

# Education *Matters*

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## Johnny Can Write...If We Challenge Him

By Bill Rhatican

**T**o suggest that a high school student might be able to write a thoughtful, insightful, and well-researched essay that is of sufficient quality it could be included in a book would be almost laughable to some. However, that this is exactly what has happened each of the past three years in a large public high school in Fairfax County, Virginia.

Even more astounding, the school, West Potomac High School, is often portrayed in negative terms as a “Route 1 corridor school” because its students span the economic spectrum, come from twenty-eight different countries, and speak twenty-one different languages at home.

### Authored Three Books

In spite of the stereotypical view of this public school, students have written three books, had them published and registered with the Library of Congress, seen them available for sale on Amazon and Barnes & Noble websites and, most importantly, have learned a valuable lesson in the im-

portance of original research and writing skills.

Especially interesting to those who look for such things, the projects have been completed without any governmental money—national, state, or local school board. The initial seed money was privately supplied and supplemented with grants from the Virginia Professional Educators, an affiliate of the Association of American Educators, and from the school’s Parent, Teacher, Student Association.

All three books dealt with serious subjects: immigration, presidential challenges throughout history, and the relevance of the United States Constitution to today’s America. The first, written four years ago, began as a writing assignment in my Advanced Placement U.S. Government class. I required the students to select any immigrant group in the history of the United States and write a twenty-page essay on that group’s experience as it assimilated into American culture. As I read their essays, I concluded that the

students who wrote exceptional pieces should be rewarded with more than just a number in the grade book. After all, these were unusually perceptive pieces that cried out for greater recognition than a simple grade.

### Beyond Grading Papers

Too often, I discovered, writing assignments are “grade-driven” and quickly forgotten by both the teacher and student after submission. This time, I vowed, would be different. We would recognize the exceptional work of these students by publishing their works.

Authorhouse, a publisher-on-demand company based in Bloomington, Indiana, took on the task and, together, we published the students’ work. It was worth every second of editing to see the excitement in the students’ eyes when they saw their high school projects in print, available at local bookstores, and offered online. Even more importantly, however, the students vied with each other to partici-

pate in various book-signings we held in the area. Their work has been published as *And Still They Come*.

With that first year under our belt, we set out to improve the product and tighten the requirements on the student essays. Interestingly, rather than shop around for other AP Government teachers who were

In short, the students opted for a more strenuous—and interesting—class than one in which the sole purpose of “learning” was to prepare them for a specific test. The number of my former students who have gone on to college and are now majoring in history, government, or political science has created a small “bub-

support woman’s suffrage.

One student, who graduated in June 2006, went so far as to ask me in September 2005, if he could submit an essay to me on that year’s topic even though he was not enrolled in my class and would get no academic credit for the work. I agreed to allow his submission and, in fact, found it to be among the finest of the year. It not only was accepted but also is the lead essay in *The Constitution: Written in Sand or Etched in Stone*.

## “These young people rose well above the artificial stereotype that had been placed on their high school.”

### The Constitution

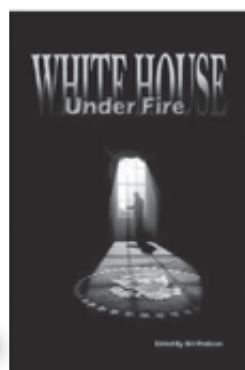
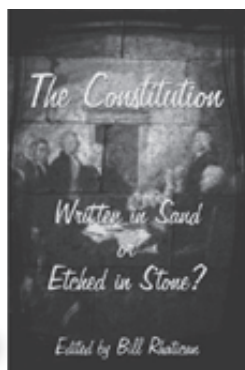
That book, published in May 2006, explored the US Constitution as it relates to today’s America. One student-author tackled the question of “fanfiction” on the internet and whether it violated the Constitution’s preservation of private property, a question that many constitutional lawyers have not yet tackled. Another delved into the constitutional questions arising out of same-sex marriages, while a third questioned whether her own generation deserved the right to vote, as expressed in the Twenty-sixth Amendment.

