

“Our Gang”

—A Reformer’s Take on Injecting Sanity into the Education Wars

By Lisa Graham Keegan



Lisa Graham Keegan

If you remember “Our Gang,” you recall the great naïve enthusiasm with which the gang threw themselves into their projects: “We’ll just have a show in the garage and raise all the money we need!!!” The next scene depicts a

glum lot of children, heads in hands on the street in front of an empty garage. So much for enthusiasm.

As a former state school superintendent and committed education reformer, this scene resonates with me. “All we have to do,” says I to me, “is to show how much simpler this could be. Educators and the public must be convinced that a reformed and less complicated education system will be fairer, achievement will be greater, and teachers will be paid more and have more control over their work. Who’s gonna argue with that???”

As it turns out, lots of people.

Ten years ago, I was a first-term legislator learning the inside workings of our education system. I encountered a set of laws that are convoluted without cause, that penalize those without wealth, and that have choked the life out of individual teacher initiative and professional responsibility. After confronting these facts, I was certain that if I could simply explain to others what was happening in our schools, we would have the will to fix it together. A decade later, I am more committed than ever to success for our children but rather clear-eyed about the strength of the opposition to real change on their behalf.

Simply put, public education in the United States should be that in which the money necessary for an education follows a child to the school his or her parent determines is best. The nation’s education profession should supply an array of schools from which parents may choose, and the state should limit its role to ensuring fair and equal access and reporting on academic quality at each school.

Yet, while our country has prospered in most areas by rejecting the dangers of central planning, our inability to improve public education owes largely to a reflexive belief that because we have set up a “public school system,” the government must run it. Instead of relying on professional educators to supply schools of choice, we assign students to schools and elect lay boards that dictate what must happen in every school for every child. It is not a sane endeavor! It is a classic monopoly with the confusing feature of our neighbors as monopolists-in-charge.

Any system bereft of the feedback provided by a competitive market will be out of touch with the needs of those it is meant to serve. In the case of education, the combination of monopoly in the public sector, significant profitability for those who serve the monopoly, and the unique ability of the wealthy to choose the best schools has translated into a nightmare of predictable results for “haves” and “have-nots,” one the monopoly blames on the students and parents.

Imagine the same scenario in health care. How would the public react if a new edict required that families were assigned to the hospital nearest them, regardless of their preferences or the hospital’s quality? What would happen if we suddenly found out that in the inner city, doctors were opposed to diagnosis and preferred to treat all patients with their favorite medicine regardless of the patient’s condition? How comfortable would we be with a statistic saying that poor and minority children were 40 percent incurable?

Not very.

And yet, we have relied on this centralized education system for so long that we confuse its disappointing product with its good intention, and those who criticize the results are seen as hostile to the whole idea of publicly supported education.

As reformers committed to genuine improvement, we must discipline ourselves to pursue a simple and sane education model rather than fall prey to the shallow side shows that beset the public debate in education. Issues of class size, quality of buildings, uniforms...all of these are appropriate education discussions, but not for state policy leaders. Those questions should be answered by the education profession, and featured in the details of their local schools.

We have not been without progress in the past decade, and I have felt privileged to serve with so many others who pursue education reform based first and foremost on the needs of children.

This past decade of reform assures us that a simpler model of public education is fairer to students, is far more likely to result in high achievement for all students, and elevates teachers to a leadership role once again. Discussing that evidence will also get you lambasted in public meetings, called a child hater and worse, and will occasionally

make you wish for a new calling. I have

personally spent several hours in the “Our Gang” head-in-the-hands posture, wondering where it all went wrong.

But despite the regular setbacks, students in my home state and the nation are benefiting from the combined efforts of the “gang.” In fact, I chose to leave the job I loved in

Arizona because I am compelled by the possibility that reform may actually reach its “tipping point” soon.

In moving beyond the superintendent’s role, I have chosen to accept a job as CEO for an organization whose vision matches my own. The Education Leaders Council (ELC) aims to make the world safe for educational sanity, and we are well aware that in addition to being the nation’s pre-eminent membership organization for practicing reformers, we are also the nation’s only such group.

Continued on page 2, See... “Our Gang”

Teachers Face Tougher Task than Public Understands

By Joseph Reynolds



Joseph Reynolds

When I announced that I was leaving a successful twenty-five-year career as an attorney to teach high school history, some said I was crazy. Others said they dreamed of doing the same someday.

I remembered teachers who influenced my life, and I hoped I could help. As it turned out, I didn't last. But I learned in the process that the public has a grossly inaccurate picture of teaching, and if we want to get and keep good teachers, we need to make some practical changes.

