

Character Education: Another Niche for Charter Schools

By Robert Holland



Robert Holland

A common definition of character is “what we do when no one is looking.” Repeated scandals at high levels of government in recent decades have given new strength to the old concept that character formation is

an important part of education. Civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr., stated the case as succinctly as anyone ever has.

“Intelligence plus *character*—that is the goal of a true education,” said Dr. King.

“Character is not engraved by age six—or even sixteen,” wrote John M. Templeton, Jr., “We can change and improve our character. However, like a comfortable pair of shoes, selfishness, laziness, dishonesty, and irresponsibility are easy to slip into. But the uplifting message of character development is that we can acquire a good and sound character—one that is durable yet evolving. All it takes is hard work and commitment. Just as a mountain is constantly being reshaped by weather patterns, our character is reshaped by the different choices we make and the virtues we choose to practice. In much the same way, *our choices develop our character—and our character determines our choices.*”¹

A great deal of emphasis is going to formation of character and a moral focus in elementary and secondary schools. This work goes on in public, private, parochial, and home schools. However, this article focuses primarily on public charter schools, which have an advantage in this realm of education that they share with the universities and private institutions—i.e., teachers,

parents, and students are not assigned to them. People study or work in charter schools by choice. They are not assigned to charter schools as is often the case with conventional public schools. Character education can be controversial when questions arise as to “whose values will be taught,” or when inclusion of the spiritual dimension of character spurs allegations that a publicly funded school is advancing religion. However, the edge comes off such contentiousness when participants have bought into the approach used to instill sound character and moral values.

A New View of Competence

Many character education programs emphasize a process that will develop character while simultaneously increasing student achievement. The two goals are joined, instead of standing separate and apart. That is certainly true of Character and Competence, a teacher training program that is based on a fresh view of human competence. Dr. A. Lynn Scoresby, an educational consultant and child psychologist who developed this program, points out that most teaching has been structured to make students competent according to their factual knowledge. He argues that any definition of competence that does not include character is incomplete and too narrow. Dr. Scoresby adds that factual knowledge—all the information in the curriculum—is indeed one of the important components of competence. But it is just one of three. The other two are character, which includes a sense of right and wrong, and achievement, which entails an ethic of work in an organized way toward meeting high standards. Following the 1983 “A Nation at Risk” report, and subsequent reports of test scores, criticisms of lagging achievement have led many

schools to concentrate single-mindedly on increasing students’ grasp of factual knowledge. However, Dr. Scoresby contends that a comprehensive view of competence that includes good character actually figures to yield greater success in students acquiring knowledge “because we will be teaching students achievement skills while we reduce distractions and conduct problems which can be solved by improved character.”

Mary Eubank of the Utah-based Legacy Foundation, which contracts for schools’ use of the program, notes that Character and Competence has been field-tested on more than 65,000 students of differing ages and ethnic backgrounds, including more than 600 high-risk students in grades K-9. “The results indicate a marked reduction in conduct problems, greater focus on learning tasks, increased social and emotional skills, and improved achievement-test results,” she says.

A Moral Underpinning

National Heritage Academies (NHA), founded in 1995 by Christian businessman J.C. Huizenga, is among those charter-school companies that consider moral education to be central to the classroom experience. NHA, one of the nation’s most successful education management organizations, operates thirty-two charter schools in Michigan, New York, North Carolina, and Ohio.

Part of what distinguishes an NHA school is the strong moral focus of instruction. Each month, an Academy emphasizes a different quality of character, one that is based on the Greek Cardinal Virtues of justice, temperance, prudence, and fortitude. Taught throughout the year and integrated into the curriculum rather than taught as separate units, these four Virtues are taught as character qualities—such as responsibility, respect, cooperation, courage, and perseverance—that the children can more readily understand. Teachers discuss these qualities with students, model the trait, and encourage students to demonstrate it in their lives.

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Character education is a particularly good fit with charter schools because potentially divisive instruction on moral and spiritual issues is done within classrooms of the willing.

Guest Editorial— Consolidation is a Bad Idea

By John T. Wenders



John Wenders

Arizona, South Dakota, Kansas, Vermont, Iowa, and Idaho are presently, or have been recently, weighing proposals to reduce the number of school districts within their borders by consolidating some of them into larger units.

Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee, responding to a court decision that made the state responsible for providing children with an “adequate education,” proposed that the number of school districts in Arkansas be cut from 310 to no more than 116. In Arizona, new state school superintendent Tom Horne said that consolidation of his state’s 220+ districts would ease administrative costs. In South Dakota, the House education committee recently considered a bill to reduce districts from 176 to 30. In Kansas, a proposal to slash the number from 303 to 30 was being studied. Vermont’s legislature is weighing a proposal to shrink the number from 60 to 15. Iowa is pondering financial incentives to encourage consolidations. (In Michigan, they already get a \$50-per-pupil bonus.) In Idaho, a similar proposal went before the House education committee. And, of course, New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg has effectively merged that city’s many “community” districts into a single, centralized system.