In short, these young people rose well above the artificial stereotype that had been placed on their high school, and achieved more in one year than most Americans achieve in a lifetime. They had become published authors, a distinction they will maintain throughout their lives. Significantly, they selected their own topics, did all of their own original research and writing, and did so enthusiastically. They demonstrated to me—and to anyone else who would pay attention—that they can and will rise to a challenge if it can be demonstrated that the challenge is more meaningful than just a grade. ■



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*ter eight years as a history, government, and Advanced Placement Government teacher at West Potomac High School in Fairfax County, Virginia, where he was named “Teacher of the Year” by the students for three of the five years they had given the award.*



The three student-written books available at Amazon.com. *And Still They Come* is 152 pages; *The Constitution: Written in Sand or Etched in Stone?* is 428 pages; *White House Under Fire* is 572 pages.

not requiring the lengthy essays, students flocked to my classes, actually begging their guidance counselors to enroll them in my classes.

### Setting the Bar High

The second year for me as an educator, was even more rewarding than the first. Students lined up for my class, anxious to take on an assignment that traditional educators told me was a “waste of time,” “non-academic,” and “off-task,” diverting valuable time away from the supremely important AP test at the end of the year. I felt differently. While the AP test results might have an impact on a student’s acceptance by the college of his choice, I believed that, since the test results were published long after college acceptances had been made, the value of this writing exercise far outweighed any distraction it might cause.

ble” of such majors from one public high school in northern Virginia.

### The Presidents

The second time around, I allowed the students to select any president in U.S. history and choose a specific challenge that president faced while in office. Frankly, I was astounded by their choices. Six of them selected Harry Truman, but each had carefully opted for a different challenge. Among their choices were Truman’s integration of the US Army, his decision to defend Korea, his reaction to the Berlin blockade by the Soviet Union, and his role in the creation of Israel as a nation.

Other surprises included Theodore Roosevelt’s creation of the Food and Drug Administration and his involvement in the anthracite coal strike of 1902, as well as Woodrow Wilson’s reluctance to

# Three cheers for Steve Jobs

## Addresses Major Obstacle to Improving Education

By Rod Paige

If there was the slightest doubt that Steve Jobs is one of the most courageous men of our time, it was dispelled dramatically on February 16th. He was at a high profile education conference when, in what I believe was a spontaneous outburst, he decided to take on teacher unions.

The Associated Press memorialized the moment, quoting Jobs as saying: "I believe that what is wrong with our schools in this nation is that they have become unionized in the worst possible way. This unionization and lifetime employment of K-12 teachers is off-the-charts crazy."

Jobs was a presenter at the Texas Public Education Reform Foundation's 2007 Statewide Education Summit when he made these and other comments in front of a packed ballroom at Austin's Hyatt Regency hotel. The topic was "Enhancing Education Through Technology" and it was almost as if he was talking to himself when he said, in response to a question, that technology in the classroom could not improve our schools "until principals could fire bad teachers."

### Courageous

This happened in front of an audience of educators, legislators, business professionals, and other highly placed individuals representing Texas's educational leadership. Jobs was a courageous man willing to put himself in the line of fire in order to raise a public discussion about an issue that must be dealt with if school reform efforts are to have any possibility of saving this nation's public schools.

I agree with Steve Jobs: teacher unions have become a major barrier to the improvement of our public schools. Holding this view does not mean that I am anti-teacher. To the contrary: I view the many incredible teachers I know as heroes. Holding this view also does not mean that I believe all teacher unions are bad. Some do add value, as did the AFT in its leadership in reading. After all, the AFT was first to call this nation's attention to the complexity of reading through the publi-

cation of its highly informative booklet, *Teaching Reading is Rocket Science*. My opinions on this matter also do not reflect a desire to get rid of all teacher unions. As painful as it is to admit, there are instances where teachers do need proper representation and protection from administrative abuse.