First, the public's misperception. As former students, we all have firsthand knowledge of the education system. So we think we're experts on good teaching. But that's like thinking that because we know how to eat, we can cook.

We also tend to see teaching as a cushy job. Teachers can go home in the middle of the afternoon and receive generous time off, including summers and holidays.

In reality, the demands of teaching are daunting, especially for a new teacher:

- **Keeping up to date is a challenge.** Even though I have a master's in history and read a lot, this took a great deal of time. Teachers' days may look short — and, in fact, for some, they may be short — but for the good ones, simply keeping in step with the latest knowledge eats countless hours outside the classroom.
- **One size doesn't fit all.** I had to create lessons for students who learn in different ways and start from different backgrounds. There are seven or eight different styles of learning. Not every one can listen and learn or look and learn. I also had to provide accommodations for kids with special needs, both physical and emotional, in diverse classrooms where cultural and social backgrounds varied widely.
- **There's more to it than teaching from textbooks.** I was expected to maintain order and teach ethics, critical thinking, writing, and manners — as well as teach during unexpected crises such as 9/11. I was also expected to control gum chewing and talking.
- **Conditions are challenging.** All of this was to be done in a classroom with 26-29 kids. Oh, yes; the classroom was not in a building but in a "learning cottage" (trailer).

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It drives me crazy to hear people say, "Those who can, do; those who can't, teach."

- **Grading absorbs free time.** If I assigned my students a paper to write, I had to grade 120 papers. (I had 140 students; about 20 could be expected to ignore the assignment.) At 20 minutes per paper, that's about 40 hours of work. Even a quiz that takes a minute to grade eats up two hours. Think about a test with essay questions.
- **Did I mention the administrative tasks?** There's attendance and paperwork, the individual education plans, the team, department, and faculty meetings, and so forth. It is simply not possible for teachers to accomplish all of the tasks we ask of them. It drives me crazy to hear people say, "Those who can, do; those who can't, teach."

Attracting and Keeping Good Teachers

Teachers are retiring, and new ones are needed. If we want to get and keep good teachers, we need to acknowledge the workload and find creative ways to help novices:

- **Use the knowledge of successful veteran teachers.** Schools need to find ways to provide new teachers with access to the vast resources created by experienced teachers. Find those model teachers and have them share their creative teaching methods and the teaching tools they developed. Some mentoring is done now, but expand it by giving mentors the compensated time to teach new teachers.
- **Expect less of new teachers.** I know that sounds objectionable, but new teachers are paid less. With my master's degree (the law degree didn't count), I made \$34,069. A twenty-year veteran would make \$69,734. New teachers need the additional time to build the material and skills necessary to be successful. Let them build up to a full workload over time. I didn't have big cases as a first-year lawyer.
- **Give them the tools to succeed.** Too often, the most junior new teachers get the worst equipment and facilities; many don't even have a home classroom in which to organize their lessons. Yet of all instructors, they need the most and are the least able to adapt successfully.

Although my teaching tenure was brief, I hope what I learned from the experience can help others who choose to follow the same path someday. **EM**

Joseph Reynolds has returned to the law firm of Nixon Peabody LLP, in Washington, D.C. He still hopes to find a less life-consuming way to be a teacher.

"Our Gang"

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ELC's goal is to provide support for the idea that student success depends on high quality instruction and not external factors. Our membership is made up of active reformers affiliated by philosophy, not title. We are governors, state school chiefs, state board members, congressional members, university professors, state legislators, local board members, superintendents, principals, business executives, parents and, most importantly, classroom teachers.

As members of ELC, we share a view that success can only be judged by the achievement gains of our students. As practicing reformers, we find it ironic that our work strongly reflects both the public viewpoint and scientific research on achievement; yet it is clearly the minority view within the education community.

Our organization embraces what is possible for students because we have seen it work. ELC believes 100 percent literacy is not "pie in the sky" optimism—it is an achievable goal. ELC believes mathematical competence through algebra and geometry is possible for all students today. And ELC believes that the shamefully predictable gaps in achievement between students are a phenomenon of adult behavior, not student attributes.

At the Education Leaders Council, we are singularly focused on success for students.

The nation cannot abide a system that is blatantly unfair in the access it provides its students to excellent education. This battle for the right of all children to access a quality education is the civil rights movement of our time, and it will succeed. I only know that it requires us to act with urgency sufficient to cause change tomorrow, and to do so for as long as it takes. We intend to do just that. **EM**

Lisa Graham Keegan recently took the helm of the Education Leaders Council as its Chief Executive Officer. Prior to this position, she was Arizona's Superintendent of Public Instruction. Ms. Keegan is nationally known for her focus on educational improvement and reform, including efforts for student-centered funding, charter schools, expanded school choice, and an emphasis on marketplace incentives.

