

## Making Matters Worse

By Lynne V. Cheney



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**I**n the twenty years since *A Nation at Risk* was published, hundreds of education summits have been called, thousands of reports issued, and billions of dollars poured into reform projects, all in the name of improving

But there is little to show as a result. Reading scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress trend exam are virtually the same as they were at the time of *A Nation at Risk*. While there has been some improvement in trend scores in mathematics, the fact is that among the nation's twelfth graders, only 8 percent can solve math problems involving more than two steps. In the Third International Mathematics and Science Survey, our twelfth graders ranked nineteenth out of twenty-one nations. Only students from Cyprus and South Africa had scores significantly lower.

Despite efforts to improve the teaching of history, only 11 percent of 12<sup>th</sup> graders achieved a "proficient" level in the NAEP history exam. Even after four-years of college at some of our nation's most elite institutions, only 22 percent of students can identify "government of the people, by the people, and for the people" as being from the Gettysburg Address, only 23 percent can identify James Madison as the "father of the Constitution," only 34 percent can identify George Washington as the American general at Yorktown. Thirty-seven percent thought it was Ulysses S. Grant.

How can it be that after billions of dollars and untold hours of effort students still perform so poorly? One important reason, I'd like to suggest today, is that many reforms are not reforms at all. Instead of bringing about change, these so-called reforms maintain and strengthen the status quo. Instead of making matters better, they actually make them worse by adding to the influence of a way of thinking that has prevailed in and failed our schools for a very long time.

Let me give you an extended example. In October, 1999, there was a front page

story in *Education Week* headlined, "Tests to Reflect New Teachers' Subject Savvy." The Educational Testing Service, it was reported, was revising its Praxis examinations—its tests for new teachers—"to reflect the standards for teachers written by subject-matter associations."

On the face of it, such revamping seems like a fine idea. Education schools have long been criticized—and rightly so—for emphasizing pedagogy, or how to teach, rather than knowledge, or what to teach. Thus, a plan to emphasize subject matter seems all to the good—until one looks closely at what the three most prominent "subject matter associations" actually mean by subject matter.

One might imagine, for example, that the National Council of Teachers of English would want literature teachers to know Shakespeare's plays and Lincoln's speeches. But in the view of the council, what teachers ought primarily to master is a theory that, in fact, devalues knowledge they might have in these areas by defining education as a student-directed enterprise. Teachers, rather than being "sages on the stage," who make sure that students know great literature and the ideas that animate it, are to act as "guides on the side" or facilitators, who allow students to discover and create their own knowledge. Thus, the specific works that teachers study in college are of little importance.

The idea that student interests should drive the curriculum also poses a difficulty when it comes time to create standards. How can any organization of adults say what students should know once students have been deemed the authorities in such matters? It is not surprising, therefore, that the council's standards have been widely deemed to be unsatisfactory. "A fog of euphemism and evasion," is how the *New York Times* described them. Diane Ravitch of the Brookings Institution wrote that the English council's standards "buzzed with fashionable pedagogical concepts but lacked any concrete reference to the importance of accurate language usage, correct spelling and grammar, great contemporary or classical

literature, or what students at any grade level should actually know and be able to do."

The English-language arts standards also presented critical elements of reading, such as phonemic awareness (being aware of the separate speech sounds in a word) and knowledge of spelling-sound correspondences (phonics), as skills children acquire on their own, although research has repeatedly shown that teaching phonemic awareness improves children's reading and that instruction in systematic phonics produces significant benefits. The view of reading presented in the English-language arts standards was entirely consistent with the "whole language" approach, which maintains

that children will become quite proficient at reading (or "constructing meaning," as the English council likes to put it) if only adults will quit trying to teach them in a direct and organized way the skills that are necessary in order to read.

So that was one group charged with revising exams for prospective teachers. Another was the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, which, like the English council, places great importance on the idea that students should create

knowledge for themselves. By emphasizing this point in their 1989 Curriculum and Evaluation Standards for School Mathematics (which were not, in fact, standards at all, but a series of pedagogical recommendations), the math council gave rise to an entire generation of textbooks in which teachers are defined as "co-learners" and students are encouraged to create their personal methods of multiplication and division. And if students fail to come up with efficient methods, not to worry. They can always rely on calculators, which the math council recommends be available from kindergarten on. In 2000, the organization put out revised standards, in part to clear up what the organization said were "misunderstandings," but mathematics skills were still downplayed and calculator use encouraged from the earliest years.

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See "Making Matters Worse"

# What's a "Qualified" Teacher and How Can We Get More of Them?

By Chester E. Finn, Jr.



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With states aflutter over how to meet NCLB's mandate that they must guarantee a "highly qualified teacher in every classroom," two recent reports are illuminating.