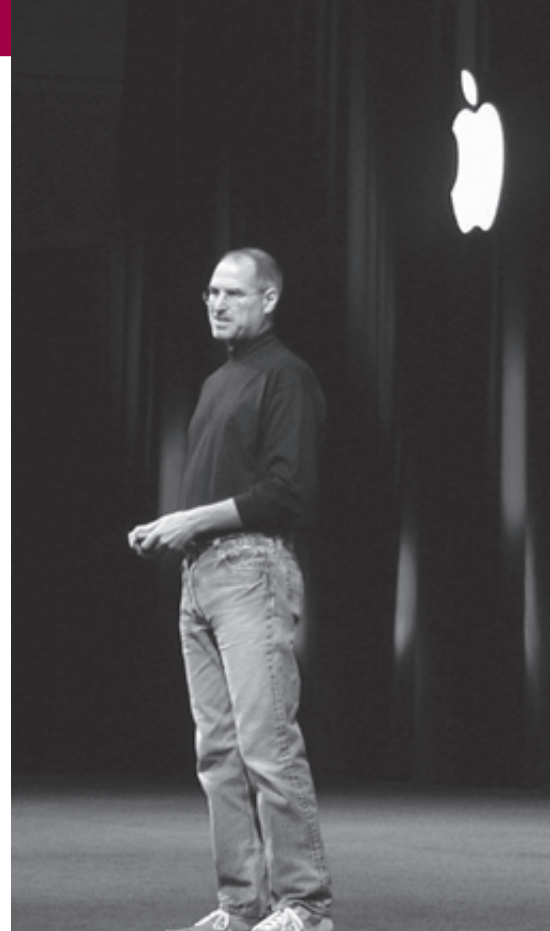
### Stifling Innovation

My concern is not with teachers. It's with teacher unions as organizations: huge, rich, powerful, politically manipulative, self-aggrandizing organizations that are blocking urgently needed reforms to our struggling public education system.

While the unions have been doing what they do, which is collecting dues and protecting their interest, the public has fallen asleep at the switch. The checks and balances on the teacher unions are seriously inadequate. As a result, they have grown so powerful that effective and efficient school operations are, for the most part, impossible.

How did this happen? In too many cases over the years, when school boards have found themselves unable to meet union demands for salary increases, they bought peace from the unions by granting them authority over certain aspects of school operations. Even worse, unions have enough money and clout in many parts of the country to subvert democracy and determine who gets elected to the school board. So when the union is negotiating a new contract and has friends on the school board, it is, in effect, sitting on both sides of the bargaining table. If you doubt the unions are using their political might to block reform, check out the news from places as far and wide as Buffalo, New York City, Fresno, Boston, St. Louis... the list goes on and on.

As a result of the rise of union power and the concomitant decline in the power of communities and parents, unions in many districts now control district policy making, teacher assignments, staff development possibilities, and personnel ter-



Jobs speaking at a MacWorld conference

mination procedures. In too many places, the unions have more control over school operations than the superintendent or the school principals. As Jobs alluded in his remarks, principals can't hire the teachers they need; seniority rules dictate whom they can hire. And once a bad teacher has tenure, it's almost impossible to fire him. So schools just pass them around, a practice that some refer to as "the dance of the lemons." And most hurtful, in the midst of this era of accountability in public education, unions are subjected to zero accountability for student performance.

So three cheers for Steve Jobs. I appreciate his candor, and hope his remarks will spark a national conversation about this most urgent issue. ■

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## AAE Utah Affiliate Successfully Lobbies Against Censorship

AAE affiliate, the Utah Council of Educators (UTCE), successfully lobbied for Utah House legislators to pass a bill to level the playing field for all teacher associations in Utah.

The legislation gives all groups equal access to teachers and prohibits school districts from endorsing the Utah Education Association or any other group.

Legislators also took the term “UEA” out of the name “UEA Weekend,” the annual four-day weekend in October when the UEA convention is held.

“The fact that the sponsor wanted to keep that in the bill shows how petty legislators can be up here,” said Vik Arnold, government relations specialist for the UEA. “Since that’s why school is not in session those two days. It makes sense that school districts call it what it is.”

But Rep. Merlynn Newbold, R-South Jordan, said it was a gesture of fairness and in the past, schools have changed even monikers such as Christmas Vacation to “Winter Break” and Easter Break to “Spring Recess.”

“There have been changes when times have changed, and this will just reiterate in the process that all organizations will be treated equally,” Newbold said.

Earlier this month, after the bill was

passed by the Senate in a 26-3 vote, the measure was changed in a House committee with language that would allow school districts to select one organization with which to negotiate.

