

Education *Matters*

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HELPING NEW TEACHERS SUCCEED

Louisiana teachers gain skills for professional success from AAE affiliate

As any new teacher can tell you, those first days in the classroom can be a frightening experience. New teachers often feel unsure of themselves and their skills. They are adapting to a new environment fraught with bureaucracy. Many report that they feel discouraged and isolated. To combat the “New Teacher Syndrome,” the Associated Professional Educators of Louisiana (A+PEL) launched Project NEW. Its goal is to make the transition from student to classroom teacher a smoother and more enjoyable experience. It is a multifaceted support system for education majors and new teachers.

Practical Help

Project NEW was founded out of A+PEL’s desire to support education majors and new teachers. It gives teachers the information, tools, and assistance necessary for them to be successful and to excel in the profession. The assistance begins at the university level. A+PEL provides resources such as its *Guidebook for New Teachers*, and recommends education website links and other references that include innovative teaching strategies. The Project NEW team also reviews critical elements of Louisiana’s education standards with education majors so that they are already familiar with the Louisiana Components of Effective Teaching, Grade-



Level Expectations, the model curriculum framework, and assessments and accountability before they enter the classroom. In addition, through Project NEW, education majors become knowledgeable about the teacher certification process.

Project NEW is also there for new teachers. In Louisiana, beginning teachers must complete 150 clock hours of professional development to maintain their certification. New teachers must also participate in the Louisiana Assistance and Assessment Program (LaTAAP) for their first two years. During this time, the local school district assigns new teachers a mentor who provides advice and support, and evaluates their performance.

Peer Coaches

Project NEW not only works with new teachers within the LaTAAP framework, but also takes the state's mentorship program to another level. Project NEW prepares new teachers to go through LaTAAP by assigning A+PEL educators who have recently completed the program to serve as peer "coaches" for participants. Elementary teachers are assigned to beginning elementary teachers, middle school to new middle school teachers, and secondary teachers to new secondary educators. The coach uses his or her own recent experience to advise the new teacher on LaTAAP requirements and expectations.

Project NEW coaches work with beginning teachers to put together a portfolio with work samples; create a professional growth plan that includes strategic pro-

fessional development; and confer with the teachers to make recommendations for school improvement. The coaches examine data from new teacher evaluations to determine weaknesses and to work with the teachers to improve those areas. The Project NEW team keeps up with

the ever-changing state portfolio recommendations. Teachers who go through the program earn a certificate they can include in their portfolio. They may also earn continuing education credits that count toward meeting the 150-hour professional development requirement.

Deborah Nelson, A+PEL's Director of University Programs, coordinates Project NEW for the Association. Nelson says the response to the program illustrates the tremendous need for new teacher support mechanisms. "The first year we offered the workshop, eleven people registered. Two years later, we had sixty-three registrants," explains Nelson. "Word is getting out to education majors and new teachers that A+PEL is there for them. We are definitely filling a void."

Expanded Help

As Project NEW got underway and quickly grew, A+PEL devised custom programs to meet ongoing teacher needs. Several Project NEW workshops are offered throughout the year that address different educational topics, such as effective classroom management. One area that A+PEL covers that is often excluded from traditional teacher education is teacher legal rights. In today's classroom environment, teachers need to understand the law and conditions of employment.

In addition to the workshops, Project NEW offers professional development through its *Symposium for the Millenni-*

um Teacher. The symposium series is co-sponsored by AAE. This year, the symposium is called "Blueprint for Success," and features a student-focused program. It includes insights on how to respond to the needs of diverse learners and how to teach higher level thinking strategies.

Ongoing Assistance

Project NEW also provides an online support group. This e-mail communication, called "Class Notes," allows participants to have a cyberspace network to help one another as they deal with the requirements of their new profession.

Nelson says, "I believe in professional development—in always learning. Project NEW offers opportunities for education majors and new teachers to begin their careers believing in themselves and in their profession."