However, this pendulum swings both ways. Oregon is considering proposals to break up large school districts. Los Angeles has often been urged to shear the mammoth LAUSD into thirty or so parts. In Nevada, plans are afoot to break up the huge Clark County (Las Vegas) school district. And Wyoming’s legislature recently defeated an attempt at more district consolidation.

Does it matter? Yes, the history of public education suggests that district consolidation and the inevitable school consolidation that follows are generally bad ideas. Although proponents promise lower costs and stronger student performance, in practice neither seems to occur. Worse, over the long haul, consolidation sucks power away from parents, students, and local influence into more centralized political arrangements in which teacher unions and other special interests have even more clout. The result has been higher, not lower, per-pupil costs and worse education. In the jargon of Economics 101, any economies gained by

movements down cost curves have been more than offset by upward shifts in these same curves.

The number of public school districts in the U.S. shrank from 117,000 in 1940 to 15,000 in 2000. The number of public schools fell from 233,000 in the late 1930s to 91,000 in 2000. These two developments caused the average number of pupils per district to rise from 217 in 1940 to 3,159 in 2000, and the average school to swell from 127 to 521 pupils.

As everyone knows, these consolidations were accompanied not by amazing new efficiencies but by rising-per pupil costs—and costs borne more and more by non-local sources. From the end of World War II to today, real per-pupil spending sextupled, even as the local share of public-school funding dwindled from 80 percent (early 1900s) to 45.4 percent in 2000.

Power follows money to its source. In education, that has meant following it upward to places where special interest groups are better able both to secure further hikes in school funding and to divert much of the increment toward themselves and their members.

Besides price escalation, consolidation discourages competition and educational diversity. Harvard University’s Caroline Hoxby and the University of Chicago’s Sam Peltzman have found that it adversely affects both the cost of education and the performance of students. Peltzman discovered that deterioration in pupil performance was greatest where the shift in funding from local to state sources was greatest. He also found that the upward movement of power added to union influence.

Consider teacher pay and work rules. Teacher unions bargain at the district level. As districts become larger, negotiators on both sides are farther removed from direct knowledge of individual teachers and schools. Districtwide pay schedules and work rules become more detached from the performance of real teachers and schools. Veteran teachers transfer out of inner-city schools. The ultimate union objective is statewide salary schedules and work rules, which already exist in North Carolina and Washington State. These are more readily controlled from the top. A favorite trick is to mandate statewide minimum starting wages that force up entire salary grids.

Perhaps this would still be worth doing if students learned more but, by and large, they have not, at least not lately. The data

show gradually improving pupil performance until the early 1960s. From then until the early 1980s, however, scores plummeted, such that, by the end of this period, high school graduates were about one and one-half years behind their predecessors of the early 1960s. There has since been some recovery in scores, but well below what it would have been had the pre-1960s trend continued.

Over the same period, community colleges grew in no small part because they provided remedial help. Moreover, half the private schools in existence in 1994 were founded in the three decades immediately preceding. It is at least plausible that both developments responded to public school and district consolidation and the accompanying declines in pupil performance.

Why should this be? Effective-schools research indicates that achievement is stronger where schools establish a clear identity for students—a community of interest, yet consolidation pushes the other way. High schools, in particular, became shopping malls. Larger schools necessarily had less sense of community. While diversity may be a plus in other ways, it probably does not square with improved student performance. What’s more, all of this occurred as the larger society was fracturing. Ironically, these developments led both to greater homogeneity among schools and more diversity within schools. Both developments eroded student performance, the former by reducing competition among schools, and the latter by destroying strong school identities.

Big schools are a problem for other reasons. Many people judge the optimal school size to be about 300-400 students at the elementary level and 400-800 in secondary institutions. Yet fourth-fifths of U.S. elementary students are in schools larger than 400 students, and nearly three-quarters of secondary pupils attend schools bigger than 800. By contrast, higher performing private schools are typically less than half the size of their public counterparts.

Bigger doesn’t mean better. More consolidation will push both education costs and student performance in unwanted directions. State policymakers should take note. **EM**

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Education Reformers Seek New Paths to School Leadership—

Call for Deregulated Entry, Performance Pay, More Power, Provokes Spirited Debate

A new “manifesto” published by the Fordham Institute and The Broad Foundation contends that American public education faces a “crisis in leadership” that cannot be alleviated from traditional sources of school principals and superintendents. Its signers do not believe this crisis can be fixed by conventional strategies for preparing, certifying, and employing education leaders. Instead, they urge that first-rate leaders be sought outside the education field, earn salaries on par with their peers in other professions, and gain new authority over school staffing, operations, and budgets.

