?" With Jargon Builder, you can quickly and easily become "Deputy Superintendent for Connective Integrated Validation." Call now! Telecommunications device manipulators are standing by. **EM**

Source—The Education Intelligence Agency's Communiqué, a weekly e-mail that reports on current issues and news in public education.

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