Source—The School Choice Advocate, The Milton & Rose D. Friedman Foundation, One American Square, Suite 1750, Indianapolis, IN 46282.

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Graduation Statistics: Caveat Emptor

By Jay P. Greene



Jay P. Greene

As the pundits keep reminding us, honesty is often a casualty of war. Alas, it also appears to be a frequent casualty of K-12 education data. Graduation statistics reported by federal, state, and local school

districts are especially confusing, misleading, and implausibly optimistic.

Even the federal government's normally reliable National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) is wont to inflict such wounds. Last fall, that agency issued its annual report on dropouts and high school completion rates, and again we find that it paints a blurred picture of how U.S. schools are performing. According to "Dropout Rates in the United States: 2000," 86.5 percent of young Americans are completing high school, up from 85.9 percent the previous year (see <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2002114>).

Would that it were so. By my calculations, however, U.S. high-school graduation rates are considerably lower. (You can find my recent study at http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/cr_baeo.htm.) Using a transparent and easily checked method of comparing 8th grade enrollments in 1993-94 with high-school diploma counts in spring 1998 (and adjusting for student population changes), I put the national graduation rate at about 74 percent. The situation for minority students is far bleaker. I find that only 56 percent of African-American students and 54 percent of Latino students graduated from high school in 1998. This contrasts with NCES claims of 83.7 percent completion rates for African-American students and 64.1 percent for Latino students.

Why are the NCES numbers so much higher than mine? The main reason is that the federal report includes among high-school completers those who have passed an "equivalency" test, such as the GED. This is misleading for several reasons, beginning with the fact that GED recipients are not graduates of the public high school system. They have received their degrees with the assistance of community colleges, the prison system, vocational schools, or through their own independent efforts. Since most people view the NCES completion data as attesting to the performance of our high school system, we should not include people who dropped out of that system and later received degrees from

some other system. (In computing a physician's cure rate, we would not want to count patients who had transferred to the care of another doctor.)

A considerable body of research also suggests that the life outcomes of GED recipients more closely resemble those of dropouts than those of regular high school graduates. Economists James Heckman and Stephen Cameron find that "Exam-certified high school equivalents are statistically indistinguishable from high school dropouts." Other researchers find moderate benefits for GED recipients, but no one claims that they are truly "equivalent" to regular high school graduates. To lump GED holders with regular graduates, therefore, is to combine fundamentally dissimilar groups while misleading people about the school system's ability to produce high school graduates.

In previous years, NCES reports included data (in small print) that distinguished regular diploma recipients from those with "equivalency" certificates. The latest report, however, does not provide this information at all. But we can estimate the difference using the 1999 report and removing GED recipients. We find that NCES calculates the "true" high school graduation rate at 76.8 percent, a little higher than my 1998 finding of 74 percent. The Latino rate drops to 54.9 percent, close to my finding of 54 percent. The NCES African-American graduation rate sans GEDs, however, was 72.9 percent in 1999, considerably higher than my 1998 estimate of 56 percent.

That discrepancy probably has to do with the different methods by which the information was collected. My method simply involves a comparison of 8th grade enrollments with diploma counts five years later, adjusting for enrollment and population changes. The NCES figures come from the Current Population Survey (CPS) of the U.S. Census. The CPS tries to phone a representative sample of households to ask a number of questions, including whether young people in the house have finished high school.

While CPS is a well-run survey, this methodology may inflate the graduation-rate estimate for young African-Americans. CPS depends upon people forthrightly describing their own level of educational attainment. Such self-reporting could significantly distort graduation rates for groups that may overstate their educational achievement to compensate for workforce discrimination. One of the advantages of

my simple method of calculating graduate rates is that it requires only enrollment and diploma counts, which tend to be reliable and easily checked figures.

However, for all their flaws, NCES graduation statistics are light years ahead of the numbers usually reported by states and school districts. Rather than relying on surveys or enrollment counts, most states and districts calculate these statistics by trying to track individual students over time. Yet few have either the resources or the incentives to track them successfully. Faced with ambiguous or missing information about the whereabouts of individuals, districts may be prone to offer the most benign explanation for a student's absence. This tendency to produce rosy results is exacerbated by the bizarre definitions of dropouts that many districts use, commonly excluding not only GED-seekers but also students who leave high school to go to jail or join the military.

