

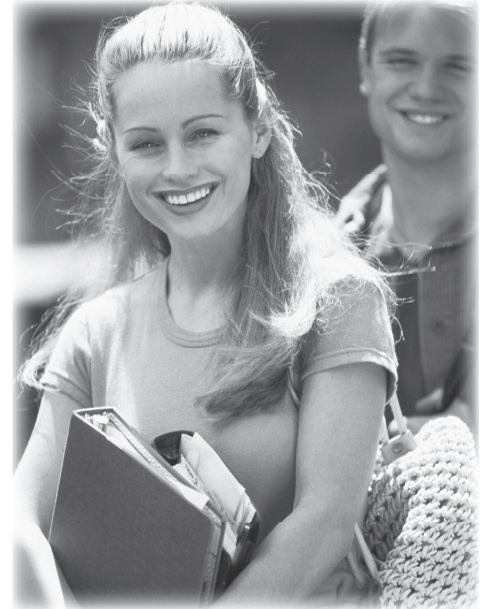
Education *Matters*

December 2005

A publication of the Association of American Educators

TEACHERS OF PROMISE

An interview with educational trailblazer Phil Bigler



Phil Bigler is a teacher on a mission to help new teachers make a successful transition from college to the classroom, and to support them during their crucial early years.

In 1998 Mr. Bigler was named National Teacher of the Year, and in 1999 he was honored as one of the recipients of The Milken National Educators Award. Both awards recognized his many years teaching history at Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology in Alexandria, Virginia.

Currently, he is the director of the James Madison Center, at James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Virginia, where he leads an innovative program for new teachers called “Teachers of Promise” in conjunction with the Virginia Department of Education, and the Virginia Milken Educator Network.

EM: How did it feel to be honored as one of the recipients of The Milken National Educators Award?

BIGLER: One of the greatest aspects of The Milken National Educators Award is

that you do not apply for it, they find you. I was one of the initial class of Milken Educators from Virginia. We have since formed the Virginia Milken Educators Network (VMEN) and now have twenty-three members from throughout the Commonwealth. Every time we meet, I am in awe of the talent that exists in our nation’s schools. These individuals are true professionals and represent the very best in American education. Collectively, we have made it our network’s goal to help new teachers make a successful transition from college to the classroom, and to sup-

port them during their crucial early years. It is one way that we can give back to this remarkable profession.

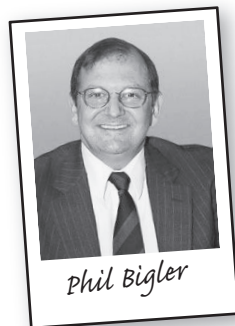
EM: What are the biggest challenges facing new teachers today?

BIGLER: Teaching has always been hard work, but it seems that each new generation of educators faces a new set of challenges. The recent technological revolution has changed the modern classroom; however, effective use of computers and

the Internet to advance learning still poses serious obstacles. On one hand, the world’s museums, archives, and art galleries have become accessible and research is easier than ever before. Spell check, editing tools, and note-taking software have improved opportunities for learning, but students still tend to surf and prefer multimedia glitz to substance. The so-called Information Revolution has failed abysmally to distinguish quality from quantity so even the best students are unsure about what is important and what is accurate. Our “iPOD Generation” is digitally connected, but they have a dangerously shortened attention span; their quest for immediate gratification has made it increasingly difficult for them to concentrate or to think. Few modern students can imagine sitting alone reading a classic or spending a quiet afternoon in a library.

Moreover, plagiarism, however inadvertent, has become rampant in our schools, and cut and paste research means that academic integrity is a constant issue. For the modern teacher, it is a major challenge to motivate students and get them excited about learning but I have found that the best teachers can still do this daily.

(continued on page 2)





Phil Bigler was named 1998 National Teacher of the Year during a ceremony at the White House with President Clinton, Secretary of Education Richard Riley, and Senator Chuck Robb (VA).

EM: What are some other changes you've seen over the years that teachers must now face?