Supporters said that was the complete opposite of the intent of the bill but House lawmakers accepted a substitute similar to the original bill. The measure passed 39-31 and now goes to the Senate for concurrence—supporters say they have confidence in Senate support.

“This is really a great victory for Utah,” remarked David Barrett, Utah Council of Educators president, who worked with Sen. Mark Madsen, R-Lehi, on the measure.

“Now teachers will enjoy the free flow of information, and any endorsement or preferential treatment by UEA will disappear, or should because of the law—now everybody has to play by the same rules,” he said.

Initially, opponents were concerned that the bill would create confusion with how districts could approach contract bargaining, questioning whether districts could still select one organization to negotiate, or even negotiate at all.

That issue was cleared up in the bill’s intent language that further clarified that



David Barrett, president of Utah Council of Educators, helped the state legislators allow more access to information for Utah educators.

districts could continue to negotiate with a dominant organization but must allow all organizations access to teachers’ school mailboxes and e-mails.

Both UTCE and American Federation of Teachers representatives have said they have been denied access in some districts. But UEA leaders say they have not been able to find any districts that don’t already allow equal access and the bill isn’t really needed.

Some lawmakers said they were against the bill since not only was the UEA representing more than 18,000 teachers in the state but also they work as advocates for other educators even though they were not members of the group through legal help and other support.

“This is an issue about first amendments rights, free speech and association, and who has the rights to go in and contact our teachers—so we should open it up so all organizations have fair access,” Rep. Stephen Urquhart, R-St. George said.

Barrett points out that UTCE is not a labor union, does not engage in collective bargaining efforts, and is careful not to waste resources by getting mired in divisive issues unrelated to public education. UTCE focuses on strategic educational objectives and the establishment of common educative goals rather than getting sidetracked with controversial partisan politics. ■

*Source—Adapted from an article by Tiffany Erickson, Desert Morning News*



## TEACHERS BY CALLING, PROFESSIONALS BY CHOICE.

Across the country, over 250,000 teachers have made the professional choice to join the Association of American Educators or its sister organizations at the state level.

association of  
american educators 

[www.aaeteachers.org](http://www.aaeteachers.org)

## New Internet Resource

# Over 8,000 High-Quality Classroom Materials Free

The Institute for the Study of Knowledge Management in Education (ISKME) launched a new Internet resource that makes over 8,000 high-quality classroom materials available to teachers, faculty, and learners worldwide at no cost.

In the weeks before its public launch, over 10,000 visitors have come to [www.oercommons.org](http://www.oercommons.org) to find a wide range of educational resources, from primary documents to complete course guides and from algebra to zoology, all in one place.

Content on OER Commons has been developed by over sixty collections worldwide, including Carnegie Mellon, Connexions at Rice University, Foothill De Anza Community College, George Mason, Harvard, MIT, NASA Kids Science News Network, Open Universi-

ty-UK, Science Education Resource Center, UC Berkeley, and WGBH-TV in Boston. The number of tools and materials



[www.oercommons.org](http://www.oercommons.org)

ty-UK, Science Education Resource Center, UC Berkeley, and WGBH-TV in Boston. The number of tools and materials on the site is growing daily, and they will soon be enhanced and adapted for classroom use with comments, ratings, and reviews by instructors and learners across the globe.

OER Commons is the first comprehensive network for Open Education Resources

combining high-quality content with extensive social networking. Educators and learners add tags, ratings, reviews, and comments to help others in schools and on campuses quickly find what they are looking for and to encourage others to share their ratings and reviews—for the benefit of all.

“OER Commons brings the open content movement into the classroom. It offers new ways for instructors and students to engage with teaching and learning materials and share what they know,” says Lisa Petrides, president of ISKME. “When people share their knowledge on OER Commons, they pass along their best thinking to others around the globe.”

“OER Commons is a great place to locate teaching and learning resources and make them your own,” says Richard Baraniuk of Connexions at Rice University, which is a content partner with OER Commons. “By providing an easy link to resources such as those found in Connexions, OER Commons offers unique and innovative opportunities for educators to learn and helps open the door to collaboration.”