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While it sounds more precise to track individual students, the failure of districts to do so successfully and the inability of outsiders to check district accounts of student whereabouts can lead to graduation statistics that are grossly misleading. Take, for example, the Dallas Independent School District, which reports an annual dropout rate of 1.3 percent. Presenting dropout rates in annual terms is like reporting credit card interest rates in monthly terms; it just makes the number feel smaller. If we convert the annual rate into a cumulative rate (which is how everyone thinks about dropouts), we would expect about 8 percent of an 8th grade class to drop out before graduation. However, according to my calculations, only 52 percent of 8th grade students in Dallas manage to earn a diploma "on time." The 1.3 percent rate reported by the district has to be a fantasy in a district with half as many graduates as 8th graders and with a growing student population.

But let's not just pick on Dallas. Unfortunately, the misreporting of dropout statistics is too common across the country. At least Dallas is aware that its numbers are off and that the district truly has a serious problem. As a school system spokesman told *The Dallas Morning News*, "[Superintendent Mike] Moses has said the dropout problem is probably a lot bigger than what any of the other figures report. We know it's a major problem, and we're trying to do something about it."

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A Dose of Common Sense on College Campus

“Throughout the Cold War, the United States embraced the idea of nuclear deterrence and mutually assured destruction. Due to this counter intuitive logic, the U.S. and the USSR were able to survive decades of intense geopolitical competition without engulfing the world in a nuclear holocaust. Today, as then, the threat of nuclear retaliation may do much to prevent a world conflict.”

No, that’s not a news release from a conservative think tank—it’s the Harvard *Crimson* writing on the Bush administration’s nuclear deterrence policy... a rare endorsement of a conservative concept from an Ivy League paper. **EM**

International Survey Indicates: School Choice Helps the Learning Disabled

A new Yankee Institute study of twenty-two countries adds unexpected twist to the voucher debate in America.

“Allowing parents to take the public money set aside for their child’s education and spend it at any school of their choice is a social policy that clearly benefits most deaf, autistic, hyperactive, and other learning disabled children,” concludes an eighteen month international study by Dr. Lewis M. Andrews of the Yankee Institute for Public Policy in Hartford, Connecticut. In a survey partly funded by the Milbank Foundation for Rehabilitation, Dr. Andrews examines the twenty-two countries that allow parents to send their children to private schools with government vouchers or similar reimbursement, and finds that special education kids tend to thrive “to an extent not even imagined by American educators.”

In the study entitled “More Choices for disabled Kids: Lessons from Abroad,” Dr. Andrews illustrates the potential benefits of school choice to learning disabled children with a detailed analysis of six countries: Australia, New Zealand, the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark, and the United Kingdom.

The Yankee Institute report also examines the success of the McKay Scholarship Program, a largely underreported two-year-old initiative of the Florida legislature, which applies the experi-

ence of foreign countries here in the United States. Under this law, parents of any Florida special-needs student may receive a subsidy from the government of anywhere from \$6,000 to \$20,000, depending on the severity of the child’s disability, and place their child at a private school of their choosing. Now in its second year of operation, child participation in the McKay Scholarship Program has more than quadrupled, from 900 to over 4000, while the number of participating private schools is more than 300. **EM**

Source—www.yankeeinstitute.org

NEA Names Jeffords 2002 Friend of Education

The National Education Association Board of Directors unanimously approved the selection of Vermont Sen. James Jeffords as the union’s 2002 Friend of Education.

Senator Jeffords is best known for bolting the Republican party after the 2000 election, giving Democrats control of the U.S. Senate. Jeffords sits on the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions. **EM**

The Battle of Britain is ... About to be Lost?

If misery loves company, recent results from a history examination in the United Kingdom are sure to make some Americans happy. In the wake of the recent NAEP test scores revealing the lack of progress in retention of American History by our nation’s public school students, London’s daily *Guardian* commissioned a poll of British college-aged youth to determine the extent of British students’ knowledge of history.

What did they find? Knowledge of England’s illustrious past is—shall we say it?—history. Less than a third of the students could identify Winston Churchill. Eighty-one percent were unable to name novels by Charles Dickens. Another 80 percent could not identify Chaucer as the author of *The Canterbury Tales*. Only 7 percent knew that Milton had written *Paradise Lost* and a mere 23 percent could identify the Magna Carta.

What did they know? Like American students, popular culture was at the top of the list. Ninety-three percent could complete the name of rock star Fatboy Slim. And 40 percent knew Laura Croft, a busomy computer game character—even before the recent movie based on the game.