Entitled *Better Leaders for America’s Schools*, and already signed by sixty-five educators and policy leaders, this manifesto was issued by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute and The Broad Foundation. “In an era when America has finally resolved to leave no child behind,” says Fordham Institute president Chester E. Finn, Jr., “thousands of our public schools and school systems need better leaders. First-rate school executives can be found in many places. It’s time to open the doors and invite them in.”

Better Leaders for America’s Schools calls on states and school systems to overhaul an archaic and inadequate hiring system that virtually bars proven leaders outside the education field from seeking positions of responsibility in public schools. It urges boosting principals’ pay while authorizing them to hire and fire staff and make curriculum and budget decisions. This would be a better use of scarce dollars than subsidizing the credentialing as leaders of many educators who have no intention of assuming leadership roles. (In Illinois, for example, about 1,300 educators *annually* receive certification as school principals though the state has only 3,000 public-school principals; nearly half of those who receive certification as principals in Massachusetts do not seek jobs as administrators.)

“I believe that a strong, competent governing body, combined with a talented CIE and senior management team, can make a profound difference in turning our school systems from lack luster bureaucracies into high-performing enterprises,” said Eli Broad, public school reform advocate and founder of The Broad Foundation.

Released in May at a Washington symposium featuring proponents and critics of these reform proposals, the manifesto’s signers include two former U.S. Secretaries of Education, current and former members of Congress, a governor, state and district school superintendents, and education officials and experts from a wide range of backgrounds and philosophies.

“Alternative routes have already become the source of almost one third of our new teachers,” Finn noted. “Now it’s time to think anew about the key leadership posts of

principal and superintendent. Private and charter schools are already free to seek great leaders wherever they can find them—and empower them to truly lead. We must now do the same for the schools that most American children attend.”

Better Leaders for America’s Schools notes that a number of large school districts, including Chicago, Jacksonville, Los Angeles, New York City, Philadelphia, San Diego, and Seattle, have selected noneducators to lead them. It includes profiles of several superintendents and principals with nontraditional backgrounds who have thrived in such districts.

Moving Beyond ‘Take What You Get’

American schools today are more accountable for performance than ever before. They need leaders who are equal to that challenge. “This is a huge problem,” explained Finn. “A recent survey showed 60 percent of superintendents saying that they must ‘take what you get’ when filling

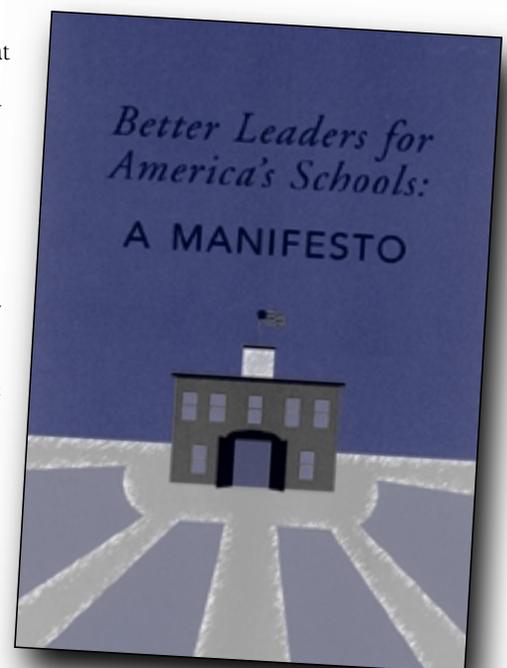
a principal’s position. Fewer than two in five were satisfied with their principals’ ability to make tough decisions, delegate responsibility, engage teachers in developing policies, or spend money efficiently.”

Some states are already moving to address these problems. According to the report, fourteen states have developed some type of alternative route or certification program for principal and superintendent positions. **EM**

The Thomas B. Fordham Institute supports research, publications, and action projects of national significance in K-12 education reform. It is neither connected with nor sponsored by Fordham University. For more information on the Institute or its publications, please visit www.edexcellence.net/tbfstitute/index.html.

The Broad Foundation’s mission is to dramatically improve K-12 urban public education through better governance, management and labor relations. The Foundation was started with an initial investment of \$100 million that was recently increased by the Broad family to \$400 million. The Foundation also sponsors the one million dollar Broad Prize for Urban Education, awarded each year to urban school districts that have made the greatest overall improvement in student achievement. For more information, visit www.broadfoundation.org.