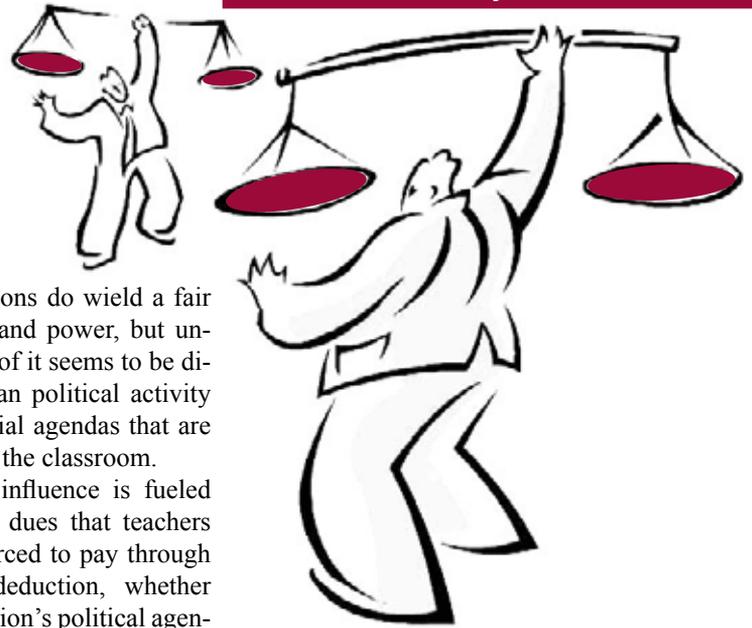
Polly Broussard, A+PEL Executive Director, believes that Project NEW is one example of why A+PEL is such a powerful force for education in Louisiana. "The next generation of schools is only as good as the next generation of teachers," says Broussard. "Almost 50 percent of new teachers leave the profession in the first three years, a disturbing statistic. We knew something had to be done, that we had to help good teachers stay in the profession. Project NEW has become a very important part of A+PEL's service to teachers and we see it having a positive impact."

Broussard added that Project NEW has also brought collateral benefits to A+PEL, such as opening doors into higher education that led to new A+PEL chapters at universities. Additionally, A+PEL has gained the reputation of presenting quality content in their professional development programs. The organization's name is associated with positive results among administrators and classroom teachers.

What is the future for Project NEW? Says Nelson, "Project NEW is reaching so many people—we have a new group each year, and we're continuing to grow. As the numbers expand, so will the program. We'll consider expanding the number of workshops offered, developing new ones, or going to different parts of the state. We want to meet the need statewide, to let all new teachers know that they will survive, and that A+PEL is here for them." ■

Teachers vs. Unions at Supreme Court

By Tracey Bailey



The U.S. Supreme Court announced it will take up the case of *The State of Washington v. Washington Education Association*. At issue is whether the union has a constitutional right to use nonmember teachers' dues however it chooses for political purposes. Nonmember teachers, also called "agency fee only" teachers, are those who have resigned from the union, but who are still forced to pay collective bargaining fees—or "agency fees"—because of compulsory union laws in many states.

Unfortunately, teacher unions have developed an unhealthy sense of entitlement—that somehow teachers owe the union money, whether that union is accurately representing teachers' own personal beliefs or political preferences. At last, this concern is beginning to get the national attention it deserves. Too many teachers have been taken advantage of for too long by unions that claim to fight for teachers' interests, but that instead have become side-tracked with political causes and agendas not even supported by their own members.

Unions were initially created to be a voice for workers—protecting them against poor working conditions and totalitarian management. To their credit, factory workplaces were made safer for workers after the inception of industrial labor unions.

However, today's teacher labor unions do little to truly advance the teaching profession. Industrial-style unionism does not promote professionalism, nor has it helped teachers achieve the level of respect or compensation that other professionals enjoy. In fact, many would say that "unionism" and "professionalism" are opposite and exclusive approaches shaping the future of the teaching workforce.