Last month, Education Secretary Rod

Paige issued his second annual report on teacher quality "Meeting the Highly Qualified Teachers Challenge" <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OPE/News/teacherprep/Title-II-Report.pdf>, or see Gadfly's review of this report at <http://www.edexcellence.net/gadfly/v03/gadfly25.html#review1>). Although not the conceptual equal of its predecessor (<http://www.ed.gov/offices/OPE/News/teacherprep/AnnualReport.pdf>), these eighty-eight pages include edifying reviews of nine promising programs, three involving innovations in "traditional" teacher preparation and six utilizing "alternative routes." Also valuable is Paige's restatement of NCLB's trinitarian provision that, "to be highly qualified, teachers must: hold at least a bachelor's degree from a four-year institution; hold full state certification; and demonstrate competence in their subject area."

Much ink—in statute and report alike—has been spilled on how the last of these requirements can be met, i.e. how subject competence can be demonstrated, based on, in Paige's words, NCLB's recognition of "research findings that teachers' content knowledge is important" and that extant state procedures for verifying that knowledge "were not rigorous enough."

The Secretary's report also devotes several paragraphs to the sleeper issue in NCLB, the leg of the teacher tripod that few states have so far paid attention to: What does it mean to "hold full state certification"? It does NOT mean that Washington wants states to persist in their traditional approaches, long on pedagogy and ed-school attendance. As Dr. Paige reminds his readers, "the law was markedly less explicit about what it means to have full state certification. In fact, both the statute and the Department's regulations are silent on the issue. States have flexibility, then, ...to consider major revisions to existing systems. If states want to, they can dramatically streamline their processes and create alternative routes to full state certification that target talented people who would be turned off by traditional preparation and certification programs. In other words, NCLB gives the green

light to states that want to lower barriers to the teaching profession."

That's worth repeating: "NCLB gives the green light to states that want to lower barriers to the teaching profession."

That doesn't mean letting anybody enter. Teachers still need to hold a college degree and to demonstrate subject-area competence. But they don't necessarily need to spend a single day in an ed school or pedagogy class and they certainly don't need to endure a conventional four or five year pre-service preparation program. States could, in fact, move to a wholly test-based certification system rather than a time-and-transcript-and-practice-teaching approach. Paige makes this explicit: "States could [for example] decide that individuals who pass the relevant sections of the American Board assessment would be considered fully certified to teach, regardless of where they learned the important knowledge and skills that were tested. These teachers could thus be considered 'highly qualified' under the law."

Talk about a stake through the heart of the ed school cartel! But Secretary Paige—himself a onetime ed school dean—isn't the only one driving such stakes today. From Denver, the mainstream Education Commission of the States recently issued a major report entitled "Eight Questions on Teacher Preparation: What Does the Research Say?" [<http://www.ecs.org/tpreport>] This substantial volume reviews ninety-two empirical studies that passed muster with ECS analysts as basing conclusions on "systematic observation rather than from articles that are based on opinion and use other studies for support."

ECS has done so thorough and dispassionate a review of the available evidence that it's worth restating the first five questions and summarizing the analysts' answers. (There was insufficient decent research on the final three questions to draw any conclusions.)

Q. To what extent does subject knowledge contribute to the effectiveness of a teacher?

A. The research on this topic...provides moderate support for the importance of solid subject-matter knowledge.... As important as strong subject-matter knowledge seems to be, teacher preparation programs do not appear

to be doing an adequate job of ensuring that their graduates have it.

Q. To what extent does pedagogical coursework contribute to a teacher's effectiveness?

A. The research provides limited support for the conclusion that preparation in pedagogy can contribute significantly to effective teaching.... It is not clear from the research..., however, whether such knowledge and skills are best acquired through coursework, field experience (especially student teaching) or on the job.... Moreover, the uncertainty about the ability of preservice preparation to ensure the solid acquisition of core pedagogical skills opens the door to the consideration of alternative preparation routes, which emphasize on-the-job training and have a limited preservice component.

Q. To what extent does high-quality field-based experience prior to certification contribute to a teacher's effectiveness?

A. There is relatively little disagreement that practical experience is extremely important in learning to teach.... It remains unclear, however, what constitutes effective field experience and what impact it has relative to other components of teacher preparation programs.... The research...fails to support any confident conclusions about the effectiveness of different kinds of field experiences.

Q. Are there "alternative route" programs that graduate high percentages of effective new teachers with average or higher-than-average rates of teacher retention?

A. Overall, the research provides limited support for the conclusion that there are indeed alternative programs that produce cohorts of teachers who are ultimately as effective as traditionally trained teachers.

Q. Are there any teacher preparation strategies that are likely to increase the effectiveness of new teachers in hard-to-staff or low-performing schools?

A. The very few studies that met the criteria for this report provide limited support for the conclusion that deliberate efforts to prepare teachers to teach in urban, low-performing schools can be beneficial.