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Double Principal Salaries, Says Columnist

The *Washington Post's* respected education columnist Jay Matthews wants to double principals' salaries. There's no doubt that this proposal is going to be received with skepticism in these times of tight budgets, but Matthews insists. The columnist says that despite visiting hundreds of schools in the last twenty years, he's never been to a bad school ("those sour places where kids are just tolerated and goals never set") that was run by a good principal. Besides, since principals are always few in number in any district, his plan is not going to break the bank. Furthermore, the principals' chief job—hiring excellent teachers—is one that would pay immediate dividends.

Better paid principals could be granted both increased accountability and discretion, whereby the principal would be responsible for raising achievement school-wide and have the increased ability to dismiss consistently failing teachers in order to accomplish that goal.

Matthews knows his proposal is unlikely to be adopted, but it makes his point: better principals are worth the money. **EM**

Source—"A Plan for Principals' Pay," *The Washington Post*, May 6, 2003.

Most Parents Don't Know If Kids Are in Failing Schools in New York

More than 300,000 children are in the 331 New York City public schools the state has rated as low performers, but 85 percent of the parents whose children attend those schools don't know about their school's low rating, according to a survey of 1,200 people conducted late last year by the Foundation for Education Reform and Accountability. Although Foundation President Tom Carroll was "shocked" and surprised by the finding, parents weren't.

"The letters sent to parents about the status of their schools are filled with jargon,"

Bronx parent Denise Moncrief told the *New York Post*.

Once informed of the dismal school rating, though, 94 percent of parents said they would likely transfer their child to a better public school, and 97 percent said they would support free tutoring—two options made available under the No Child Left Behind Law. However, if they could afford it, more than 80 percent of parents would transfer their children out of the public schools altogether and put them in private or parochial schools. An overwhelming majority support using public funds—vouchers—for that transfer. **EM**

Source—School Reform News, February 2003, a publication of Heartland Institute, www.heartland.org.

Teachers Union Backs Gambling Proposal

The Washington Education Association decided to support a controversial statewide gambling proposal, so long as the millions of dollars raised would pay for teacher cost-of-living increases.

"It's not our preferred approach," WEA president Charles Hasse said. "This would be seen as an emergency method to get us through this tough time in the state."

Gambling critics blasted the idea.

"That's so wrong," Spokane retired teacher and gambling foe Penny Lancaster said. "The idea that a teachers union would align their name with that industry sends a terrible message."

"I'm shocked that the WEA would even consider aligning themselves with the gam-

bling interests," said King County Prosecutor Norm Maleng, who heads an anti-gambling group. "We expect better from an organization that purports to speak for teachers."

The union is trying to protect Initiative 732, which voters approved three years ago. It guaranteed teachers annual cost-of-living increases, based on the Seattle inflation rate.

"We have qualms about it," Hasse said. "There are no easy answers in any of this. This may be the best that we're able to do in this session." **EM**

Source—The Spokesman-Review.

Editor's Note—

This controversial bill was referred to the House Commerce & Labor Committee, but the bill did not receive a hearing by the cutoff date. It is now considered a "dead bill," although technically the bill could become active at any time during the 2003-2004 session.

Not Enough Men in the Classroom?

Only 4 percent of teachers in early childcare are men. Only 13 percent of elementary school teachers are male. Seventy-six percent of teachers overall are female. As a student gets older, his or her likelihood of being assigned a male teacher increases. These are the findings of a new report by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (total membership: 103,525; female membership: 99,000) lamenting the consequences of this gender imbalance. **EM**

AMERICAN BOARD Launches Enhanced Web-site

The American Board is excited to announce the launch of their new web-site at www.abcte.org. The revamped site is designed to be informative and user-friendly, and aims to speak to the needs of education officials, policymakers, and potential American Board certification candidates. New pages on the site are dedicated to providing up-to-date information specific to Master and Passport-to-Teaching certification. An innovative addition is a narrative about the development of the American Board standards.

The Resource Center, where you can find information about alternative certification as well as the American Board Circular archives, has a fresh, easy-to-navigate design. Be sure to check the Breaking News section on a weekly basis to find out the latest about American Board activities. The Board invites teachers to submit comments, concerns, and suggestions by using the new American Board online guest book! **EM**

Where We Are Now: A Digest of a Decade of Survey Research

According to this “survey of surveys” by Public Agenda, most U.S. employers and college professors rate recent public school graduates as barely literate, poorly motivated slackers who know a lot about computers.