Today, teacher unions do wield a fair amount of influence and power, but unfortunately too much of it seems to be directed towards partisan political activity and controversial social agendas that are not directly related to the classroom.

This misdirected influence is fueled largely by the union dues that teachers in many states are forced to pay through mandatory payroll deduction, whether they agree with the union's political agenda—and in many cases, whether they are union members. Teachers in almost half the country must pay these union dues or equivalent union fees—often without the option of saying no—simply for the

privilege of having a job in the public schools. This is a shocking surprise to teachers from "right-to-work" states, who enjoy

legal protections against such garnishing of their wages.

Union contributions to political causes would be fine if they were authorized by each contributing teacher. Yet all too often, union political spending is directly at odds with the personal or professional views of many union members. Like most organizations, unions can raise money for politics through voluntary political contributions. If that method falls short, they should not be allowed to make up the difference by using teachers' mandatory collective bargaining dues without permission.

I am personally familiar with the pressure and coercion that is placed upon teachers to pay union dues, even in right-to-work states. As a first-year teacher, I received hate mail and insults when I didn't join the union immediately upon beginning my teaching career. This case is an excellent chance for teachers to be protected from, not only forced payments for unwanted union politics, but also the

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bullying and coercion that too often accompanies unionism and union dues.

Teachers nationwide will be affected when the U.S. Supreme Court hears *The State of Washington v. Washington Education Association*. I commend the court for accepting this important case. The Association of American Educators will be filing an *amicus curiae* brief at the Supreme Court on behalf of our members across the nation. Our goal is to see the court render a decision that helps protect the personal finances—and personal freedoms—of all of America's teachers.

For more information on the court case mentioned above, visit the AAE website at www.aaeteachers.org and click on Press Room. ■



Tracey Bailey is Director of Public Policy for the Association of American Educators in its Washington, D.C. office. Before joining AAE, he was selected as the National Teacher of the Year from a field of over 2.7 million public school teachers across the country. Tracey taught AP Physics, AP Biology, Chemistry, and Science Research at Satellite High School in Satellite Beach, Florida.

African-American History

New textbook highlights missing African-American contributions to history, literature, art, music, and dance.

The Core Knowledge Foundation released a remarkable new text and resource book, *Grace Abounding: The Core Knowledge Anthology of African-American Literature, Art, and Music*, in response to the lack of curriculum resources focused on African-American contributions to the areas of history, literature, art, music, and dance. This new comprehensive textbook is aimed at middle and high school students, but includes works that can be used at the earliest grade levels.

The Core Knowledge Foundation, a nonprofit, curriculum development organization based in Charlottesville, Virginia, carefully researched and produced the text with the assistance of institutions such as the Howard University Museum of Art and the Schromburg Center for Research in Black Culture. The text was then vetted by leading African-American scholars before being published.

More than Black History Month

“Far too often, African-American history and literature is saved just for Black History Month or glossed over in 11th grade literature survey courses,” Core Knowledge Foundation President Dr. Barbara Garvin-Kester said. “*Grace Abounding* opens up a whole world for African-American students to understand their rich heritage and for all students to get a balanced perspective of the geniuses, artists, and writers who have shaped our world.”

This new book is lavishly illustrated and focused on African-American cultural tradition, and provides an opportunity for students across the country to expand their knowledge and understanding of African-American culture and influence, facets of history that are often undermined or even left out of traditional textbooks. *Grace Abounding* details African-American literary and arts tradition, tracing its development from African roots, through Emancipation, Reconstruction, the Harlem Renaissance, and the Black Arts Movement of the 1970s, all the way to the



emergent voices of the twenty-first century.