Created with and for educators, students, and self-learners, this broad selection of high-quality teaching and learning materials for K-12 and higher education can be browsed, searched, and most importantly, enhanced using Web 2.0 social networking features, such as tagging, ratings, comments, and reviews. ■

## Help for Students Headed for College

In the upcoming months, high school seniors will be busy filling out applications, writing essays, and choosing which school to attend. Many parents, on the other hand, will be searching for ways to afford the increasingly expensive college tuition.

[GovBenefits.gov](http://GovBenefits.gov) and [Govloans.gov](http://Govloans.gov) can be valuable resources to both students and parents in locating educational benefit and loan programs.

[GovBenefits.gov](http://GovBenefits.gov) provides access to more than 1,000 government benefit and assistance programs, and allows visitors to customize the search process to fit their individual needs. Users can identify benefit and assistance programs using the site's confidential prescreening questionnaire. The site allows for searches by life event, keyword, and benefit category. ■

**Teacher:** Johnny, why are you doing your math multiplication on the floor?

**Johnny:** You told me to do it without using tables.

**Teacher:** Sally, name one important thing we have today that we didn't have ten years ago.

**Sally:** Me!

### JUST FOR LAUGHS!



**Teacher:** Roberto, your essay on “My Dog” is exactly the same as your brother's! Did you copy?

**Roberto:** No. It's the same dog.

## Exit Exams Impact Two Urban Districts

A new report released by the Center on Education Policy finds that exit exams appear to have increased instructional time in tested subject areas in the Austin, Texas, and Jackson, Mississippi, school districts, often at the expense of other high school learning experiences and electives.

While curriculum and instructional changes were seen district-wide in both the Jackson Public Schools and the Austin Independent School District, the shift was even more pervasive at schools serv-

ing greater numbers of lower-income and minority students in Austin.

Many educators in both districts reported that the intense focus on tested subject matter has helped to increase consistency in instruction across schools in the district by ensuring that teachers are accountable and adhere to the prescribed curriculum.

The full report is available at [www.cepd.org/highschoolexit/jacksonaustin](http://www.cepd.org/highschoolexit/jacksonaustin). ■

## Joint Hearing on Improving NCLB to Close Achievement Gap

The Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions and the House Committee on Education and Labor recently held a hearing titled, "Elementary and Secondary Education Act Reauthorization: Improving NCLB to Close the Achievement Gap." A wide range of witnesses testified at the hearing.

In his opening statement, Chairman George Miller (D-CA) stated, "We must remain dedicated to the principle that every child deserves a first-rate education because we know that every child, if given the opportunity, can learn and can succeed."

During the hearing, diverse suggestions about how children can succeed were brought forth by the witnesses. Reg Weaver of the National Education Association (NEA) argued that lawmakers need to focus on providing better salaries, financial incentives, reduced class sizes, mentoring programs, and a better school environment. Meanwhile, Elizabeth Burmaster, president of the Council of Chief State School Officers, argued for more flexibility for the states and less federal intrusion. This hearing was one of many hearings that will be held on No Child Left Behind before it is reauthorized.

## Renewal Act of 2007

Recently, the Renewal Act of 2007, a bill championed by the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), was introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives (HR 1372) and in the U.S. Senate (S. 808). If these bills pass, approximately \$250 million over the next five years will be allocated for teachers in the New Orleans area and other areas destroyed by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The money would be used to cover bonus pay, relocation expenses, student-loan forgiveness, housing subsidies, recruitment costs, and professional development.

One aspect of the bills that is particularly concerning is the fact that the bills give teacher unions greater power to design a new school system in the New Orleans area. As the law is currently written, other teacher associations are not included in the rebuilding of schools in the Gulf Region.

## The A Plus Act

On March 15, a press conference was held on the grounds of the U.S. Senate by a number of U.S. Senators and Representatives to introduce the A Plus Act, a bill that restores local control of education. A member of the Association of American Educators staff attended the event.

The A Plus Act would allow states the option of a five-year performance agreement with the U.S. Secretary of Education. This agreement would permit states to consolidate funds from a

few or all of the federal education programs for the use of education programs created by the state. States would be required to meet their state performance objectives for improving academic achievement and prove that achievement gaps are being narrowed. If a state fails to reach these two requirements, its performance agreement would be revoked and it would revert back to No Child Left Behind.

