

The Forgotten Children

By Virginia Walden-Ford



Virginia Walden-Ford

When a child is diagnosed with a mental illness, it can be a difficult and even scary scenario. The child may have to deal with the stigma associated with those who suffer from learning disabilities or be taught how to compensate for his/her disability. The child may have to go through months of behavior therapy or be placed on medication to help deal with symptoms.

However, even scarier to contemplate is what the child's life might have been like if he/she had not been diagnosed with the illness and had not received treatment. According to recent research studies, it seems children are often slipping through the cracks of mental illness diagnosis. Even more disheartening is that the same research shows that race matters when it comes to timely diagnosis and treatment of mental illnesses.

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is the most commonly diagnosed childhood mental health disorder, affecting between 3 to 5 percent of U.S. children. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends a treatment of medication combined with behavioral therapy. Children with

ADHD suffer from inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsive behavior. Without medical help, these children face failure at home, in school, and possibly in adulthood.

The disparities of ADHD treatment that exist between different racial, ethnic, and economic groups are troubling, to say the least. A 1999 report of the Surgeon General found that ADHD treatment rates are significantly lower for minorities. Another study found that doctors educate African Americans about ADHD less frequently than their white counterparts. The National Mental Health Association found that African American adolescents are more likely to be referred to the juvenile justice system rather than the treatment system, even though it has long been known that the rates of mental illness in urban populations are much higher.

Even as an African American woman and a former educator, I can't ascertain why the inequities in the treatment of ADHD are so obvious, yet so often ignored. But I do know that the chance of success for a child whose mental illness goes undiagnosed is significantly reduced.

Teenagers with ADHD have almost four times as many car accidents and are seven times more likely to have a second accident as their non-ADHD peers. Forty-five percent of students suffering from ADHD are suspended from school, while a staggering 35 percent of students eventually drop out. It even affects their family:

Parents of a child who has ADHD are three times as likely to separate or divorce.

All children deserve an equal chance at success, and that chance should not depend on their color or economic status. As educators, parents, and child advocates, we must call for more research into how mental illnesses affect minority populations. We need to demand a better understanding of the disparities of diagnosis. And, collectively, we need to hold tight to the value on which our country was founded—an equal opportunity for all. **EM**

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Attention Members!

We need your response!

**Please take a moment to E-mail us
your current E-mail address**

Email addresses change frequently and it is important that we have your current address.

Last month we broadcasted two very timely E-mail announcements to our membership in preparation for the 9/11 "Day of Remembrance." Still, a number of members called to say that we should have recommended some lesson plans for the day of observance. As many of

you know, we did send recommended lesson plans!

If you did not receive our announcements, it's because we either don't have an E-mail address for you or we don't have the current correct one.

Please E-mail your address to email@aaeteachers.org.

Thank you very much.

9/11 Lessons Learned?

A Word from our Executive Director, Gary Beckner

Our prayers were answered when the anniversary of the tragic events of 9/11 passed without further incident. And I'm sure you were touched, as I was, by some of the moving remembrances around the nation. They made me proud to be an American.

I was particularly impressed by what Linda Chavez, the president of the Center for Equal Opportunity, had to say. She pointed out that for too many years we've been exploring what's wrong with America, and that the best honor we could pay those who died a year ago would be to teach our children what makes this nation so great. Which leads me to the following observation.

You may have read about the hammering the National Education Association (NEA) took over the controversial lesson plan listed on its website to help teachers prepare for the anniversary of 9/11. In a nutshell, the lesson plan discouraged teachers from making moral judgments about the events of 9/11 and, instead, encouraged them to "discuss historical instances of American intolerance." The NEA tried to deflect the outrage that followed by pointing out that the lesson plan was just one of many listed and did not necessarily reflect an official position of the NEA. It insisted that there was plenty of patriotic material to offset that one controversial plan (which may be true since the site was altered about a week after the controversy began). And to be fair, over 100 lesson plans are listed on their site with links to a cross section of apolitical and political institutions that certainly would not be considered un-American or unpatriotic. Yet a thorough review of NEA lesson plans past and present, especially those on American history, civics, or character development, will reveal a prominent thread connecting all of them—the thread of relativism. Possessing such a relativistic mindset, the leaders of the NEA at times find themselves scratching their heads about why some Americans react so negatively to their ideas about what to teach our children.