It’s no wonder that the *Wall Street Journal Europe* found the results distressing. “Simply put, national identity depends on shared knowledge,” wrote the *Journal*. “That’s why invading armies rename streets, smash statues and rewrite history books. If Britons come to believe that Churchill and Fatboy Slim are of equal value, then Britain’s teachers have done what Britain’s enemies have failed to do since 1066.” And we must wonder how many British students know the significance of that date. **EM**

Surveying Congress on School Choice

Recently, researchers at The Heritage Foundation surveyed Members of Congress to determine whether they practice or have practiced private school choice for their children, as a follow-up to a similar survey conducted in 2000.

The results of the survey demonstrate that private school choice continues to be an important option for Members of Congress who have school-age children—especially those in the House and Senate who serve on committees with jurisdiction over education spending. The percentage of members of Congress who send their children to private school remains disproportionate to that of the general populace:

- Whereas only 10 percent of the general populace send at least one child to private school, in 2000, 40 percent of Representatives and 49 percent of Senators with school-age children responded that they had sent children to private school; in 2001, the numbers climbed slightly, with 47 percent of Representatives and 50 percent of Senators with school-age children affirming that they had exercised the private school choice option.
- 50 percent of members of the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee who have children and 53 percent of those on the Senate Finance Committee who have children exercised private school choice.

Although Members of Congress are more likely to exercise private school choice than are most other Americans, many of these lawmakers have not supported bills that would enable other parents—particularly low-income parents who cannot afford to send their children to another school—to exercise that same option. **EM**

-Quote of the month-

“Public education is a concept; it is not a structure. And what it really means is that students should be able to receive a free and appropriate education, one at the expense of the public. There are multiple delivery systems that can achieve that goal, and I think as we go forward into this new century, we are going to see a proliferation of new delivery systems. There are going to be cyber schools, home schooling, parochial schools, private schools, public schools – all kinds of delivery systems. And I think that’s going to be good, because that expands choices for parents.”

—U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige.



Entrance to office suite

AAE Opens Washington, D.C. Office!

With the national media, congressional committees, and the U.S. Department of Education calling upon the AAE much more frequently, we felt the time was right to open a D.C. office.

To economize our membership dues, we are sharing office space with two other education reform-minded entities—the Education Leaders Council (see page 1 article by Lisa Keegan), and the newly formed National Council on Teacher Quality (see related article “Generation Gap” on page 6).

Our Director of National Projects, Mr. Tracey Bailey, will be headquartered at the new location, and we will also administer the AAE Foundation activities from this office. The administration of our association membership services, legal services, and insurance will continue at our California office, with the exception of those services provided directly through our state-based affiliate offices.

When you're in D.C., give Tracey a call and stop by to visit us at 1225 19th Street, N.W., Suite 400, Washington, D.C. 20036. The phone number is 877-385-6264 or 202-261-2609.



1993 National Teacher of the Year, Tracey Bailey, Director of National Projects for the AAE



Special Assistant Christina Vastola



(L to R) Tracey Bailey, Chad Miller and Christina Vastola



1225 19th Street office

What You Haven't Heard about the NAEP History Scores

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores for U.S. history were released last month and, well, they weren't too good. Analysis of the results by the Education Intelligence Agency (EIA) is a little unorthodox: EIA says a new emphasis on history is unlikely to affect these scores very much. Mike Antonucci, Director of EIA, adds, "They are the entirely predictable result of a decline in reading comprehension. It would be baffling if history scores rose while reading scores remained flat or fell. Conversely, if reading scores climbed and history scores remained flat, then we could lay the blame on a lack of effective history instruction."

The NAEP results always produce more data than can usefully be analyzed in a short newspaper story, so a lot of fascinating stuff often goes unreported. However, two findings of the NAEP history assessments were particularly interesting.

First was the news that, in American history, students in nonpublic schools outperformed students in public schools by a fairly wide margin. That may not be surprising to some, but the NAEP scores for nonpublic schools were also divided into "Catholic" and "Other," and those results showed that the scores of Catholic school students went up in grades 4, 8, and 12 (compared to 1994), while other nonpublic schools saw a one-point increase in grade 8 scores and declines in scores in grades 4 and 12. Because Catholic schools are more likely to have low-income students than other private schools, this is a remarkable outcome.

Also, for the first time, NAEP scores were broken down by the frequency of computer use, and here the results were startling. In the 4th grade, students who used computers at school for social studies every day scored a whopping forty-seven points lower than students who

"never or hardly ever" used computers at school for social studies. The margin for both 8th and 12th graders was twenty-four points. The trend was virtually unbroken for all three grade levels: the more frequently you used a computer at school for social studies, the lower you scored. Conversely, students who used the Internet for research projects scored much higher than those who did not. The lesson here seems to be that computers should be used as an enhanced library tool, but that their use in classroom instruction for history is counterproductive. **EM**

Source—Communiqué, a publication of The Education Intelligence Agency, conducts public education research, analysis, and investigations. Director: Mike Antonucci. PO Box 580007, Elk Grove, CA 95758. Ph: 916-422-4373. E-Mail: EducationIntel@aol.com. Web-site: <http://www.eiaonline.com>.