Examples of pieces included in the text include poetry from Langston Hughes and Countee Cullen and the background and lyrics to spirituals, work songs, and field hollers that have made their way into popular American culture such as “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” and “Mama’s Gonna Buy You a Mockin’ Bird.” The book also examines in great detail the lesser known speeches, folk tales, and biographies that have made an impact on American culture. The book’s final unit details an extensive collection of African-American art with descriptions and full-color prints included for each selection.

“The book differs from other texts in not whitewashing or sugarcoating those aspects of the African-American struggle in the United States that future generations of American citizens need to understand and confront,” Dr. Garvin-Kester said. “By treating such subjects as slavery and Jim Crow and the Black Power Movement forthrightly, this book lays the groundwork for understanding, tolerance, and positive social and economic change.

This book and its accompanying website with additional study guides are designed for a wide range of grade and

reading levels; teachers and curriculum coordinators from grades four to ten will find everything they need to instruct students in this essential, yet often overlooked literary domain.

Online Resources

In addition to the comprehensive text, the *Grace Abounding* website offers free resources to instructors through direct web access. Through the site, teachers can view selections for further reading, grade-level recommendations for literary works, web links for research, and complete indexes from the book. Visitors can also find reading-check tests, vocabulary tests, other assessments, answer keys, and skill-related lesson plans covering topics such as grammar, writing, research, and other language arts-related skills. All tests, lessons, and answers are available for direct download in PDF format and are available for a nominal fee through credit card access only to prevent students from obtaining the documents. ■

Grace Abounding is available for purchase on www.coreknowledge.org.

Process vs. Content

Challenge students to read before they write

By Will Fitzhugh

When teaching our students to write, we often overload them with formulae and guidelines to such a degree that the importance of actually having something to say gets lost in the maze of processes. This maze includes limiting students to the five-paragraph essay, requiring responses to a document-based question, or demanding personal essays about matters that are often no one else's business.

On the one hand, writing is difficult enough to do, and academic writing is especially difficult if the student has not read anything. On the other hand, teachers feel the need to have students "produce" writing, however short or superficial it may be. Writing consultants and writing teachers feel they must come up with guidelines, parameters, checklists, and the like, as props to substitute for students' lack of motivation to describe or express in writing something they have learned.

Reading & Writing

Samuel Johnson once said, "An author will turn over half a library to produce one book." The point being, as I understand it, that good writing must be based on extensive reading. However, in too many instances, reading is precisely the step teachers leave out of the "Writing Process." The result is that students, in fact, do not have much to say, so, of course, they don't have much they want to communicate in writing.

Enter the guidelines. Students are told to write a topic sentence, to express one idea per paragraph, to follow the structure of Introduction, Body, and Conclusion, to follow the "Twelve Steps to Effective Writing," and the like. This the students can be made to do, but the result is too often empty, formulaic writing that students come to despise, and that does not prepare them for the serious academic papers they may be asked to do in college.

I fear that the history book report, at least at the high school level in too many places, has died in the United States. Per-

haps people will contact me with welcome evidence to the contrary, but where it is no longer done, students have been not only discouraged from reading non-fiction, but also lead to believe that they can and must write to fit a formula without knowing something—for instance, about the contents of a good book—before they write.

A nationally famous educator of writing teachers once told me: "I teach writing, I don't get into content that much." This is a splendid example of the divorce between content and process in common writing instruction.

Bursting to Write

Reading and writing are inseparable partners. Authors of essays published in *The Concord Review* over the years, often tell me that they read so much about something in history that they reached a point where they felt a strong need to tell people what they found out. The knowledge they had acquired had given them the desire to write well so that others could share and appreciate it as they did.

This is where good academic writing should start. When the motivation is there, born from knowledge gained, then the writing process follows a much more natural and straightforward path. The student can write, read what he wrote, see what he has left out, what he needs to learn more about, and what he has failed to express clearly. He can, then, read more, rewrite, and do all the natural things that have always lead to good academic writing, whether in history or in any other subject.