At the press conference, Sen. John Cornyn (R-TX) said, "States should be given the flexibility to design education programs that fit the local needs of individual districts, parents, and children. This bill will reduce the bureaucratic red tape that often stands in the way of results, accountability, and superior schools."

The Senate bill, which is sponsored by Senators John Cornyn (R-TX) and Jim DeMint (R-TX), has not yet been introduced. The House bill, HR 1539, was introduced in the House on March 15. It has been referred to the Committee on Education and Labor. It is sponsored by Rep. Pete Hoekstra (R-MI) and has fifty-one cosponsors.

## Spellings & Reading

Secretary Margaret Spellings was recently on Capitol Hill testifying before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services and the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services. The topic of the hearings was funding for No Child Left Behind and the Reading First grant program.

At the House Appropriations subcommittee hearing, Chairman David R. Obey (D-WI) stated, "If the administration is going to get my vote on reauthorization, they're going to have to be a whole lot more flexible in terms of what they mandate on the states, and I'm going to have to be convinced that this time around the administration isn't going to walk away from its financial commitment."

Later in the hearing Chairman Obey stated that the budget for education this year will be significantly increased.

At the Senate Appropriations subcommittee hearing, the issue of the Reading First program was raised. The Education Department's inspector general, John P. Higgins, Jr., found recently that the department appeared to favor certain commercial reading programs in the grant approval process. At the hearing, Secretary Spellings stated that she has taken the inspector general's recommendations on how to improve the Reading First program into consideration, and the officials whose actions were questioned no longer work at the department.

Senator Harkin (D-IA), chairman of the subcommittee on Labor, Health, Education, and Human Services, also pledged that the education funding would receive a considerable boost this year. ■

# Separation of Church and Union

## Union: Pay Dues or Change Religion, Teacher Says

By Randy Hall, CNSNews.com Staff Writer/Editor

Told by a union official to pay forced dues or “change religions,” a teacher in southern Ohio is challenging a state law that allows only those public employees who belong to certain denominations the right to claim religious objection to paying union dues.

Carol Katter, a mathematics and language arts instructor in the St. Marys district, filed a federal complaint in the U.S. District Court in Columbus last January because of an Ohio law that prevents the lifelong Catholic from diverting her dues from a union she refuses to fund because it supports abortion on demand.

### The Law

Katter filed the complaint against top officials of the State Employment Relations Board (SERB) for religious discrimination in enforcing Ohio Revised Code section 4117.09(C), which states:

“Any public employee who is a member of and adheres to established and traditional tenets or teachings of a bona fide religion or religious body *which has historically held conscientious objections to joining or financially supporting an employee organization* and which is exempt from taxation under the provisions of the Internal Revenue Code shall not be required to join or financially support any employee organization as a condition of employment.” (emphasis added)

In light of this, the teacher told Cybercast News Service, she had been “shocked” to learn her dues had to go to the OEA.

“I had never belonged to a teacher’s union [because] I know where NEA money goes, and I knew I never wanted to be a part of that,” Katter said. “When it became mandatory last year, we were told our dues could go to a charity.”

However, she later learned that members of only two religions receive the charity exception. “If you’re a Seventh-

Day Adventist or a Mennonite, you’re pretty well covered” because unions “don’t hassle them at all” due to those denominations’ history of objection to union membership, she said.

While discussing the situation with an OEA official, Katter “pretty much pleaded with the lady,” saying: “I can’t do this. It’s against my belief and my conscience. Isn’t there anything I can do to just give the money to charity?”

### The Loop Hole

The teacher’s request was turned down “basically because I could not come up with proof that my individual church—not the Catholic faith, but my individual church—had a record of anyone having successfully fought a union,” she said. “In my little parish church, no one’s ever done this, and that’s what threw it out.”

Katter said the union attorney told her

## The union attorney told her she had two choices—pay her dues or “change religions.”

she had two choices—pay her dues or “change religions.”

The teacher also filed a related charge with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission against her union, the Ohio Education Association (OEA), a state affiliate of the National Education Association (NEA). She charges that an OEA attorney told her she must “change religions” to receive a religious exemption.

Katter’s complaint says the Ohio statute amounts to an unconstitutional establishment of religion. She wants a federal injunction prohibiting SERB from further enforcing the law against other state employees.