Generation Gap among Teachers Argues for Flexibility in the Profession

The teachers who have worked their way to the top of today's education system were hired at a time when fewer professional opportunities were open to all and when choosing a lifelong career was the norm. By contrast, today's new teaching candidates have many attractive career options and very different expectations about career mobility and job security. The archetype of the entrepreneur and free agent has replaced that of the company man (or woman). However, teaching appears to be one of the few lines of work with a static understanding of career. So write Harvard ed school professor Susan Moore Johnson and four colleagues in "The Next Generation of Teachers: Changing Conceptions of a Career in Teaching," an article analyzing the results of interviews with fifty first- and second-year teachers in Massachusetts.

The main question motivating the study was how the next generation of teachers differs from the generation that is about to retire in its conceptions of a career. In an attempt to capture the views of a wide range of teachers, the researchers interviewed thirty-six teachers who had followed the traditional route into teaching (passing through an ed school) and fourteen who had followed alternate routes, either teaching in a charter school or participating in Massachusetts' fast-track certification program for outstanding teaching candidates. The researchers set out to explore what motivates this new generation of teachers, with an eye toward using this information to improve recruitment and retention policies.

The researchers were able to identify several different species of new teachers. About one-third of the teachers interviewed were classified as long-termers who anticipated making teaching their primary career; the other two-thirds were classified as short-termers. Among the long-termers, only a small fraction of these expected to remain full-time classroom teachers; most anticipated wanting new challenges and different roles in education as their careers progressed. The short-termers were divided into two categories: "explorers," who were testing out the career to see if it was a good fit for the long-term, and "contributors," hoping to make a difference for children and society at either the beginning or the



end of careers in other fields. Researchers found that the short-termers were not casual about their commitment to their work but were very sensitive to the costs of pre-service training and licensure; they concluded that policymakers should create alternate pathways for these individuals into teaching that are less costly (in terms of time and money) than traditional routes.

Policymakers also need to think more systematically about retaining the new generation of teachers, the authors write. To retain long-termers, it is essential that the career of teaching become more differentiated so that accomplished teachers can take on roles as inductors, mentors, peer reviewers, professional developers, team leaders, and curriculum writers. While improving work conditions may induce some short-termers to become long-termers, it is important to recognize that there may be a substantial group of teachers whose contribution to education will be short but nonetheless valuable, and policymakers should focus on making their time in teaching as productive as possible rather than trying to convince every teacher to stay for the long term.

"If public education is to tap the talents and interests of this entire pool and schools are to recruit the best possible candidates into the classroom, policies must not require that all candidates conform to a single career pattern," Johnson and her co-authors conclude. They proposed a mixed model for the teaching career, with both a large core of dedicated teachers providing continuity in schools and some well-defined alternative pathways by which shorter term teachers (who are still understood to have a serious commitment to teaching) can enter the classroom more easily.

A radically different proposal for adapting the teaching profession is proposed by Peter Temes of the Great Books Foundation in a commentary in *Education Week*. Frustrated that we do not screen new teachers for excellence before granting them tenure but merely for competence, Temes urges that new teachers face an early-career merit-based threshold similar to what doctors and lawyers face in their first years of professional work. Most who begin their career as teachers won't make the grade, but by keeping only the very best of the new teacher recruits, we'll turn teaching into an elite profession. The author contends that this will attract large numbers of talented people from other professions who don't think teaching is respected today.

While the ambition of stocking our nation's schools with nothing but the elite as teachers has some appeal, the first step is to create ways of identifying and recognizing those teachers who today meet this standard of excellence. This is the goal of the American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence, launched earlier this year by the National Council on Teacher Quality and the Education Leaders Council. **EM**

Source—Education Gadfly is a weekly bulletin of news and analysis from the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, 1627 K Street, NW, Suite 600, Washington, D.C. 20006. Phone number: 202-223-5452. Web-site: www.edexcellence.net

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 "If...schools are to recruit the best possible candidates into the classroom, policies must not require that all candidates conform to a single career pattern."