At that point, the guidelines are no longer needed because the student has become immersed in the real work of expressing the meaning and value of something he knows is worth addressing. This writing helps him discover the limits of his own understanding of the subject and allows him to see more clearly what he thinks about the subject. The process of critiquing his own writing becomes natu-

ral and automatic. This is not to deny, of course, the value of reading what he has written to a friend or of giving it to a teacher for criticism and advice. However, the writing techniques and processes no longer stop up the natural springs for the motivation to write.

As students are encouraged to learn more before they write, their writing will gradually extend past the five-paragraph size so often constraining the craft of writing in our schools. The *Page Per Year Plan*® suggests that all public high school Seniors could be expected to write a twelve-page history research paper, if they had written an eleven-page paper their Junior year, and so on all the way back to a one-page paper on a topic other than themselves their first year in school. With the *Page Per Year Plan*®, every Senior in high school will have probably learned, for that twelve-page paper, more about some topic than anyone else in his class—perhaps even more than any of his teachers. He will have had in the course of writing longer papers each year, that first taste of being a scholar which will serve him so well in higher education and beyond.

Dare to Read

Writing is always much harder when the student has nothing to communicate. Proliferating paraphernalia of structural aids from writing consultants and teachers often simply encumber students and alienate them from the essential benefits of writing. John Adams urged his fellow citizens to "Dare to read, think, speak, and write" so that they could contribute to the civilization we have been given to enjoy and preserve. Let us endeavor to allow students to discover, through their own academic reading and writing, both the discipline and the satisfactions of writing carefully and well. ■



Will Fitzhugh is a Harvard graduate who taught high school for ten years in Concord, Massachusetts. He founded the Concord Review. For more information, visit www.tcr.org.

Hands-On Learning

Vocational education gaining in popularity

A growing number of schools are beginning to, once again, offer vocational education courses for students. Over the years a focus on standardized tests and college pushed vocational education out of schools. Now called career technical education courses, schools are providing students with new options.

North Carolina, Florida, and California are adding these vocational opportunities in their states' schools. Congress reauthorized \$1.3 billion for career-based courses in high schools and community colleges.

In an interview with Associated Press reporter Ana Beatriz Cholo, Principal Doug Williams of Hoover High School in San Diego, California, expressed his commitment to bringing back auto shop classes for his students.

"When our students are connected to a person or a program, they seem to do better than those kids who are not connected, are struggling academically and are potential dropouts," he said.

Cholo reports that, according to the California Industrial and Technology Education Association, three-quarters of high school technology education programs have disappeared since the early 1980s. As a result, the number of high school courses offered has dropped from about 40,000 in the late 1980s to 24,000 in 2005-06, according to state data.

Cholo also interviewed Rick Steves, senior vice president of Boeing, regarding the need for an educated workforce that doesn't always mean a college-educated workforce.

"An auto mechanic today needs to know computer science, electronics, how to use sophisticated electronic tools...none of which require a degree," Stephens said.

According to the Associated Press reporter, in 2000, 258 career tech high school courses met University of California standards. Six years later, the number is up to 4,705, according to state statistics.



Source: Associated Press.

Qualities of Professional Educators

By Gene Bedley

Professional educators are value-driven, guided by principles, passion, and a purpose bigger than themselves.

Professional educators are need analysts—competent to diagnose and prescribe options for educational success and significance.

Professional educators believe their work is a vocation and calling rather than an occupation where one merely occupies space.

Professional educators recognize that change is the norm. They are growth-oriented and consider themselves life-long learners and contributors.

Professional educators are climate creators, recognizing that the conditions that

surround learning contribute to learning.

Professional educators are catalysts in promoting calculated risks that advance their profession and enable everyone access to success.

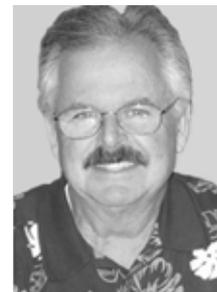
Professional educators are respectful, responsible, and ready to respond to their clients' individual needs.