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# Performance Pay—Comparatively Speaking

By Dr. Lewis C. Solmon



Dr. Lewis C. Solmon

**We** often hear that teachers do not choose their profession for the money, that money is not important to teachers. Of course not. Given the puny pay they usually earn (compared to other fields), if money was

decisive, they wouldn't be teachers. But money does matter to many young people who decide not to become teachers. In focus groups over the years, we have heard that many of our best and brightest college graduates would have loved to become teachers, but decided not to when they compared their earning potential as a teacher to what it might be if they entered law, medicine, or business. Even many of those who start as teachers often leave the profession when they realize they will never be able to purchase a home or will struggle to send their kids to college.

Some argue that we do not want our children taught by "mercenaries," rather, we want teachers who love children, love knowledge, and have a missionary zeal to help kids learn. But the mercenary and missionary goals are not mutually exclusive.

Doctors may be eager to cure illnesses and lawyers to bring about justice, but their devotion to their profession has not precluded the best from earning handsome incomes.

Teaching is so important that we might like all teachers to earn more than they do. However, any substantial across-the-board increase in teacher salaries (say \$10,000 or more) would break the bank in terms of funds available to education. And an increase of \$10,000 still would not be sufficient to attract many would-be lawyers, MDs, or business people. Rather, such a raise would do more to keep in the teaching profession those

who have the fewest options elsewhere, those who are the least effective teachers.

Furthermore, do we really want to raise salaries of all teachers by the same amount? Don't we want to differentiate between the hardest working and the slackards, the most up-to-date in their fields and those teaching the same lessons they did decades ago, those whose students learn a great deal and those whose kids learn little?

The average lawyer's salary is actually not so different from that of the average teacher. The difference is that the best lawyers make much more than the least hard-working and least effective lawyers. When the college graduate who has won all the awards and achieved the highest grades considers careers, she does not compare average salaries, but rather asks what she might earn if she were at the top of her field. That is where she expects to be. So when the best graduates find out that no matter how well they do, they will earn the same as every other teacher with the same years of experience and post-baccalaureate college credits, they turn to other fields where their talents will be rewarded.

To us it is clear: teacher performance, which in part is measured by how much students learn, must be rewarded in terms of higher pay. Many educators object to performance pay on the grounds that differential pay will result in competition rather than much-needed collaboration. We have seen that when part of the performance pay is based on school-wide student gains, it literally pays for teachers to help each other. That is even truer when teachers are put in cluster groups of collaborative teams to take part in

professional development.

Other objections are that performance evaluations will lead to bias, nepotism, and favoritism; that truly effective performance will not get rewarded, especially if different teachers have children of different ability levels. With multiple classroom evaluations by different evaluators, and with the use of value-added (growth) scores on achievement tests, these fears can be eliminated.

Finally, the knee-jerk reaction to performance pay is "How can we know who the really good teachers are?" This was made clear during a focus group we held at the Milken Family Foundation several weeks ago.

We asked a principal if she would have sent her own child to her low-performing school. Her response was, "I have to say if she got my best teachers, she would have gotten a very good education." A few minutes later she was asked if she favored paying her best teachers more. This time her response was, "How do you measure a good teacher?" We

believe that effective teaching *can* be measured not by a single subjective opinion of an administrator, but by observed classroom behaviors, and by what students learn. **EM**

*Lewis C. Solmon is Senior Vice-President and Senior Scholar for the Milken Family Foundation and a member of its board of directors. From 1991 to 1997, Lewis was the founding president of the Milken Institute, which he built into a nationally recognized economics think tank. From 1985 to 1991, he served as dean of UCLA's Graduate School of Education, where he is now professor emeritus. He currently serves on the board of the Center for Education Reform and the National Council on Teacher Quality.*

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## What's a "Qualified" Teacher and How Can We Get More of Them?

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What does this add up to? Most obviously, to a need for wide-ranging experimentation and additional research in teacher preparation. Frightfully little is known with any certainty about what knowledge, skills, and experience work for teachers, and even less is known about how best to ensure that they acquire these things. This should lead states to cast off the shackles that chain them to ancient ways of preparing and certifying

teachers and bring them instead to a fresh appreciation of Secretary Paige's point: NCLB leaves them free to define "fully certified" however they like, not necessarily as they have habitually done.

Although confusedly reported in the press, this excellent ECS study, as I read it, vindicates those who say "teachers need subject matter knowledge and they need practical experience and they MAY also need some pedagogical knowledge, but nothing we know today is compelling enough to restrict us to accustomed ways of trying to provide new teachers with these things."

Although the General Accounting Office deplores such flexibility and craves more

guidance and uniformity emanating from Washington, this strikes me as a grand moment for innovation and experimentation in teacher preparation and certification. The executive branch is encouraging precisely that. But how many states will have the vision and the gumption? How many will instead let themselves be mauled into submission by vested interests that don't want them to change? Or sit on their hands, waiting for Uncle Sam to tell them what to do? **EM**

*Chester E. Finn, Jr. is President of the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation in Washington, D.C., and a former U.S. Assistant Secretary of Education.*



see an upward trend, not only at the postsecondary level. We're also seeing it in K-12, too." For more information, go to <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2003017>. **EM**

## NEA's Real Beef with NCLB

Since NEA General Counsel Bob Chanin announced it just prior to the union's convention in July, national education observers have focused on the likelihood that NEA will sue for "full funding" of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). But there's another lawsuit in the works that addresses the union's major concern with NCLB. It's not testing, it's not adequate yearly progress, and it's not even money. It's collective bargaining.