BIGLER: One of the greatest education mistakes in the past twenty-five years has been the litigation of educational policy. The courts and lawsuits have eroded public respect for the schools and have turned parents and teachers into adversaries. This, I believe, is the single greatest change I've seen during my thirty years in education. Early in my career, I could go into a parent conference confident that parents would work with me to help their child succeed. Today, it is just as likely that they will be accompanied by a lawyer or a psychologist's report in order to demand all sorts of special accommodations from the school without ever addressing the underlying issues that may have caused the problem.

The general lack of respect accorded to teachers is a national disgrace, and the news media has contributed to this situation by failing to inform our citizens of what truly goes on in our nation's classrooms. The "good news" in American education is lost in a sea of 24-hour sensationalism. It is no longer good enough to be an excellent classroom teacher; all educators must be advocates for our profession and proactive in offsetting the negative stereotypes that are pervasive in our society. This also means that educators have a responsibility to be positive role models for their students.

EM: You have a very innovative program with the Teachers of Promise Institute. Explain the program.

BIGLER: The Teachers of Promise Institute is in its third year. All thirty-seven of Virgin-

ia's teacher accrediting institutions are invited to bring some of their best pre-service teachers to James Madison University for a quality in-service. Our goals are to welcome these young people into the profession and to assist them in having a successful first year. The event is sponsored by the Virginia Milken Educator Network, the James Madison Center, and the Virginia Department of Education. It lasts two days, and is normally scheduled for mid-March.

We enlist some of the Commonwealth's best educators including state Teachers of the Year and Milken Educators to serve as presenters and mentors during the Institute. After the students meet their mentor, we hold a gala dinner on campus.

Each year we feature a different theme. This year's theme is "Teachers of Promise: Virginia's Brightest Stars." The pre-service teachers each receive special letters of welcome at the dinner written by students, thanking them for choosing teaching as a career. We use all types of multimedia presentations to build excitement and have an inspiring keynote address. The highlight of the evening is when the mentors "pin" the students. Each pre-service teacher is given a special pin that indicates that he is a "Teacher of Promise."

On Saturday, the students meet again with their mentors and then attend another high motivation keynote. They next attend a series of workshops and presentations that are geared towards entry-level educators. At our final general session, we celebrate these young people once again by awarding various door prizes. As far as I know, no other state is doing such a program for pre-service teachers. We hope that ultimately this model will be picked up by other states and will promote greater cooperation between various colleges and universities.

We also hope that it will bridge the gap between the academic, theoretical world and the actual teacher practitioners.

EM: What have new teachers told you are the benefits they've received from the TOP Institute?

BIGLER: The teachers feel validated in their

choice of a profession. They are treated so well and with dignity that it makes them feel good about being a teacher. I have found that experienced teachers often get burned out because no one ever says "thank you" or acknowledges their hard work. Every day they go into their classrooms, work with kids, and perform miracles and they have a sense that no one notices. To honor teachers for their work is something we must do better and at the Teachers of Promise Institute, we help these new educators realize that they are going to be doing important work and that their efforts are, in fact, appreciated.

They also get practical advice and help about how to start successfully. The first year is so important because you are overwhelmed. The details of teaching are exhausting and even the best prepared educators are shocked by how hard it is to be an effective teacher. The students leave TOP with practical and immediately useful ideas on how to set up their classroom, make a positive impression, set the tone for the school year, and communicate effectively with parents. They also have a new support structure that allows them to seek guidance whenever they need it without the fear of criticism or evaluation.

These young teachers have been recognized for their commitment and "promise." The entire point of teacher recognition programs is to promote professionalism and to represent our vocation in a positive manner.

EM: You've said that you believe teachers in the profession should assume a greater responsibility for helping new teachers making the transition from the university to the classroom. What are practical ways an experienced teacher can do that?

BIGLER: I used to believe that it was "good enough" to be an excellent classroom teacher. I no longer believe that. To be a great teacher you have to be a professional and that means that you have a commitment not only to your individual students but also to your profession. We all must become advocates for teaching and encourage others to follow this important career path. Here are a few things that teachers need to be:

Recruiters. Teachers need to be good recruiters. I am constantly frustrated when I hear educators say, "I'm just a teacher." If that is how you view your profession, no one would ever want to become a teacher. We

“I used to believe that it was ‘good enough’ to be an excellent classroom teacher. I no longer believe that. To be a great teacher you have to be a professional and that means that you have not only a commitment to your individual students but also to your profession.” - *Phil Bigler*

need to be proud of what we do as educators and to recognize that it takes a remarkable amount of talent and skill to motivate and engage young people daily.