The cornerstone of nearly every NEA curriculum is *tolerance*. That is why NEA leadership appeared to miss the "lesson" to be learned from the public's reaction to their recommendations. Unlike the NEA, the majority of Americans are not quite ready to subjugate every other virtue to tolerance. In fact, after the events of 9/11, Americans drew a line in the sand as if to say, "We've tolerated too much for too long and it ends right here!"

For over half a century, the NEA has been at the forefront pushing the values-neutral approach to educating our children. An entire generation of public school-educated children (who are now young adults trying to cope with parenthood) was taught not to judge anyone else's values or choices. In fact, Americans have been collectively anesthetized into a state of moral ambivalence toward judging anything. Is it any wonder then that it took such a horrendously violent act to awaken us? Thank God President Bush had the courage to – gasp! – actually make a moral judgment by simply declaring the act itself and the perpetrators "evil." That was the leadership we needed and will continue to need in the years ahead.

From my college days I remember a lesson in mechanical engineering that defined tolerance as "the amount of variation allowed from a standard." It didn't take us burr-headed students long to discover that if you allow too much variation from the acceptable level of tolerance, the entire machine breaks down. The lesson was simple—that a little tolerance can be okay, even a good thing, but too much tolerance is a bad thing.

Tolerance involves more than just understanding and compassion; it requires maturity and demands discernment. Tolerance is useless, even dangerous, without the ability to discern what is good for you and what is not good for you. Teaching our children to be tolerant without teaching them to discern between right and wrong, good and evil, is irresponsible. As mature and responsible adults, it is time to teach our children that there are some things that simply should not be tolerated.

An old Jewish custom illustrates this point. The tradition is called "casting out the leaven." At a certain time every year just before Passover, the matriarch of the household hides small pieces of bread throughout the house. The father takes the children on



a search to find all the leaven and cast it out of the house. The cursory lesson is that leaven is an agent that will spread and cause a gradual but inevitable change. It will eventually permeate everything. In the hands of an experienced baker, it can be a good thing. However, in the hands of someone who doesn't know what they're doing, it can ruin the whole loaf. The morality lesson, however, goes much deeper. In Jewish tradition, leaven is symbolic of sin or evil. This custom is meant to teach their children that it is best to just cast out the "leaven" *before* it has a chance to permeate their lives.

In light of 9/11/01 and the days that have followed, the idea of searching high and low for the "leaven" (evil and evildoers) and the removal of it seems more relevant than ever.

Before we accept any more lesson plans from the NEA, maybe it would be a good idea if someone wrote a new lesson plan for the NEA. One that would teach them that discernment is as integral to a person's well-being as tolerance is. And one that could help the NEA understand that America is not great because it is so diverse. America is great because we have embraced a system of government that by its very design assimilates the strengths of our diverseness into one great entity. A simplified version of that lesson is always readily available. It can be found on the loose coins in your pocket... *E Pluribus Unum* (one from many)! **EM**

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A Common Sense Case for Small Class Size

By Donna Garner



Donna Garner

As a teacher with many years of classroom experience, I have grown concerned as of late with people who say that class size is an unimportant factor in increasing academic performance. I often hear people say, “When

I was in school, we had forty students in one room; and my teacher managed just fine.” The Good Old Days were very different from the days of special education inclusion and large numbers of at-risk students who are in today’s classrooms.

Only teachers who are currently in the classroom understand how much physical space a student in a wheelchair, his specially built computer, and his full-time aide take up in an average-size room. Now that many emotionally disturbed, physically impaired, learning disabled, at-risk, and ADD/ADHD students are being placed in the mainstream classroom, the total number of students in the room has become a very important factor as to how effectively a teacher can deliver the curriculum.

Children who fall under IDEA (Special Education) and Section 504 (e.g., ADD/ADHD) place federal mandates on the teacher’s time because of possible litigation and loss of federal funding, and consequently, the needs of these students are oftentimes met first. In a large classroom of over twenty-five students, the rest of the students simply have to wait their turn; and today’s generation of children is not very good at waiting patiently.

We also need to look at the increasing numbers of children who come from dysfunctional homes. The more students a teacher has means the more parents with whom the teacher needs to communicate. The sad truth is that in most cases emotionally disturbed and learning disabled children have parents with similar difficulties. These parents need and deserve careful explanations from the teacher so that these children can overcome their learning problems and achieve academic success.

Having a classroom where students must sit physically close to each other is detrimental to today’s students, many of whom exhibit short attention spans, jitteriness, and

hyperactivity. They become very unsettled and cannot concentrate when they are put in close proximity with each other. When at-risk students are placed in a crowded area, it is almost as if the air is charged with a type of “electricity” that agitates them and makes them unable to focus on their studies.