This is one of the more blunt findings in this compilation of public opinion analyses on education over the past decade, but not the only interesting one. We also learn that parents, teachers, employers, and professors all give high marks to the basic concepts that constitute the No Child Left Behind Act. All of those groups strongly support high standards and the efforts to back them up with real action. “In fact, majorities of parents, teachers, students, employers, and

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“Teachers in their school spend more time trying to keep order in the classroom than teaching students”

professors say it is much worse for a child to be promoted and passed along without learning what was expected than to be held back a grade.”

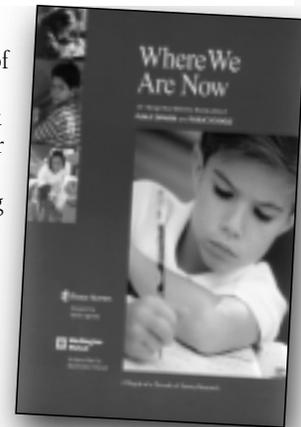
This support for strong measures applies to testing as well. Before students are awarded a high school diploma, say more than half of all parents, teachers, employers, and professors, they “should be required to pass a basic skills test.” Yet few believe that testing should be the only gauge of student, teacher, or school success. All groups think

schools should use “standardized test scores and teacher evaluations as basis for promotion.” Teachers support high standards but believe the problems facing schools and children will never be solved by tests and

standards alone. More than half of high school students say that “teachers in their school spend more time trying to keep order in the classroom than teaching students,” and many high school teachers agree.

This report is a useful compilation of the attitudes and views of groups toward education and learning at the dawn of the twenty-first century. It is worthy reading.

To check it out, go to:
<http://www.publicagenda.org/specials/wherewearenow/wherewearenow.htm> **EM**



Aren't Rank and File Union Members Entitled to Know More?

Excerpts of a speech by U.S. Secretary of Labor Elaine Chao at the Conservative Political Action Committee (CPAC) Conference

... **In** the years preceding my tenure at the [Labor] Department, the federal agency responsible for ensuring union transparency and integrity—The Office of Labor Management Standards—was nearly gutted. Its resources were slashed 40 percent at a time when other Labor Department enforcement agencies received hefty increases every year.

Its offices were banished to the farthest corner of the building, as far away as possible from the office of the Secretary. The message was clear: don't dig too deeply and don't ask for any more information than you get.

We have a duty to protect the retirement security of rank and file union members. These responsibilities are actually enshrined in a law called the Labor-Management Reporting and Disclosure Act (LMRDA). That law requires us to make sure that rank and file union members have the information

they need to protect their rights and their union's financial integrity.

In a sense, the Department of Labor acts like the Securities and Exchange Commission for organized labor.

Right now, the forms some unions file with the Department are virtually meaningless. For example, one union reported \$3.9 million as “sundry expenses.” That's a lot of sundry expenses! Another reported \$63 million in “grants to state and local affiliates joint projects.” No further details were given.

That's why we announced a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking last December to dramatically improve the quality of information that labor unions must disclose to their members through our Department.

Some have predictably attacked this effort as “anti-union.” Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, it's *pro-union member*.

If you have any doubts, just read the *Washington Post*. Recently, it's been filled with daily stories of how the local teacher union leadership has allegedly spent local members' dues on designer clothes, lavish vacations, and political activity—to the tune of \$5 million. And that's just what has been discovered so far.

...One of the [*Washington Post*] editorials raised a very pointed question: “...how could [*this scandal*] have gone on for so long?”

The answer is simple: union members have almost no access to detailed information about their unions' finances. Even the *U.S. Labor Department* has a difficult time getting this detailed information. Furthermore, we just don't have the resources to carefully audit all the reports the unions must file.

All of that has got to change.... **EM**

Source—*Landmark Legal Foundation*, www.landmarklegal.org.

Character Education

(Continued from page 1)

For instance, when a reporter visited the new NHA-operated **Queen's Grant Community School** in the Mint Hill community of Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, last fall, she found the school concentrating on the trait of wisdom. Said the school's principal, Christy Morrin, "What we're doing here reinforces what the parents are doing at home." Educators "actually are doing a disservice to society," she said, "if they teach children how to read and write without also teaching them to respect others."²

As is true of other NHA schools, Mint Hill has a daily assembly at which students recite the Pledge of Allegiance and sing patriotic songs. Teachers use direct instruction and the curriculum is based on E. D. Hirsch, Jr.'s Core Knowledge Sequence.

Mint Hill Mayor Ted Biggers, Jr., fought for state approval of this K-5 charter school because of his conviction that a good Charlotte-Mecklenburg school system would become even better. As the region grew and schools became more and more crowded, recognition grew that "if you wanted any other choice in education, you couldn't find it in Mint Hill." In this case, a charter school helped meet the demand for solid education with a moral underpinning.³

Some Concluding Thoughts

It ought to be noted that character education does not mean the same thing to all who promote activities in its name.