Last month NEA filed a complaint against the U.S. Department of Education, charging the agency with failing to provide documents under the Freedom of Information Act. The union is seeking "all written material that details why the department retreated from its previous interpretation of a provision" of NCLB that ensures its mandates "cannot override the rights of school employees under federal, state, or local laws or collective bargaining agreements."

Should NEA find any reason to believe that NCLB will trump teacher contracts, it will file suit. For months, union activists have been seeking specific instances across the country where contract provisions have been set aside or gone unnegotiated because of NCLB. The most brazen instances will be used as the basis for court action.

Education Intelligence Agency (EIA) has previously noted the irony of NEA angst over federal overreach, but NEA lawsuits against the U.S. Department of Education are particularly delicious since that agency came into existence largely due to the efforts of the newly "unionized" NEA during the Carter administration. It's hard to sympathize with the mad scientist when his monster starts tearing up his laboratory. **EM**

*Source—Communiqué, a publication from EIA, which conducts public education research, analysis, and investigations. [www.eiaonline.com](http://www.eiaonline.com).*

## Flawed Civics

A new report spanning the ideological spectrum, "Education for Democracy," (<http://www.shankerinstitute.org/Downloads/Efd-draft.pdf>) contends public schools

offer students plenty about America's failings but not enough about its freedoms and values. In turn, the report warns that without a change of approach schools will continue to turn out large numbers of students who are disengaged in society and unappreciative of democracy. Specifically, it calls for a stronger social studies and history curricula, starting in elementary school and continuing through every year of schooling. It also suggests a bigger push for morality in education lessons. Meanwhile, the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation recently released two studies aimed at revitalizing social studies: "Terrorists, Despots, and Democracy: What Our Children Need to Know" (posted at <http://www.edexcellence.net/socialstudies/Democracy/Democracy.html>) and "Where Did Social Studies Go Wrong?" (posted at <http://www.edexcellence.net/socialstudies/Contrarians/WhereDidSocialStudiesGoWrong.html>). **EM**

## Paying Attention to the Details, the "RISE" Program for Teacher Retention

Here's a program that we hope spreads far and wide. Resources for Indispensable Schools and Educators (RISE) is essentially a matchmaker that links together well-run schools serving poor children with proven, effective teachers who are committed to teaching poor children. Teachers who apply to the RISE network only have to have taught one year but must demonstrate that they are above average when it comes to raising student achievement. Schools that apply to RISE have to demonstrate that they are great places for great teachers to work—in return for access to the RISE database of teachers. Impressively, RISE does on-site school inspections, rating schools on the cleanliness of their campus to how polite office staff are to visitors.

RISE hopes to improve abysmal teacher retention rates in poor areas by making teachers feel they are part of a network, placed in good working conditions, and giving them a few freebies along the way, such as discounts on school supplies. Last month, RISE added two schools in Silicon Valley to the current network of twenty-five schools located in Chicago, Los Angeles, and the Bay Area. We wish RISE all the best! **EM**

*Source—Teacher Quality Bulletin, a weekly e-mail newsletter of the National Council on Teacher Quality, [www.nctq.org](http://www.nctq.org).*

## National Group Declares Teacher Shortage Nearly Over

The American Association for Employment in Education (AAEE) completed its annual survey of national teacher hiring patterns and announced the demand for teachers is at its lowest level in five years.

The group, located at Ohio State University, is made up of school personnel administrators and university career placement professionals. Each year it analyzes the teacher job market and disseminates its findings. Its newest study reveals the elimination of shortages in reading, business, English and French teachers, and "mild surpluses" in social studies, health, and elementary school teachers, according to a report by the Associated Press. Teach for America applications have tripled in the last two years.

Teacher shortages in math, science, bilingual, and special education continue to plague school districts across the country. "Last year we measured ten or twelve fields as having a considerable shortage." **EM**

*Source—Communiqué, a publication from Education Intelligence Agency (EIA), which conducts public education research, analysis, and investigations. [www.eiaonline.com](http://www.eiaonline.com).*

## Distance Learning Grows

According to "Distance Learning at Degree-Granting Postsecondary Institutions: 2000-01," the third such survey of the National Center of Education Statistics (NCES), enrollment in distance education courses has nearly doubled since 1995, to 3.1 million, with over half (56 percent) of the nation's two- and four-year colleges offering distance courses. "Distance education is both a sign of the times and a harbinger on the future delivery of education services," explained John Bailey, director of the Department's Office of Educational Technology. "We'll continue to

# Empowering Students to Succeed

By John Bishop



John Bishop

**T**hink for a moment about the amount of money we as a nation have continued to spend to control/eliminate the social problems of drugs, crime, gangs, teen pregnancy, alcoholism, and physical and sexual abuse. To

date, many programs have been well intended, but often are “top down programs” that address specific issues without significantly dealing with a student’s core issue.