Classes need to be kept small not only at the elementary level but also at the secondary level. Secondary students take up more space per person because of their larger teenage bodies. Because today’s classrooms contain an increasing number of students who cause discipline problems, a teacher must have small classes in order to have a few extra desks in which students can be placed who may need a somewhat isolated, classroom placement.

Another factor that is different in today’s classrooms than in years past is the presence of backpacks. Nearly every child carries one. Backpacks take up huge amounts of space—the more students who are assigned to a classroom, the more backpacks that students and teachers are likely to trip over.

Unfortunately, many children emulate what they have seen in the adult world, and the cold, hard fact is that more students cheat today than in days gone by. The close proximity of student desks to each other can and does lead to students being tempted to steal answers.

It is true that having small classes does not automatically translate into high academic achievement. Small classes must be accompanied by good discipline along with the right curriculum. However, large classes almost certainly mean that teachers will not be able to control their classes in order to deliver quality instruction. Just like the rest of the world, teachers have only twenty-four hours in a day, and being assigned large numbers of students may force even quality teachers to lower their expectations. **EM**

Donna Garner is an AAE advising member. Donna taught at Midway High School in Hewitt, Texas for over thirty years. She was appointed by President Reagan and reappointed by President Bush to the National Commission of Migrant Education, and was appointed by Texas Education Commissioner Mike Moses to the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) writing team for English/Language Arts/Reading. Donna can be reached at wgarner1@hotmail.com.

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At-risk students
placed in a
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Who’s to Blame?... Not I

The college professor said: “Such rawness in a student is a shame; lack of preparation in high school is to blame.”

Said the high school teacher: “Good heavens! That boy’s a fool. The fault, of course, is with the middle school.”

The middle school teacher said: “From stupidity may I be spared. They sent him in so unprepared.”

The primary teacher huffed: “Kindergarten blockheads all. They call that preparation? Why, it’s worse than none at all.”

The kindergarten teacher said: “Such lack of training never did I see. What kind of woman must that mother be.”

The mother said: “Poor helpless child. He’s not to blame. His father’s people were all the same.”

Said the father at the end of the line: “I doubt the rascal’s even mine.”

—Anonymous author

New Department of Education Television Series

A new television series has been unveiled to replace the U.S. Secretary of Education’s decade-old Satellite Town Meeting. The series promises to be livelier and less policy-focused to address the educational needs and concerns of parents and families. The program will include one-on-one interviews, discussions, “how to” demonstrations, video, and graphics, anchored by Education Department officials, school community, business, religious leaders, and researchers. The season premier provided parents with answers to questions they had about such No Child Left Behind topics as Annual Yearly Progress, parental options, Reading First, testing and accountability, and supplemental education services. Frankly, plenty of teachers would like to hear the answers to those same questions. To participate, all you need is a facility with satellite downlink capabilities.

For more information, please go to <http://registerevent.ed.gov/downlink/event-flyer.asp?intEventID=160>. (Note: As before, you can watch live and archived webcasts of each show by going to <http://www.connectlive.com/events/edtownmeetings/>.) **EM**



Union Orders Dues Donated to ACLU

A public school employees union in Washington state ordered a part-time school bus driver to send his annual dues to the American Civil Liberties Union, despite the driver's religious objections to the national organization and its stances on social issues.

The Rev. Ivan Poisel, bus driver in Sunnyside, Wash., and pastor of the Church of God Pentecostal congregation, has religious objections to the charities and activities the Public School Employees (PSE) union supports, and has asked the union to donate his \$15 monthly dues to a local food bank called Second Harvest. But the union declined his request, saying it recognizes only the ACLU, the country's largest public-interest firm.

Union officials defended their decision. "This is not an adversarial situation in the least," said Rick Chisa, PSE's communications director. "Mr. Poisel is voicing his preference, and we're voicing our preference to what charity his dues should be sent. We're at a point right now where we just disagree with his preference." Mr. Poisel said he doesn't want his dues going to the ACLU because he says, "They're against everything I stand for."

The issue centers on a state law that requires union officials and public-school employees who identify themselves as religious objectors to mutually approve a charity before any dues are sent to support it. PSE, which represents about 26,000 Washington state school employees, requires public-school employees to either be union members or pay mandatory fees. State and federal law protect religious liberty by allowing people to become "objectors" and designate a charity to receive 100 percent of their dues.