Scholar Denis P. Doyle may have described most cogently the differences in approach to character education in a 1997 article for *Phi Delta Kappan* entitled "Education and Character: A Conservative View." One side favors student self-expression, self-esteem, critical thinking, values clarification—in short, a process not necessarily leading to right or wrong answers. In terms of political thinkers, that school of thought is associated with the French Romantic Rousseau, whose ideas helped mold progressive education in the U.S. The other school of thought favors self-restraint, structured learning, assiduous study of great books, and an understanding of right and wrong based on eternal verities. That mindset might be called Hobbesian, after the English thinker, Thomas Hobbes.⁴

In Doyle's ideal paradigm, sound character education is composed of three elements: example, study, and practice. Life is ultimately about moral choices we make, he argues, not about technique or "spontaneous unfolding." By example, he means

the role of virtuous adults—first parents, then teachers and friends—who model virtuous behavior for students. As part of study, he recommends reading the ancients (*The Iliad*, *The Odyssey*, *The Aeneid*, the *Old and New Testaments*); the enduring documents of citizenship (the Magna Carta, Bill of Rights, Lincoln's Second Inaugural, Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter From a Birmingham Jail"); the classics of prose and poetry (Sophocles, Shakespeare, Donne, Marlowe, Spenser); and more recent storytellers (Hemingway, Steinbeck, Melville, Twain, Cather, Bronte). By practice, he means not only doing the intellectual tasks of reading, essay composition, and organized research, but also the exercise of being a good person. That means the sustained discipline of respecting teachers, classmates, and self, and being honest, punctual, and honorable.

While Doyle's preference is clear, he ended by arguing against any particular approach being dictated. "As I do not want to have Rousseau's views imposed on me," he wrote, "I do not propose to force my Hobbesian views on hapless romantics. Let us agree to that. That is what liberty—or liberalism—is supposed to be about. The logic of liberalism is to leave people free to pursue the aims that suit their values. Let the followers of Rousseau and Hobbes compete in the marketplace of both ideas and practice. The schools of Rousseau for those that want them, the schools of Hobbes for the rest."⁵

This is precisely the beauty of public charter schools. They can be organized by devotees of competing educational philosophies so that, within the publicly financed school system, parents and students and teachers are free to choose what most appeals to them or motivates them. Character education is a particularly good fit with charter schools because potentially divisive instruction on moral and spiritual issues is done within classrooms of the willing. Other public and private schools can learn from charter schools what approach to character formation might work for them, given the informed consent (and even better, outright endorsement) of families and teachers. **EM**

Robert Holland is a Senior Fellow with the Lexington Institute, a nonprofit, nonpartisan public policy foundation based in Arlington, Virginia.

He specializes in education reform, one of the issues the Institute regards as of surpassing importance to the success of democracy.

Holland was Editor of the Op-Ed Page of the Richmond Times-Dispatch where he also wrote an award-winning column on education-related topics.

Holland won the 1992 H.L. Mencken award in the category of Best Editorial or

Op-Ed Column in the nation. The Free Press Association gives the award to journalists who use First Amendment freedoms to question authority and to expose violations of individual rights. Holland's writing also has won awards from the International Reading Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Family Foundation, and the Virginia Press Association.

ENDNOTES

1. *Colleges That Encourage Character Development*, edited by the John Templeton Foundation, Templeton Foundation Press, Philadelphia, 1999.
2. Celeste Smith, "Parents Applaud Volunteer at Mint Hill Charter School," *Charlotte Observer*, October 29, 2002.
3. Ibid.
4. Denis P. Doyle, "Education and Character: A Conservative View," *Phi Delta Kappan*, February 1997.
5. Ibid.

For a complete version of this report with more examples of outstanding character education programs in cutting edge charter schools, you may access it at <http://www.edexcellence.net/gadfly/v03/gadfly12.html>.

Quote to Note—

"Putting money into home schooling is throwing money down a rathole. You have no idea if that money is being spent properly or children are benefiting."

—Wayne Johnson, President of the California Teachers Association (CTA)

Maybe someone should inform Mr. Johnson of the following:

The average home schooler's SAT score is 1100, eighty points higher than the average score for the general population.

Only 3 percent of home-schooled fourth-graders watch more than three hours of TV a day, vs. 38 percent of all fourth-graders.

M.I.T. admitted seven of twenty-one home schoolers who applied last year—or 33 percent—twice the overall rate.

Source—Time Magazine, August 27, 2001, "Is Home Schooling Good for America?"