Professional educators promote cohesiveness, collaboration, and team-building. They promote a "we are better together" philosophy.

Professional educators create a climate of ownership by ensuring that everyone involved in the educational process is invited to participate.

Professional educators are accountable to their clients, community, parents and students, providing a quality educational program for all children.

Professional educators belong to an organization that promotes their profession above personal gain.



Gene Bedley is the executive Director of the National Character Education Center which provides educators with hundreds of practical strategies through its free online newsletter (www.ethicsusa.com).

Cash for Schools

State school board associations improve efficiency and cash flow for districts, add convenience for busy parents

Thirteen state school board associations across the United States have adopted PaySchools, a new online payment service that allows schools to collect and process easily and efficiently payments for a wide range of fees—from lunches, textbooks and field trips to prom tickets, T-shirts and driver's education. The New York State and California School Board Associations are among the thirteen early adopters of the program. Others are state school board associations in Iowa, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Jersey, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Tennessee, Utah, and Wyoming.

PaySchools is sponsored by the National School Boards Association, and was created by the Iowa Association of School Boards (IASB) and local school district personnel.

"PaySchools was created by a nonprofit for nonprofits to help meet the unique needs of schools

and the families they serve," said Ron Rice, executive director of IASB. "The program concentrates the significant buying power of state and national school board association members to enable districts to collect and manage online payments without incurring high per-transaction fees and large administration and setup costs. School districts benefit from the tremendous economies of scale inherent in the PaySchools program to achieve cost efficiencies they would otherwise be unable to attain on their own."

For parents, PaySchools offers convenient, 24/7 access, and payments are reflected immediately. Parents can also view their payment history as well as their child's purchases online. To ensure transactions are secure, PaySchools does not store personal bank or credit card information.

For more information, contact www.PaySchools.com.



When is a Strike a Strike?

After the teacher union strike in Detroit, Michigan, State Rep. Phil Pavlov has now introduced a bill to add teeth to the state's existing no-strike law. HB 6528 would speed up the fining process and shorten the amount of time (from sixty days to seven) that the Michigan Employment Relations Commission has to wait before formally declaring what teacher unions may be terming a "walkout" an actual strike. In addition, it would change the law to allow parents, and not just a school district, to report a teacher strike to the Commission.

In the recent Detroit debacle, the school district never even filed a strike complaint with the Commission. Avoiding the fines that come with a strike, the union was careful never to call their simultaneous "walk-out" of 7,000 of its members a strike.

Pavlov's proposal is just good common sense: if it looks like a strike and smells like a strike, it must be a strike.

Source—TQ Bulletin, an electronic newsletter publication of National Council on Teacher Quality, www.nctq.org.

Qualification Overkill in California

Along the path to meeting NCLB requirements, California is tripping over its own shoelaces. Costly and time-consuming certification requirements are frustrating teachers and driving some of the best out of the public school system.

Pacific Collegiate, a distinguished California charter high school, lost several accomplished teachers this year, including Jefferds Huyck, a Harvard graduate with a doctorate in classics and twenty-two years of high school and college teaching experience. Huyck decided to forgo taking two years of certification classes and spending \$15,000 after watching his wife, Sarah Whittier, give up precious time otherwise dedicated to her students in order to participate in classes targeted toward young, inexperienced teachers. Ms. Whittier, with a doctorate of her own

in English—not to mention a state award for excellence in teaching—described the certification as "a badge of shame."

However, the stories like these go back long before NCLB. They are why the alternate route movement gained such quick traction. Under NCLB's "highly qualified teacher" provisions, most teachers are required to attain certification—nothing new here—and it is the state, not the federal law, that establishes those certification requirements. What's more, NCLB explicitly exempts charter schoolteachers like Huyck from having to be fully certified. California, however, has chosen to impose a requirement for charter schoolteachers on its own.