Mr. Poisel's case came three weeks after the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission ordered the National Education Association and its state affiliates to stop forcing teachers who categorize themselves as religious objectors to undergo annual written procedures so their dues

will not fund the union's political agenda.

Soon after Rev. Poisel and a representative of the PSE union appeared together on a prominent news radio program, the PSE decided it was in "everyone's best interest" to drop their demand. The pastor is now contributing his union dues to the charity of his choice. **EM**

Source—Ellen Sorokin, *The Washington Times*.

Innovative Approach to Principal Preparation

In an experiment with the University of San Diego (USD) funded largely by the Eli Broad Educational Foundation, the San Diego Unified School District has developed a training program, the Educational Leadership Development Academy, for aspiring administrators. In keeping with the District's Blueprint for Student Success, a series of reforms designed a few years ago to improve student performance, the principal's position was recast from chief administrator to classroom coach. San Diego principals must now spend at least two hours a day in the classroom. Another result is that principal candidates are paired with mentor principals as part of their year-long training, serving as co-principals. **EM**

Source—Teacher Quality Bulletin, www.nctq.org.

Latest Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll Shows Public Support for No Child Left Behind Act

Phi Delta Kappa International and Gallup, Inc., has released its 2002 "Public Attitudes Toward the Public Schools" poll. The poll showed, among other interesting data, strong support (67 percent) for testing in grades 3-8; 96 percent support requiring teachers to be licensed in the areas that they teach; and, for schools that fail to meet state standards, 90 percent support offering tutoring by state-approved and private providers. **EM**

For more information go to www.pdkintl.org.

"Student Athlete" is not an Oxymoron!

Tom Loveless, director of the Brookings Institution's Brown Center, has taken to issuing annual reports on American education, each examining several topics in interesting and provocative ways. This year is no

exception. The new Brookings report takes up three issues. The one that got scant press attention—doubtless because it revealed no alarming problem—is whether high schools that are "sports powerhouses" are weaker academically than schools less adept at athletics. The answer is no, no "zero sum" game is at work, and there's "no evidence that schools suffer academically when they excel at athletics." In fact, Loveless' research indicates the two forms of success may even be "mutually reinforcing." **EM**

Source—The Education Gadfly, www.edexcellence.net.

"Forestalling" Hate Crimes

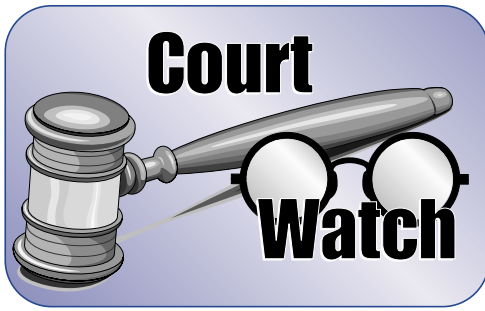
This tactic of promoting gay rights under the guise of preventing violence a.k.a. Hate Crimes legislation is often used by gay rights' advocates, and sometimes to an absurd degree. For example, the United States Students Association (USSA) is pressuring this country's universities to provide single-stall "gender neutral" rest rooms to protect transgender students from harassment and assault. A USSA spokesperson explained that cross dressers "have a problem with bathrooms" that are for men or women only because "they face a risk of being assaulted if another person in there doesn't think they belong." If they aren't safe in the bathroom, "they won't necessarily be able to go to college." **EM**

Source—TownHall.com

A New York Teachers Union Opposes National Certification Funding

A measure to investigate the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards was referred to the AFT Executive Council by convention delegates (where it will most likely be quietly buried), but NEA New York took a firmer stand against national certification. At that union's annual convention, delegates passed a resolution amendment that added the following language: "Until such time as national board certification is demonstrated to be a valid, reliable, and credible instrument for evaluating teaching practice and increasing student learning, NEA/NY shall oppose the expenditure of public funds to provide financial subsidies or incentives to teachers seeking national board certification or additional salary compensation to teachers holding national board certification." **EM**

Source—The Educational Intelligence Agency Communiqué, www.eiaonline.com.



Blaine Amendment Falls in WA— Ninth Circuit Court Rules State Cannot Prohibit Aid to Religious Schools

By David W. Kirkpatrick

On July 18, just three weeks after the Court's landmark *Zelman* ruling, members of the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit voted 2-1 to invalidate a Washington State law that was used to deny a state "Promise Scholarship" to an otherwise eligible college student because the student was studying theology at a religious institution.