If a student’s world includes some of the problems identified above, how does he or she see the bigger picture? How does a student break the cycle? How do we as teachers and concerned parents help today’s youth succeed? We must teach them to take control of their education and how to develop an “I’ll Make It Happen” approach in the classroom and in life.

If we teach students how to set and achieve goals and how to apply those principles in the classroom, students will learn they play a significant role in *their* education and in *their* future. By learning how to set and achieve goals, how to overcome challenges, the importance of being positive, and how to measure their progress, students learn how to enhance and increase *their* chances for success.

When students take ownership for their education, they take personal responsibility to do something meaningful and positive to change *their* lives. With ownership comes dignity and self-respect. Teaching students how to set and achieve realistic goals will make a significant long-term difference in a student’s performance in the classroom, in the workplace, and in life.

Teaching these important “life skills” principles should be a collaborative effort shared by teachers, students and parents, and other caregivers. Ask yourself a couple of questions: (1) Were you taught how to set goals in school? (85 percent of people say “No”), and (2) If you had been, would it have helped you in school and in your adult life? Currently, a few students are told they should have goals. Often they are not shown how to set and achieve their goals or told why goals are important. Students need a discussion-based, formalized program on the “how to” and “what’s in it for me” aspects of goal setting.

Search Institute is a nonprofit organization established in 1958 to advance the well-being of children and adolescents. In their survey of over 250,000 students, they identified forty development assets that

young people need to grow up to be healthy, responsible adults.

Teaching students about how to set and achieve goals and how to take ownership of their education will positively address fifteen of these important development assets.

They are: positive view of the personal future, higher expectations, parent involvement in schooling, achievement motivation, adult role models, positive peer pressure, school engagement, homework, honesty, bonding in school, planning and decision making, positive family communications, self esteem, sense of purpose, and responsibility.

Marian Wright Edelman of the Children’s Defense Fund stated, “Never have we exposed children so early, and relentlessly, to cultural messages glamorizing violence, sex, possessions, alcohol, and tobacco. Never have we pushed so many children onto the tumultuous sea of life without life vests....”

Today’s “life vests” may be our ability to empower students to develop an “I’ll Make It Happen” approach in the classroom and in life. **EM**

John Bishop is the Executive Director of Accent On Success™, and author of the “Goal Setting for Students”™ program. For more information: [www.AccentOnSuccess.com](http://www.AccentOnSuccess.com).

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## A Reminder to Save Receipts for Special IRS Educators’ Deduction

**AS** the new school year begins, the Internal Revenue Service is reminding teachers and other educators to save their receipts for purchases of books and classroom supplies. These out-of-pocket expenses may lower their 2003 taxes.

Taxpayers may subtract up to \$250 of qualified expenses when figuring their adjusted gross income (AGI) for 2003. This deduction is available whether or not the taxpayer itemizes deductions on Schedule A. In his budget for next year, President Bush has proposed increasing this deduction to \$400.

The deduction is available to eligible educators in public or private elementary or secondary schools. To be eligible, a person must work at least 900 hours during a school year as a teacher, instructor, counselor, principal or aide.

The IRS suggests that educators keep records of qualifying expenses in a folder or envelope with a label such as “Educator Expenses Deduction,” noting the date, amount and purpose of each purchase. This will help prevent a missed deduction at tax time.

More information about the Educator Expense Deduction is available online at:

<http://www.irs.gov/taxtopics/page/0,,id%3D105560,00.html>. **EM**

## Quote of the Month

### I’m Not a Longshoreman!

**‘At** a faculty meeting with union representatives at my school recently, the strong suggestion was made that all staff should follow the ‘rule,’ arriving at precisely 8 a.m. and departing at precisely 3:15 p.m. When asked whether there wasn’t a more logical way for us to show our solidarity that did not punish students, union representatives gave the example of a longshoremen strike in which working to the rule brought management to its knees. First, I’m not a longshoreman. Not that that isn’t a valued career choice, it just wasn’t mine. Second, the issues that are worth holding out for in negotiations should be ones that directly affect our ability to educate—not insurance, transfer policies, or salary increases. Just as we enter this critical time of the shortened year, we are being asked to limit our contact with students as a way of sending a message of solidarity on contract issues. Can’t union officials see the irony in that?”

—Mimi Alkire, a twenty-eight-year teacher in the Portland Public Schools, as reported in *The Oregonian*. **EM**

Source—*The Education Intelligence Agency’s Communiqué*, on the Web at [www.eiaonline.com](http://www.eiaonline.com).

## Making Matters Worse

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Like the English council, the math council has encouraged fashionable pedagogies, such as collaborative learning (whereby students rely on one another to work through problems) and authentic assessment (which depends on journals students keep and portfolios they assemble rather than on standardized tests).