Marilyn Errett, an administrator with the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, defends the state's policy,



stating that teachers "need to learn how to work with children in immigrant families who have limited English skills, and students being moved from special education classes to regular ones. Those are skills we think they need to have." All well and good, but there is no evidence from California (or any other state) that these coursework requirements in fact help teachers achieve those skills—and plenty of evidence to the contrary.

Source—TQ Bulletin, an electronic newsletter publication of National Council on Teacher Quality, www.nctq.org.

Single-Sex Schools

Will good results be trumped by ideology?

By David Kirkpatrick

One emerging public school issue is single-sex schools. In a rational world it would not be an issue since such institutions have existed for generations among both colleges and K-12 independent schools. But the world of public schools is not a rational one. Rather, it is a world of special interests and power blocs. As long ago as March 19, 1921, in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, G.K. Chesterton was quoted as saying "State ownership means trusting the politicians."

There were only three single-sex schools in 1995, but the total has increased to fifty-one this year, plus 190 schools that incorporate single-sex classrooms. With more than 100,000 public schools in the nation, 99.95 percent of all public schools will continue to be co-ed. Or, to put it another way, with more than 14,000 school districts in the nation, even if all fifty-one single-sex schools were in separate districts, 99.6 percent of all school districts would still be 100 percent co-educational.

But that's too many for those whose ideology and political correctness trumps toleration of variations from the norm, even when there is a great need for options and some promise that they might succeed.

What brings this about is the audacity of the U.S. Department of Education which said it was modifying Title IX provisions to permit some modest develop-

ment of single-sex options for parents and students who may want them. Already the attacks upon them are underway.

Critics include the American Association of University Women (AAUW), the National Organization for Women (NOW), the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), and more localized groups such as the Women's Law Project in Philadelphia.

A NOW spokeswoman says these schools risk creating second-class citizens, ignoring that many inner-city schools already create such citizens, and have done so for generations. Lisa Maatz, of the AAUW, argues that schools should concentrate on approaches that research has shown will improve education. But she ignores existing evidence that single-

sex schools show promise of making such improvements. Even if research on single-sex schools were lacking, shouldn't a few such schools be established to provide some research evidence?

For example, Alisha N. Kiner, principal of Booker T. Washington High School in Memphis, has said discipline problems among ninth graders there have fallen by 60 percent. Education Secretary Margaret Spellings has concluded that, "Some students may learn better in single-sex education environments."

But, of course, AAUW-, ACLU-, and NOW-types wouldn't have any firsthand

knowledge of inner-city schools with largely minority enrollments. Nor would they ever permit their children to be exposed to such conditions.

Note also that these are advocacy groups with particular interests and political agendas. While, like all citizens, they have a right to their own education views, they have no particular expertise in this area and have no right to impose their beliefs on others. These groups consistently oppose any proposal that has public schools offering options to low-income families who can't afford them on their own, such as vouchers, tuition tax credits, and charter schools.

One argument is that single-sex schools will "roll back the clock" on civil rights protections, and result in another form of harmful segregation. But there are many distinctions between single-sex schools and the shameful racial segregation mandated by law in many states in the past.

First, this is not a mandate, it's voluntary. Second, it isn't statewide, or even districtwide. The new regulations permit such arrangements only in specific classes, grades, or schools. They also must demonstrate they are meeting an educational need, and districts must provide "substantially equal" opportunities for both genders. Additionally, districts must evaluate their single-sex classes every two years to ensure their compliance with Title IX law.

But, when your mind is made up, why be confused by facts? ■

Educators involved in single-sex schools...say that some inner-city minority students perform better in separate settings.



David W. Kirkpatrick is Senior Education Fellow, U.S. Freedom Foundation and Senior Education Fellow, Buckeye Institute, Columbus, OH. David is former President of NEA-affiliate Pennsylvania State Education Association.