"A state law may not offer a benefit to all ... but exclude some on the basis of religion," wrote Judge Pamela Ann Rymer in *Davey v. Locke*.

The state defended the discriminatory policy under the religious establishment clause of its state constitution, which contains "one of the most notorious and broadly construed Blaine Amendments in the nation," according to the Institute for Justice.

"Washington's interest in avoiding conflict with its own constitutional constraint against applying money to religious instruction is not a compelling reason to withhold

scholarship funds for a college education from an eligible student just because he personally decides to pursue a degree in theology," wrote Rymer. Her decision, in effect, finds the state's Blaine amendment in conflict with the U.S. Constitution and overrules it.

Jay Sekulow, chief counsel for the American Center for Law and Justice, which represented the successful plaintiff, called the ruling "a resounding victory for equal treatment of people of faith."

However, the 2-1 decision may not be the last word. It can be appealed to the full Circuit Court bench, and ultimately to the U.S. Supreme Court. Nevertheless, this first post-*Zelman* ruling indicates the possibility that Blaine's heritage of bigotry may be dying.

Blaine Amendment History

One of the most shameful episodes in United States history has been the inclusion in many state constitutions of what are termed "Blaine amendments," which prohibit public funding of religious

schools. These amendments were said to be necessary to apply the "separation of church and state" doctrine to state constitutions, but their true motivation was far less noble. Blaine amendments in fact were the result of widespread anti-Catholic bigotry in the 1800s.

Blaine's efforts, supported by President Ulysses S. Grant, grew out of anti-Catholic bigotry that began during the growing Catholic immigration of the 1840s. Earlier Catholic immigration had been relatively minor.

Although Blaine's effort to amend the U.S. Constitution failed, Congress subsequently required such provisions as a condition of statehood, adding coercion to bigotry. Many territories became states with Blaine amendments in their constitutions. The term "Blaine amendment" is now generally applied to all such amendments, whenever adopted, because they are similar in wording and purpose. Most have their origin in anti-Catholicism.

Reversing *Everson* and Blaine

The shame of Blaine may, at long last, similarly be coming to an end. On June 27, 2002, in its *Zelman* decision, the Supreme Court held Ohio's voucher law for Cleveland did not violate the First Amendment's religion clause. Moreover, Chief Justice Rehnquist, writing for the majority, noted, "Three times we have confronted Establishment Clause challenges to neutral government programs that provide aid directly to a broad class of individuals, who, in turn, direct the aid to religious schools or institution of their own choosing. Three times we have rejected such challenges."

That should settle the question regarding the U.S. Constitution's First Amendment Establishment Clause. Now the ruling of the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals begins to settle the question of the First Amendment's Free Exercise Clause. **EM**

David W. Kirkpatrick, a former public school teacher who has been actively and extensively involved in education reform, is the editor-in-chief of Schoolreformers.com, a portal for parents and grassroots activists who care about education in America.

Source—School Reform News, www.heartland.org. Reprinted with permission.

A+PEL Survey Shows Teacher Discontent

A recent Associated Professional Educators of Louisiana (A+PEL) survey of its members reveals that teachers are equally as concerned about teaching conditions as they are about pay. Seventy-two percent (72%) of those who rejected an "adjusted" Southern Average teacher salary being used by the Education Estimating Conference reversed their position when asked if it would be acceptable if tied to better working conditions. Twenty-nine percent (29%) of respondents believed the "adjusted" figures were acceptable, even without an exchange for better working conditions.

Classroom teachers care about a professionally oriented environment in their day-to-day working lives. Professional educators agree that working conditions would be greatly improved by (1) better student behav-

ior, (2) increased administrative support, (3) adequate planning time, (4) the use of current and up-to-date instruction material and training, and (5) relief from the overwhelming amount of nonacademic paperwork.

Many A+PEL members responded to the survey. Survey results and their implications were communicated to Governor Murphy J. "Mike" Foster, Senator Jay Dardenne, (R), Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, the Chairmen of the House and Senate Education Committees, Rep. Carl Crane, and Sen. Gerald Theunissen, members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, State Superintendent of Education, Cecil Picard, and news media throughout Louisiana. **EM**

Source—Connections, a publication of Associated Professional Educators of Louisiana, www.apeleducators.org.

Compulsory Unionism and Education

One of the greatest things about America is that we are free to elect our own government representatives. Anyone who is considered an adult and a United States citizen is allowed to vote for the people who will make the laws of the land.