A third group charged with revising Praxis exams was the National Council for the Social Studies, an organization whose purview includes history. This group also conceives of teachers as facilitators, who, rather than teaching a subject matter that they command, arrange for students to have “experiences” through which they, the students, can learn. The social studies council’s standards, although 178 pages long, are as silent on what specific people, events, and places of the past students should learn about as the English-language arts standards are about what literature they should read. Instead of saying that students should know who Frederick Douglass was or when the Civil War occurred, the social studies standards declare that they should have “experiences that provide for the study of the ways human beings view themselves in and over time.” There is no requirement that they know what The Federalist papers were or how we elect a President. Instead they should have “experiences that provide for the study of how people create and change structures of power, authority, and governance.” The best projects for satisfying these abstract aims, the social studies standards make clear, are not ones that involve contemplation of the past, but those that encourage political activism in the present, such as eighth graders lobbying to change the local school board’s budget priorities, or high school students examining their “complicity as consumers in the exploitation of workers and resources.”

Now, the Praxis series—the set of exams for prospective teachers that the Educational Testing Service announced it was revamping—was, as it happens, already tilted toward the theories embraced by the English, math, and social studies councils. The exam on teaching reading, for example, conceived of reading not as “decoding,” as phonics proponents do, but as “construction of meaning,” as the English council does.

One sample question from the Praxis exam that covered “Principles of Learning and Teaching” is especially instructive. It concerns a teacher named Mrs. Mercer who tells a visitor to her classroom that the purpose of kindergarten is twofold: to teach children survival skills for the first grade and to teach them reading, writing, and arithmetic. “Survival skills,” she says, “include the ability to follow directions and to concentrate on a task to its completion

as well as the ability to be attentive to what lessons the teacher presents.” The purpose of kindergarten she adds, is “not just play.”

Test-takers were asked to identify “a risk for young children associated with the teacher-centered approach in Mrs. Mercer’s classroom.” And that turned out to be, according to the correct answer, “that they will not acquire the enjoyment of and interest in learning that is required for long-term growth.” The answer key further informed us that “research suggests that overemphasis on academic skills may undermine the development of children’s disposition to use the skills they have acquired.” There is no citation in support of this point, nor is there mention of the substantial body of research supporting teacher-centered instruction.

Given that the Praxis exam and the groups charged with revising it were so perfectly aligned, there were reasons to doubt in 1999 whether the reform that at first seemed promising—enlisting “subject-matter” organizations to revise exams for new teachers—would actually bring change about. A year and a half after reform was announced, George Cunningham, a professor of educational and counseling psychology at the University of Louisville, took the Praxis exam. He reported that it was “primarily oriented towards progressive education, whole language, NCTM math.” Not only did the correct answers on the exam reflect progressivist preferences for such practices as “cooperative learning,” Cunningham said, the wrong answers, or distracters, reflected progressivist dislikes. If the question was about how to handle a student essay that contained misspelled words and bad grammar, the right answer would be “Use peer assistance,” (that is, have other students correct the essayists work). Among the wrong answers would be “Tell the students which words were misspelled and how to correct the grammatical errors.”

Four years later, I think it is safe to say, all hope for substantive change is dead. The sample Praxis exams for elementary education encourage test takers to use calculators to solve simple math problems and to view constructivism as an appealing philosophy. Approaches that the education establishment has long frowned upon end up as wrong answers: “phonetic decoding strategies” is a wrong answer, “direct instruction” is a wrong answer, and “use of standardized tests to measure reading progress” is a wrong answer. Mrs. Mercer is still on the exam. She has become a first grade teacher, but still believes that her job is to teach kids to read, write, and calculate, to follow directions, concentrate, and pay attention. Any Praxis test taker who thinks Mrs. Mercer is doing a good job will get a zero on this part of the exam.

What we see here, though it is called reform, is actually the opposite. Rather than changing anything, it empowers organizations that represent the status quo by allowing them

to present themselves as agents of change. And this is not an anomaly. The education world is rife with this kind of thing. We are told that we can improve teachers colleges by requiring them all to be accredited, but the accrediting organization, known as NCATE, has standards derived from the English, math and social science councils and other likeminded organizations. The promise is held out of encouraging good teaching by certifying good teachers, but the group that will do the certifying has standards aligned with NCATE’s.

The Koret Task Force has noted that one reason that A Nation At Risk has produced so little improvement in our schools is that it “underestimated the resistance to change from the organized adult interests of the K-12 public education system.” I would add as a corollary that A Nation at Risk also underestimated the ability of those interests to co-opt reform, to divert the energies of parents and policymakers who want to change our schools into efforts that, in fact, perpetuate the views and practices that have long held American students back.