Released Time: It's Legal and It's Working

“Knock, knock.” Helen Colburn is lightly rapping on classroom doors at Benito Juarez Elementary School in Anaheim, California. Her watch may say 10:40 a.m., but to the fourth- and fifth-graders falling in behind her, it’s “Released Time.”

Two, three, sometimes a dozen students emerge from each classroom and parade behind Mrs. Colburn to a portable classroom trailer parked in front of Juarez Elementary. The Released Time Christian Education portable classroom lies a mere six inches off campus—the distance between the trailer and the sidewalk. An orange extension cord runs from the trailer to a separate electric meter box nailed to a telephone pole; this way the school district is not liable for the electricity that runs the trailer’s lights and air conditioning.

In the new millennium, the separation between church and state can be measured in inches and kilowatts, but public schools and religious education can coexist—and have done so for more than 85 years in a little-known program called Released Time education.

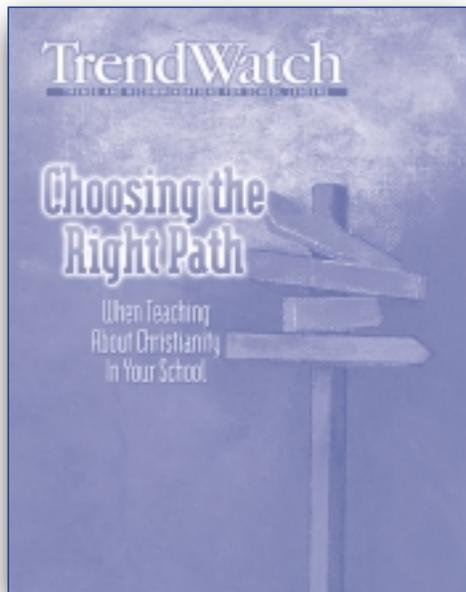
The Released Time trailer is simple and Spartan. Ten wooden desks with laminated tops and a half-dozen metal chairs are shoehorned into an 8-by-20-foot space, giving the feeling that Mrs. Colburn is a modern-day “Old Woman in a Shoe” who had so many children that she didn’t know what to do.

Why so Spartan? There’s no room for more. At Juarez Elementary alone, just over 100 fourth- and fifth-graders participate in Released Time education. Some of the thirty-two students in the present class are sitting three to a desk.

Released Time education dates back to 1914, when Indiana migrants successfully petitioned their school districts to allow religious instruction. The principle of off-campus religious instruction was upheld in a landmark 1952 U.S. Supreme Court ruling that affirmed that states may pass laws allowing students to be released from class once a week for off-campus religious instruction.

Writing for the majority, Justice William O. Douglas penned, “[We] find no constitutional requirement which makes it necessary for government to be hostile to religion and to throw its weight against efforts to widen the effective scope of religious influence.”

Whether Released Time education is welcome in the public square varies from state to state: presently thirty states have



Released Time programs. An estimated 250,000 public school students participate nationally. Most of these are elementary school students.

Released Time is a grassroots activity, started and maintained by local ministerial associations—pastors and their churches banding together to sponsor extracurricular religious education. “The more churches working together, the better,” explains John Atkinson, president of the Fellowship of Christian Released Time Ministries, based in Long Beach, California.

The “released time” concept is open to all faiths. The Mormon Church has purchased land adjacent to public schools in Utah and Idaho for the sole purpose of offering classes in Mormon religious instruction. Muslims offer a handful of classes in major cities.

The vast majority of Released Time classes, however, remain nondenominational Christian, and independent programs have been established in upstate New York, South Carolina, rural Pennsylvania, suburban Southern California, and the Pacific Northwest. These nonprofit associations rely on contributions from private donors and area churches to defray operating costs, pay liability insurance, and purchase Bibles for the students. John Atkinson estimates that 85 percent of Released Time teachers are volunteers.

Classes can be held in trailers parked curbside, as they are in Anaheim where Mrs. Colburn’s “chapel on wheels” is hitched to a truck and moved each day to a new school—five in all. Nationally, however, most Released Time classes take place in nearby homes, local churches—even an outdoor park. In Ellijay, Georgia, churches banded together to build the Christian Learning Center next door to a public high school. Hundreds of teen students walk 100 feet through a gate to take “lifestyle” classes taught from a Christian perspective; and they receive credit for these elective classes.

Why would non-Christian parents agree to send their children to unabashed Christian instruction? “The parents don’t go to church, but they want their kids exposed to Christianity,” said Atkinson. In addition, some parents work Sundays and Released Time is their only opportunity to give their children religious instruction.

A View from the Classroom

Mrs. Watts, who teaches a fourth-grade class, welcomes Released Time education because it helps with classroom order.