Abraham Lincoln once said, “No man is good enough to govern another man without that other’s consent. (Peoria, Illinois speech, October 16, 1854) Freedom of choice is a basis of our Constitution.

The first Amendment to the U.S. Constitution outlines certain basic rights that all citizens enjoy. One of these is the freedom of association. This amendment includes our right to join or unite with others for a variety of reasons, such as clubs or labor unions.

In spite of these constitutional guarantees, many working persons today are being forced to support a labor union in order to get or keep their jobs. The Supreme Court has allowed infringement of public school teachers’ rights by requiring them to pay their share of “exclusive representation” costs (*Aboud v. the Detroit Board of Education*).

The two education labor unions seeking exclusive representation are the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), which is affiliated with the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO).

NEA and AFT union chiefs have openly stated they do not want anyone who is not a union member to teach in the nation’s schools.

“Within ten years, I think this organization will control the qualifications for entrance into the profession, and for the privilege of remaining in the profession,” said George Fischer, NEA past president, speaking at the 1970 NEA convention.

In twenty states, laws have been passed that allow teacher union officials to extract forced dues from teachers.

Union leaders organize representation elections in school districts. If they win a representation election by 50 percent plus one of *those voting*, they have obtained the power to negotiate contracts on behalf of *all* teachers in the district.

In many school districts, the union will become the “exclusive representative” for *every* teacher in the district, whether that teacher voted for the union or against it. Teachers lose their individual freedom to decide what is best for them when a teacher union is made the exclusive representative.

Many times, teachers and school representatives do not agree with the contract, but they have no choice but to abide by the contract or quit their jobs. Their freedom to choose is violated.

Why do union leaders want exclusive representation in school districts? Because exclusive representation can lead to total control over all teachers in a district, even to determine who will teach and who will be fired.

Some states allow teacher union officials to negotiate “maintenance agreements” or what many call “forced dues” clauses into contracts. No matter what else it is called, “agency shop,” “fair share,” or union security, this practice is simply compulsory unionism.

Union officials who demand forced dues, or “agency shop” clauses, claim all teachers get the same benefits and therefore should pay for the union’s representation, regardless of whether it is wanted. They will complain about the “burden” of representing teachers who are not actual union members, even though these officials have demanded that their union be the exclusive representatives.

Union officials may give up many benefits in order to win what they call a “fair share” clause in a contract. Forced dues money increases the union’s income and is available for any use union officials may devise. In many cases, millions of dollars collected in the form of forced dues will go to advance political and noneducational programs that many teachers do not support.

A Right to Work Law, as has been enacted in twenty-two states across America, protects teachers from being forced to join or support a labor union in order to teach. For example, Tennessee Code Ann., § 50-1-201 through 204:

It shall be unlawful for any person, firm, corporation, or association of any kind to deny or attempt to deny employment to any person, by reason of such person’s membership in, affiliation with, resignation from, or refusal to join or affiliate with any labor union or employee organization of any kind. (enacted 1947)

...It shall be unlawful for any person, firm, corporation or association of any kind to enter into any contract, combina-

tion or agreement, written or oral, providing for exclusion from employment of any person because of membership in, affiliation with, resignation from, or refusal to join or affiliate with any labor union or employee organization of any kind. (enacted 1947)

...It shall be unlawful for any person, firm, corporation, or association of any kind to exclude from employment any person by reason of such person’s payment of or failure to pay dues, fees, assessments, or other charges to any labor union or employee organization of any kind. (enacted 1947)

Independent, nonunion professional educator groups have been established in many states. These groups are providing teachers and student teachers with benefits comparable to those of the NEA and AFT, at lower dues. Most do not support any political agenda or ideas that do not directly affect education. They also provide liability insurance protection for members, which is comparable to that offered by the NEA and AFT.

Whether to join a union is a decision you may have already had to make upon entering the education field. Some of you will be required to support a union and its affiliates, if you choose to teach in certain districts in many states.

Teachers who believe in freedom of choice say they are not “free riders” as the union labels them, but “captive passengers” because they are forced to accept representation they do not want. They believe if union officials consider it

a burden to represent them, then they should only be allowed to represent their members, and nonmembers should be allowed to speak for themselves.

Right to Work laws are not antiunion. Right to Work laws guarantee every teacher (and other workers) the *right* to join a labor union, as well as the *right not to join* or support one. **EM**

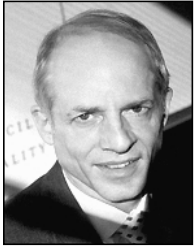
Source—National Institute for Labor Relations Research, Springfield, VA, 703-321-9606.