“Carol Katter’s struggle underscores that Ohio employees still face an uphill battle when objecting to union affiliation on religious grounds,” said Stefan Gleason, vice president of the National Right

to Work Foundation, which is providing the teacher with free legal assistance.

“Until Ohio passes a Right to Work law making union membership and dues payment strictly voluntary, such abuses will inevitably continue,” Gleason argued.

Under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, union officials may not force any employee to financially support a union if doing so violates the employee’s sincerely held religious beliefs, Gleason said.

To avoid conflict between an employee’s faith and a requirement to pay fees to a union he or she believes to be immoral, the law requires union officials to accommodate the employee—most often by designating a mutually acceptable charity to accept the funds.

Gleason added that SERB officials cannot claim ignorance in Katter’s situation. He noted that the state government was involved in a case last year that led a federal judge to issue

a decree affirming that all public-sector employees with religious objections to union affiliation could

not be forced to pay dues to such organizations.

While Katter admitted that “anybody who knows me knows I do not like the spotlight at all,” she added that “if people do know me, they know my convictions, too.”

Still, the teacher said she has another reason for pursuing the matter.

“I don’t know if people realize how much pressure there is to belong to a union,” Katter noted. “Even before it was mandatory, there was tons of pressure. People would just cave in to it, understandably.

“I’m hoping that this case will set a precedent so anybody from any religion who has these feelings will not be pressured into compromising their convictions,” she said. “I can’t not do this.” ■

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# Highly Qualified

## Myths and facts about NCLB's Highly Qualified and Effective Teacher measurement



The Commission on No Child Left Behind, led by Governor Roy Barnes and Secretary Tommy Thompson, has recommended that states recognize the effectiveness of teachers in the classroom, and support teachers who need and want help to improve. To accomplish this, the Commission recommends that states adopt a definition of a Highly Qualified and Effective Teacher (HQET). This definition would allow effective teachers to demonstrate that their children are actually learning even in schools that are not meeting adequate yearly progress (AYP). HQET measures effectiveness by how much progress a teacher's students have made over a year's worth of schooling and by an evaluation from their principal or a group of their fellow teachers.

**MYTH:** This judges teacher effectiveness based on one test score.

**FACT:** It includes both test scores and a principal evaluation or an evaluation by a teacher peer review group. Peer or princi-

pal evaluation is given equal weight as test scores in measuring teacher effectiveness.

**MYTH:** States don't have the data systems to do this—it will never work.

**FACT:** The Commission's recommendations provide funding for states to develop and implement data systems that will provide accurate information about the effectiveness of teachers. The

Commission does not recommend that states implement the new process until those data systems are in place.

**MYTH:** It requires that 25 percent of teachers "fail" each year.

**FACT:** Twenty-five percent of teachers are not "failures" after one year. Once states implement data systems capable of making the calculations, teachers have seven years to demonstrate that they are producing learning gains and receive a positive evaluation from their principal or fellow teachers before any sanctions apply.

**MYTH:** It requires elementary school teachers to meet its requirements three times.

**FACT:** Elementary school teachers who teach multiple subjects would have their students' scores aggregated to produce one set of learning gains, not three separate requirements.

**Myth:** It only labels teachers as failures and does nothing to support and improve teaching.

**FACT:** For the first time ever in federal law, it would guarantee support and professional development to teachers who need it.

**MYTH:** It is another way to put down teachers and blame them for all that ails schools.

**FACT:** It is a way to get teachers who need more support exactly what they need, and to recognize teachers who are successful. Right now, a very effective teacher is lost in the aggregate of how a school is doing when that school does not make AYP. Now, we'll know where those effective teachers are and recognize them, and schools will be able to target professional development to the teachers who need it most.

**MYTH:** It judges teachers against an arbitrary federal or state standard and isn't fair in allowing teachers to show their students are learning.

**FACT:** Actually, it compares teachers against their peers and also controls for demographics and other characteristics. Each year of the seven-year timeline, the learning gains of a teacher's students are compared to the learning gains of students of other teachers in the state. ■

*For more information on the Commission's report, visit [www.aspeninstitute.org](http://www.aspeninstitute.org).*