“Do I notice differences? Yes! My students in

Released Time come back more concerned about their fellow students.

They seem to get along better; they don’t squabble like they usually do. I can think of one of my unmotivated students who, after his Released Time class, is a much happier child the rest of the day.”

Stories like this gladden the heart of John Atkinson, a pastor who first heard of Released Time twelve years ago when he was invited to a church conference on the subject. “Released Time sounded illegal when I

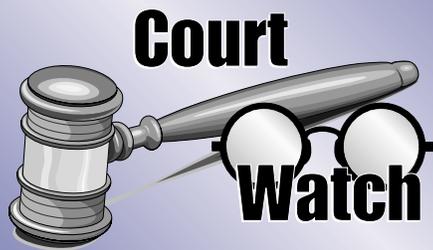
first heard about it,” he said, “but it’s legit. Groups such as the American Civil Liberties Union leave it alone.”

Bible instruction for kids in the public school during the school day is legal and it’s happening every day in hundreds of public schools all over the United States. **EM**

Source—As reported by Mike Yorkey in *Trendwatch*.

Trendwatch is a publication of Gateways to Better Education. For subscription information, visit www.gtbe.org.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★
“Do I notice differences? Yes! My students in Released Time come back more concerned about their fellow students.”



Teachers' Group Sued for Punishing Instead of 'Accommodating'

A California teacher union has been sued for religious intolerance—specifically, for having dues policies that are openly hostile to religious faith objectors.

The Pacific Justice Institute (PJI) has sued Associated Chino Teachers (ACT), a local branch of the California Teacher's Association (CTA). The lawsuit was filed on behalf of teacher Barbara Madsen, who requested that all of her dues go to a charity—but was forced to actually pay more to the charity than she would have paid the union.

PJI President Brad Dacus says unions regularly discriminate against Christians.

"[Such discrimination] is becoming very common and very widespread," Dacus says. "That's why it's so important that people who have to work with the union realize...they don't have to pay a single penny to the union if it violates their beliefs and convictions, and...they don't have to pay more out of their pocket to a charity as an alternative than they would have had to pay to the union."

Recently, the Associated Chino Teachers (ACT) filed a motion for removal into federal

court. The Pacific Justice Institute is currently waiting for a ruling from the federal court to see if they will accept the motion since it was filed late. If the court accepts the motion, Pacific Justice Institute is prepared to litigate the matter in federal court.

Dacus hopes the case will set a new precedent against unions that appear willing to punish objectors. Federal regulations require all unions to "reasonably accommodate" those with religious convictions against paying dues to their unions. **EM**

Source—Pacific Justice Institute, www.pacificjustice.org.

A Much Better High School U.S. History Textbook

Texas just adopted new high school U.S. History books. Four major publishers offered texts. Three had more or less the same old pro-big government, anti-free market, political correctness problems. However, one, *The American Republic Since 1877* (Glencoe, 2003), broke ranks to become a benchmark. Its overall scholarship is superior to the other high school U.S. History books seen in Texas in the last forty years, in that it features:

- Inclusion of pro-free enterprise perspectives. It moves beyond 1930s quasi-Marxist "Robber Baron" interpretations on industrialization and big business.
- Accurate treatment of strict and loose construction. It rightly defines strict and loose construction of the Constitution, and properly discriminates between them.

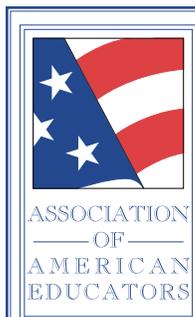
- Clear grasp of concepts of divided sovereignty. It always distinguishes states' rights from state sovereignty, and Constitutional supremacy from federal supremacy.
- Some due diligence on original intent. It occasionally notes Jeffersonian-Jacksonian views of original intent on major Constitutional issues.
- Divergent views on the Depression and New Deal. It generally avoids partisanship on controversial topics in economic history from 1929 to 1939.

This text also affirms the conservative nature of the American Revolution by closely relating it to its British constitutional historical content. On resource economics it correctly distinguishes "scarcity" from

"shortages," noting that the latter result from government price ceilings. It equally presents pros and cons on whether global warming exists, and on economic policy measures to deal with it. It avoids most excesses of political correctness.

This Glencoe book reviews the pre-1877 period in greater depth than the other high school U.S. History texts. This is vital because high schoolers can absorb more than 8th graders; because recent immigrants may have missed the first half of U.S. History in 8th grade; and because many colleges do not require students to take U.S. History. If not in high school, some Americans will never learn pre-1877 U.S. History. That would be tragic. **EM**

Source—Educational Research Analysts Newsletter, a publication of the Mel Gablers web-site: www.textbookreviews.org/.



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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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