For more information on Right to Work laws, contact the National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation at 1-800-336-3600, or visit their web-site at www.nrtw.org.

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Many times, teachers and school representatives do not agree with the contract, but they have no choice but to abide by the contract or quit their jobs.

The USDOE Teacher Quality Report and NCATE's Injured Innocence

By Michael Poliakoff



Michael Poliakoff

A story from the August 7 issue of *Education Week* describes the angry and defensive reaction from representatives of the education schools to Secretary Rod Paige's report to Congress, "Meeting the Highly-Qualified

Teachers Challenge." Leading the charge is the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), whose president, Arthur Wise, told *Education Week*, "I have rarely seen such a high level of anger," and asserted, "It is not true that colleges of education are not effective." I beg to differ.

According to NCATE, education schools impart an essential knowledge of teaching. Teachers surveyed by Public Agenda say otherwise: 57 percent said their teacher training programs did only a "fair" or "poor" job preparing them to maintain discipline. Perusal of course offerings at colleges of education reveals a stunning lack of attention to classroom management or student discipline, two areas essential for pedagogical success.

Performance of education schools in general—and a number of NCATE-accredited education schools in particular—may be even worse than what the Secretary's report

describes. When Pennsylvania tested 33,000 teachers in mathematics and reading, graduates of three NCATE-approved education programs were the lowest performers. Michael Podgursky and Dale Ballou demonstrated that candidates from several NCATE-approved education programs in Missouri and Massachusetts show some of the highest failure rates on licensure exams. NCATE avers, "The misconception that those in teacher preparation do not know the subject matter they plan to teach or are otherwise poor students, is just that—a myth." Objective test data, however, reveal otherwise. The quality crisis among our education schools is further complicated by NCATE's denial of it.

The *Education Week* analysis concludes that the teacher quality report cards submitted by the education schools in fulfillment of Title II, Section 207, of the Higher Education Act fall short of their accountability goals. A number of these programs, with the acquiescence of their states, now require candidates to pass the state licensure exam in order to be considered "program com-

pleters" and be counted in the pass rate calculations. This practice enables state teacher programs to report a 100 percent passing rate, without having to submit information on the large number of students who didn't make it. The Secretary properly pointed out this loophole, as did the Education Trust in its June report, "Interpret with Caution." The next authorization of the Higher Education Act must close such loopholes and create more effective accountability measures.

It would behoove education schools, and NCATE in particular, to take a long hard look at their standards

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It would behoove education schools, and NCATE in particular, to take a long hard look at their standards instead of blaming the US Department of Education for exposing their weaknesses.

instead of blaming the US Department of Education for exposing their weaknesses. It is long past time for states to embrace alternative routes to teaching that may utilize, but do not solely depend upon, education schools. **EM**

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

School Voucher Hypocrisy

By Lisa Snell

What I find most interesting about the court challenge to school vouchers in Florida is that the voucher opponents have chosen to challenge the small Opportunity Scholarship Program (part of Jeb Bush's A+ education plan) but have remained silent about the much larger McKay scholarships for special education students. Of course, McKay is not running for Governor. If the Blaine Amendment is upheld in Florida, it would have grave consequences for special education students as well. The McKay scholarship program has more than 8,000 students receiving school vouchers to go to more than 400 different Florida private schools. Many of these schools are religious. If the Florida Blaine Amendment were found to be constitutional, the special education students would also be barred from using school vouchers for religious schools.

The NEA, People for the American Way, PTA, AFT, and all the others who fight against school vouchers, do not have the courage to stick with their antivoucher principles when it comes to special-education students. No one is willing to acknowledge the attack on families having children with disabilities, even if those families are benefiting from the voucher programs they rail against under different circumstances. We would do well to remind the media and all the stakeholders that in Florida the choices of more than 8,000 special education students are also at risk.

State constitutions in forty-seven states still restrict state legislatures from approving voucher money for "sectarian" private schools under a provision known as the Blaine Amendment. After the Blaine Amendment—which sought to prevent public money from falling into the hands of private Catholic schools—failed in Congress

in 1875, many states simply amended their own constitutions to adopt the language (See Court Watch article on page 5).

The Acton Institute provides a detailed history of Blaine Amendments here: http://www.acton.org/ppolicy/comment/arc_hives/020807.html.