Real reform, I would suggest, will not take place through old organizations. New structures are required that can serve as alternatives to ones that have been long in place. And let me mention, in closing, one that I think is particularly promising, and that is the American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence, an organization that will soon be offering two tests for potential teachers. One will be a rigorous examination of subject matter knowledge. Another will be a test of professional teaching knowledge that is based on sound literature on effective teaching. Individuals who wish to be certified through these tests will not be required to complete a particular set of education courses or to subscribe to a particular set of education theories. What they will be required to do is demonstrate subject matter knowledge and professional competence. Pennsylvania has adopted the American Board’s program as a route to full certification, and I hope that many other states will follow.

The American Board will also be offering tests for master teachers that will involve assessment of their students’ academic achievement. This is a sensible plan of great promise, and I’d like to congratulate all involved with the American Board and all those who have encouraged it, particularly Secretary of Education Rod Paige.

The American Board is a model of how we can make things better, how we can remedy the flaws in our system of education that A Nation at Risk called to our attention in 1983. **EM**

*Remarks of Lynne V. Cheney, American Enterprise Institute—April 1, 2003. Lynne Cheney is a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute in Washington, DC, 202-862-5800 or visit their web-site at [www.aei.org](http://www.aei.org).*

# Has Teacher Unionism Become Institutionalized?

## It has in Twenty-one States!

By Jerry Lloyd

California is blessed with many wonderful, talented, and hard-working teachers in our public schools. I know because our children attended them, and I taught for eighteen years in the San Rafael School District and lately have been working with teachers in several other districts, assisting them with their vocal music programs. As president of a statewide teachers association (nonunion), I had the privilege of getting to know other teaching professionals throughout California.

We also have dedicated trustees and capable administrators. I know because I served two terms on the San Anselmo school board and was our board representative to our county school boards association.

Unfortunately these fine people must operate under an oppressive and restrictive law that severely frustrates their creative energies and efforts to bring our children the education they deserve—and once had—prior to the Education Employment Relations Act of 1975 (EERA).

This statute, modeled after the Depression-era National Labor Relations Act of 1935, was lobbied into law by teacher union officials of the California Teachers Association/NEA and the California Federation of Teachers/AFT/AFL/CIO. Both these organizations are defined as labor unions in the IRS code, and as unions they seek binding collective agreements with employers over terms and working conditions for all employees in the bargaining union (school district). This legal privilege gives teacher union officials the power to force elected school boards to negotiate “contracts” for employee services (yet contains no language to prohibit strikes if union demands are not met). The law also denies public school employees the right to represent themselves before the board in employment matters, and excludes parents and other taxpayers from union-board discussions. When you realize that 85 percent of district budgets, on average, involve salary and benefits, that’s a lot of exclusion!

Teacher strikes were rampant in California in the early years of the EERA as union officials tried to force school boards to accept voluminous standard CTA/NEA or CFT/AFT contracts with minor, if any, local modifications. Today, with huge treasuries from excessively high union dues augmented by mandated “agency” fees from non-members, the unions take a more patient approach. If a school board rejects a union demand—say, for the exclusive right for

teachers to evaluate themselves—union officials can afford to wait until the next election to fund the campaign of board candidates who are “Friends of Education” and will concede this demand when the contract is renewed.

Long ago legislators should have heeded this warning by law professor Sylvester Petro in 1974 (*Wake Forest Law Review*):

“Where the power of government to govern is challenged from within by its own organized civil servants, it ought no longer to be called government at all.”

It should be significant to proponents of collective bargaining that earlier leaders of the American labor movement, including Samuel Gompers and George Meany, urged their members not to unionize public employees.

Thus, by introducing this adversarial system of industrial collective bargaining to our school systems, teacher union officials undermine the positive gains for workers in the private sector by earlier union leaders, as well as erode American popular sovereignty through our elected representatives—and with it the time-honored civil service merit system.

A campaign to repeal the EERA is certain to arouse ferocious opposition from teacher union officials from CTA and CFT—they have an industry of union organizers and negotiators to protect. But unless we begin now to understand the critical distinctions between public sector bargaining—and why we must reject the former as inconsistent with American democracy—I believe we will soon experience the chaos and anarchy demonstrated in France’s paralyzing nationwide strike by public employee unions last May. Even now the NEA is gearing up to merge with AFT/AFL/CIO as one behemoth “Teacher Trust” as Peter Brimelow describes them in his new book, *The Worm in the Apple*.

Do so-called collective bargaining “rights” of public school employees have a higher value for Californians than our American system of representative government? Has the EERA accomplished its stated purpose

“to promote the improvement of personnel management and employer-employee relations” in our public school systems?

In 1977 the San Anselmo school board said “no” to both questions and adopted a resolution opposing the EERA that was endorsed by the Marin County School Boards Association. Later that year it became official policy (No. 3052) of the California School Boards Association. Although this policy was later changed to allow CSBA to align with the unions in lobbying for education funding, it did lead to a repeal bill in 1980 by Republican Assemblyman Bill Filante. This bill received two days of support testimony from trustees, teachers, administrators, and parent and taxpayer

groups around the state before its defeat in committee on a party-line vote.