Graduation Statistics

(Continued from page 3)

Most school officials are not so candid. This lack of candor about the extent of problems in U.S. education produces the most serious casualty of all: minority students whose shockingly low graduation rates we are failing even to acknowledge, let alone to address. If people only realized that we graduate barely half of our minority students, there would be demands for dramatic efforts to remedy the situation. Instead, the problems are being glossed over and the failures of the status quo maintained. **EM**

Jay P. Greene is Senior Fellow at the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, (212) 599-7000, or visit www.manhattan-institute.org. The opinions expressed by Jay Greene here are his own.

A Poignant Call to End the Violence in Our Schools

Darrell Scott, the father of Rachel Scott, a victim of the Columbine High School shootings in Littleton, Colorado, was invited to address a House Judiciary Committee's subcommittee. What he said to our national leaders was painfully truthful. It should be heard by every parent, every teacher, every politician, every sociologist, every psychologist, and every educator! The following is a portion of the transcript:

"Since the dawn of creation there has been both good and evil in the hearts of men and women. We all contain the seeds of kindness or the seeds of violence. The death of my wonderful daughter, Rachel Joy Scott, and the deaths of that heroic teacher and the other eleven children who died must not be in vain. Their blood cries out for answers."

"The first recorded act of violence was when Cain slew his brother Abel out in the field. The villain was not the club he used. Neither was it the NCA, the National Club Association. The true killer was Cain, and the reason for the murder could only be found in Cain's heart."

"In the days that followed the Columbine tragedy, I was amazed at how quickly fingers began to be pointed at groups such as the NRA. I am not a member of the NRA. I am not a hunter. I do not even own a gun. I am not here to represent or defend the NRA—because I don't believe that they are responsible for my daughter's death. Therefore I do not believe that they need to be defended. If I believed they had anything to do with Rachel's murder, I would be their strongest opponent."

"I am here today to declare that Columbine was not just a tragedy—it was a spiritual event that should be forcing us to look at where the real blame lies! Much of the blame lies here in this room. Much of the blame lies behind the pointing fingers of the accusers themselves. I wrote a poem just four nights ago that expresses my feelings best. This was written way before I knew I would be speaking here today":

*Your laws ignore our deepest needs,
Your words are empty air.
You've stripped away our heritage,
You've outlawed simple prayer.*

*Now gunshots fill our classrooms,
And precious children die.
You seek for answers everywhere,
And ask the question "Why?"*

*You regulate restrictive laws,
Through legislative creed.
And yet you fail to understand,
That God is what we need!*

"Men and women are three-part beings. We all consist of body, soul, and spirit. When we refuse to acknowledge a third part of our make-up, we create a void that allows evil, prejudice, and hatred to rush in and wreak havoc. Spiritual presences were present within our educational system for most of our nation's history. Many of our major colleges began as theological seminaries. This is a historical fact. What has happened to us as a nation? We have refused to honor God, and in so doing, we open the doors to hatred and violence. And when something as terrible as Columbine's

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Political posturing
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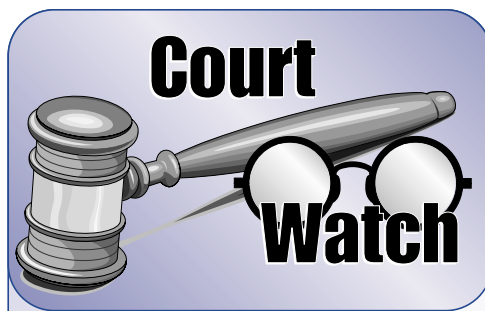
The young people of our
nation hold the key.

tragedy occurs—politicians immediately look for a scapegoat such as the NRA. They immediately seek to pass more restrictive laws that contribute to erode away our personal and private liberties. We do not need more restrictive laws.

"Eric and Dylan would not have been stopped by metal detectors. No amount of gun laws can stop someone who spends months planning this type of massacre. The real villain lies within our own hearts. Political posturing and restrictive legislation are not the answers. The young people of our nation hold the key. There is a spiritual awakening taking place that will not be squelched! We do not need more religion. We do not need more gaudy television evangelists spewing out verbal religious garbage. We do not need more million dollar church buildings built while people with basic needs are being ignored. We do need a change of heart and a humble acknowledgment that this nation was founded on the principle of simple trust in God!"

"As my son Craig lay under that table in the school library and saw his two friends murdered before his very eyes—He did not hesitate to pray in school. I defy any law or politician to deny him that right! I challenge every young person in America, and around the world, to realize that on April 20, 1999, at Columbine High School prayer was brought back to our schools. Do not let the many prayers offered by those students be in vain." **EM**

Submitted by Polly Broussard, Executive Director of Associated Professional Educators of Louisiana (A+PEL), an AAE affiliate.