UCLA Law Professor Eugene Volokh has an extensive analysis of why Blaine Amendments probably violate the federal constitution. He argues that the Florida ruling will not stand up on appeal. A state constitution can be used to grant more rights than the U.S. Constitution, but cannot restrict rights. **EM**

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ACTA Report Continues to Strike a Nerve

Related two months after the September 11, 2001, attacks, the American Council of Trustees and Alumni's report, *Defending Civilization: How Our Universities Are Failing America and What Can Be Done About It*, continues to generate a firestorm of response. The commentary ranges from high praise in the *Wall Street Journal* and *Washington Post* to an ongoing barrage of angry and sometimes obscene e-mails and phone calls from college campuses around the country. Controversy breeds publicity, which has given American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA) a greater opportunity to get across its message. Anne Neal, co-author of the report, has appeared on programs ranging from NPR to CNN to "The O'Reilly Factor." Ari Fleisher, the White House press secretary, has discussed the report at a White House press conference.

The report documents a striking divide between a segment of academic opinion and, well, almost everyone else in the universe. While the public, including leaders from both political parties, overwhelmingly condemned the terrorists and supported efforts to end terrorism, many academics expressed moral ambivalence. Some still point accusatory fingers, not at the terrorists, but at America itself!

The report argues that civic education is crucial to a free society and contends that "what is not taught will be forgotten; what is forgotten cannot be defended." It builds on ACTA's earlier study, *Losing America's Memory*, which revealed how few college

seniors—even at elite colleges—know basic facts about American history such as who James Madison was or the basic principles of the Constitution. That study found that none of the top-ranked fifty-five universities requires American history. The new report reveals another gap in students' education: only three (Colgate, Columbia, and the University of the South) require a course in Western civilization—the civilization that is under attack.

While declaring that free speech must be "passionately defended," the report argues that "academic freedom does not mean freedom from criticism." Yet some professors, accusing the report of having a "chilling effect" on their freedom to speak, seem to think they should be exempt from criticism, even when they make the most extraordinary public statements. Some were no doubt misled by an inaccurate account that appeared in the *New York Times* that omitted ACTA's defense of free speech and attributed to the report harsh language the report does not contain.

The National Association of Scholars (NAS) subsequently issued a statement on academic freedom, which supported ACTA's report and condemned the *New York Times* for "joining the mudslinging through its editorial attack." "It is difficult to avoid the impression that many professors and jour-

nalists regard intellectual freedom less as an end in itself, than as a means of protecting the adversary culture," says NAS.

Although campus critics of America's efforts to defend itself spoke up first and most loudly, the good news is that others are now coming to the fore. Sixty of the nation's leading intellectuals, led by Jean Bethke Elshtain and ACTA advisor James Q. Wilson and organized by the Institute for American Values, issued a ringing declaration of the principles of freedom and democracy that are at stake. The statement, *What We're Fighting For: A Letter from America*, declares five "fundamental truths" that must be defended. The statement, to which ACTA is a signatory, can be located at www.americanvalues.org.

The principles enunciated in that statement are the distillation of six thousand years of human civilization, from the ancient Hebrews' belief in the sanctity of the individual and the Greek's discovery of democracy, to principles of liberty and limited government articulated by John Locke and John Stuart Mill. This is the heritage that must be passed onto the young people who will inherit the burden of its defense. **EM**

Source—Inside Academe, published quarterly by the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, Washington, D.C., www.goacta.org.

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"Academic freedom
does not mean
freedom from
criticism."
—ACTA report.

Special New Tax Break for Educators!

Start saving your receipts! A new law gives teachers a tax break (this year and next) for out-of-pocket expenses. Internal Revenue Service spokesperson Valerie Thornton says, "Many teachers dip into their own pockets when funds for classroom supplies run out before the school year does...and we want them to have the records they'll need to claim these allowable expenses on their returns."

Here are the general rules—

The deductions are available to eligible educators in both public and private elementary and secondary schools. They must work at least 900 hours during the school year as a teacher, counselor, principal, or aide.

Up to \$250 of qualified expenses may be subtracted from your adjusted gross income. You will not have to itemize deductions as in the past. But you better

make sure you save all receipts you use to purchase supplies, books, etc.

Contact your tax advisor to get a list of qualified expenses and other compliance requirements as they relate to your individual returns. **EM**

*For more information, go to the IRS web-site at www.irs.gov, or for a simplified explanation go to "Tax Break for Teachers," *The Motley Fool* at www.fool.com/taxes/2002/taxes020802.htm*



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