With twenty-three years more of adversarial relations, inflexible union contracts, skyrocketing costs, and stagnant student test scores, it’s time for Californians to ask our local school boards to reconsider whether the EERA is not in the public interest and must be replaced with a law that restores American values and the sovereign power of citizens, through their elected representatives, to govern our school system. And for those of you who teach in states that do not have forced union dues (agency shop laws), keep

a watchful eye on the NEA and AFT! They will be working day and night to persuade legislators in your state to institutionalize teacher unionism and perpetuate their automatic funding scheme. **EM**

*Jerry Lloyd is a former public school teacher in the San Rafael, CA school system. He has served as a trustee on the San Anselmo school board, and is the former President of PEG, the Professional Educators Group of California.*

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It should be significant to proponents of collective bargaining that earlier leaders of the American labor movement, including Samuel Gompers and George Meany, urged their members not to unionize public employees.

Editor’s Note—

If you teach in California and would like to sign a resolution to replace the EERA referred to above, contact Jerry Lloyd at Californians Against Union Control of Public Education, P.O. Box 2402, San Anselmo, CA 94979

# Boehner Challenges Conclusions of Phi Delta Kappa Poll on No Child Left Behind Act

*Findings Based on Flawed and Distorted Descriptions of New Education Reform Law, House Education Chairman Says*

**W**ASHINGTON, D.C.—U.S. House Education and the Workforce Committee Chairman John Boehner has raised doubts about a new Phi Delta Kappa opinion poll that explores public attitudes about the No Child Left Behind Act. The poll results were generated by questions that inaccurately describe the details of the No Child Left Behind law, said Boehner, the lead House author of the legislation.

“The conclusions reached by the authors of this poll are based on a flawed and inaccurate description of what the No Child Left Behind Act actually calls for,” Boehner said. “These poll results really don’t tell us anything at all. If anything, they’re just going to result in more confusion among teachers, parents, and students—and that’s disappointing.”

Among the flaws noted by Boehner in the Phi Delta Kappa poll’s depiction of the NCLB law:

The Phi Delta Kappa poll claims NCLB “judges a school by whether a fixed percentage of all students and of all student subgroups passes a standardized test,” and does not “base the judgment on the improvement shown by students in the school.” But in reality, Phi Delta Kappa has it backwards, Boehner noted, NCLB does require states and school districts to judge schools on the improvement shown by students in the school. Students do not “pass” or “fail” standardized tests under the NCLB law; schools must simply demonstrate that students are making progress, rather than losing ground.

The Phi Delta Kappa poll mentions NCLB “allows parents in a school found to be in need of improvement to transfer their child out of the school”—but fails to

mention that schools identified as needing improvement under NCLB qualify for extra help, including technical and financial assistance. The Phi Delta Kappa poll suggests 74 percent of the public would prefer that assistance to the child be provided within the school—something NCLB not only allows, but also supports, if that is a parent’s preference.

The Phi Delta Kappa poll implies NCLB’s emphasis on standardized testing will cause teachers to “teach to the test,” suggesting 60 percent of Americans would consider that a bad thing. But when phrased differently—in less loaded language—Americans

overwhelmingly support the standardized testing provisions in NCLB. For example, a Winston Group national survey conducted less than a year ago for Americans for Better Education (ABE) showed 91 percent of Americans support requiring public schools to set and meet goals each year to show that all children are learning.

The Phi Delta Kappa poll suggests Americans are concerned that NCLB

requires schools to test students in English and math only—but doesn’t mention that nothing in NCLB precludes schools from testing students in other subjects as well, including art, music, and history. And little public or political support appears to exist among the American public for federal legislation that would mandate testing in subjects such as art and music, even if it were possible to accurately measure student progress in such areas by standardized testing.

“Numerous studies have shown that the more Americans learn about the No Child Left Behind Act, the more likely they are to support it,” Boehner noted. “Public support for the key pillars of the No Child Left Behind Act is rock-solid, and there is nothing in this poll that shows otherwise.”

The Winston Group survey mentioned by Boehner, conducted December 29-30, 2002 for ABE, polled more than 1,100 registered voters, with an oversampling of minority voters. Some results of the ABE poll:

Asked which they believe is more important to improve education—increasing funding, or raising standards and accountability—66 percent of Americans said raising standards and accountability, while a mere 26 percent said increasing funding.

Ninety-one percent of Americans support requiring states to have a highly qualified teacher in every public classroom by 2005, even if it means some teachers may be forced to obtain additional training.

Ninety-one percent of Americans support requiring school districts to give parents annual report cards on overall academic performance of schools.

Seventy-six percent support allowing parents with children in underachieving schools to transfer their children to a better public school or charter school. **EM**

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“These poll results really don’t tell us anything at all. If anything, they’re just going to result in more confusion among teachers, parents, and students—and that’s disappointing.”

**The answers you get depend upon the questions you ask.**

**-Thomas Kuhn**



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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

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