NAS Denounces Court Ruling in Discrimination Case

The National Association of Scholars (NAS) strongly objected to the decision rendered on May 14 by a sharply divided U. S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit that asserted the legality of racially discriminatory admissions at the University of Michigan Law School. In a 5-4 ruling in *Bollinger v. Grutter*, the court held that the 1978 Supreme Court decision in *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* authorizes institutions of higher education to employ racial preferences in admissions in the interest of achieving a diverse student body.

NAS issued a statement immediately after the ruling that said, in part: We believe that court is mistaken both in its analysis of the holding in *Bakke* and in its conclusion that *Bakke* provides a rule for deciding the Michigan case. The careful and scholarly dissent by Judge Boggs is more than sufficient to dispose of the majority's arguments. If Barbara Grutter chooses to appeal the court's decision, as we urge that she do, we are confident that the Supreme Court will declare that Michigan's racially discriminatory admissions regime is an affront to the right of all persons to the equal protection of the laws.

NAS Executive Director Bradford Wilson added, "The court's ruling perpetuates racial double standards in college admissions, harming the moral and academic integrity of the universities that employ them. It gives a green light to Michigan to continue to violate the constitutional rights of college applicants to be judged on the basis of their individual merits, not on the color of their skin. Surely this unfortunate decision will not stand up under further review." **EM**

Source—The National Association of Scholars is America's foremost higher education reform group. Located in Princeton, it has forty-six state affiliates and more than 4,000 professors, graduate students, administrators, and trustees as members. Phone: 609-683-7878 or nas@nas.org.

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Candid Thoughts from Union Leaders about Teacher Certification

“It is fundamental to what we stand for to make certain that there is a fully trained, certified teacher in every Kentucky classroom,” said Kentucky Education Association President Judith Gambill recently, and her remarks are typical of the sentiments of NEA and AFT officials across the country. Both unions declare loudly that certified teachers are quality teachers. While many have asked whether that’s true, few have asked why the unions profess it to be true.

The rhetoric has intensified this past year. At the NEA Representative Assembly last July, Executive Director John Wilson told the delegates, “We should be raising hell about the large number of teachers in too many of our rural and urban schools who have no certification—sometimes no college degree—and, frankly, have no business standing in front of a classroom.”

The unions released studies correlating uncertified teachers to low test scores and poor school performance. This, despite the fact that teachers universally disparage teacher certification courses. So what’s the story?

Enter Matt Jacobs. Jacobs is the president of the Sewanhaka Federation of Teachers, represents New York on the NEA Board of Directors, and is a dyed-in-the-wool unionist. Jacobs believes NEA is doing itself, and its uncertified members, a disservice with its stance on certification. In his open letter to members entitled “Thinking the Unthinkable About Teacher Certification,” Jacobs declares, “Teaching licensing requirements mandate neither in-depth subject content knowledge nor solid practical training in how to teach effectively.” Jacobs believes that, other things being equal, the nod should be given to a certified teacher over an uncertified one.

But what happens when other things are not equal? “Is there any reason to believe that, in the long run, the less knowledgeable and less talented teacher will provide superior instruction simply by virtue of possessing certification?” he asks.

Jacobs candidly offers an explanation for union obsession with certification. “Actually, the most compelling reason for requiring all public school teachers to be certified may have little to do with ensuring instructional excellence,” he writes.

“It’s a matter of simple economics and professional self-interest.” Jacobs quotes from a letter from the NEA Executive Director John Wilson explaining his remarks about uncertified teachers: “Would the union representing electricians allow a non-certified electrician to work at a site? I think not. They would close it down first. What would happen if our union closed down schools because of the lack of qualified teachers? It would cause increased compensation, improved working conditions, and most importantly, respect for our profession. As long as we allow the system to manipulate ‘supply and demand,’ our members are the losers.”

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“Actually, the most compelling reason for requiring all public school teachers to be certified may have little to do with ensuring instructional excellence.”

The only members who are losers under this philosophy are the thousands of uncertified teachers who are recruited by NEA and AFT to become members—or forced by law to pay agency fees—only to hear their union’s highest-ranking employee declare to the world that they have no business in front of a classroom. “If this is the best we can do for our uncertified members,” writes Jacobs, “they deserve a refund of their dues money.” **EM**

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EducationMatters is published by the Association of American Educators. For more information, contact AAE, 25201 Paseo de Alicia, Suite 104, Laguna Hills, CA 92653
(949) 595-7979
(800) 704-7799
Fax (949) 595-7970
E-mail: info@aaeteachers.org
Website: aaeteachers.org

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