Few people in our society can do that and yet teachers do it every single day of their lives. We need to encourage students to choose teaching as a career by re-establishing Future Teachers clubs or offering classes such as our Virginia “Teach for Tomorrow” curriculum, which gives seniors an outstanding opportunity to learn what teaching is all about.

Role Models. Teacher also need to be role models. For some reason, this is often seen as “old fashioned” in our world today but the best teachers are those who students look up to and want to emulate. I went into teaching because I wanted to be like some of my best teachers; I wanted to do for others what they had done for me.

It is important that teachers maintain their idealism and their dreams throughout their career. As my principal once told me, “To be a teacher is to be forever an optimist.” If you do not have faith in the future or a belief that children can succeed and become better people, you need to find another profession.

Public Relations Experts. Teachers need to be public relations experts. One bad news story negates ten good news stories. Sadly, in our society, the media doesn’t cover the day-to-day good news from America’s classrooms. Instead, they focus on the aberrations such as Columbine or some other sensational story and they cover it 24 hours a day. Little wonder that most Americans have a warped sense of reality when it comes to our schools.

Teachers need to offset these negative impressions by being public relation experts. It is imperative that you get to know the local

education reporter and to bring him into the school on a regular basis. Likewise, teachers need to go to the local chamber of commerce or fraternal organizations and become a presence at their meetings. One thing that all schools should do is “Take a student to lunch” on a monthly basis. The teacher and the principal showcase a talented young person at a community luncheon so that the business leaders and politicians have direct contact with the schools and an awareness of what is going on. We need to take control of the perception of our profession and help people understand what is truly going on in our schools. When we elevate our profession, more people will be attracted to it as a career.

Teaching has to be given the same respect and dignity as other professions and it is up to us to ensure that this happens.

Accepting. Teachers need to accept student teachers. The student teaching experience is a short apprenticeship and vital to helping young people become successful teachers. Yet, too often assignment of student teachers is haphazard at best. Often the weakest member of the faculty volunteers to be a supervisor with the expectation that they can turn over the class to the college student and take the semester off. The young teacher is virtually abandoned and struggles to learn what is needed to be successful. Moreover, they often are exposed to the worst type of negativity that routinely comes from the disgruntled teacher loungers and it is no wonder that they become discouraged and disillusioned. It is incumbent upon our best teachers to accept the professional responsibility of taking on the challenge of a student teacher, to become not only their supervisor but also their mentor. A great teacher can do wonders for a young person to help them bridge the gap between the theoretical and

the real world. It is one thing to know the nuances of multiple intelligences and quite another to comfort a crying third grader.

Cooperative. Teachers need to work with colleges and universities. Actual classroom practitioners need to be involved in teacher training. Teachers should volunteer to talk to college classes and to serve as adjunct faculty instructors. We need to look at education as a continuum, K-18 rather than artificially segmented into grade levels. All teachers and professors should be working as partners for the common goal of helping young people learn.

Mentors. Teachers need to serve as mentors. Most jurisdictions are required by law to have mentoring programs for first-year teachers. Talented, experienced educators should get involved in such programs because they are vital in helping new teachers develop as teachers. Effective mentoring programs provide support and encouragement for the new teachers. They are also reinvigorating for the mentors because working with new teachers reminds us of why we are still in this profession.

Professionals. Finally, teachers need to be good colleagues and model appropriate professional behaviors. We need to treat one another with respect. Too often, teachers are our own worst enemies by talking poorly about colleagues or denigrating the efforts of others. This unprofessional behavior is detrimental to the profession and hurts everyone, especially those who may wish to pursue teaching as a career. ■

To find out more about the Teachers of Promise program, visit www.jmu.edu/milken and click on Teachers of Promise.

Some Children Should Be Left Behind

The unconventional (but highly successful) wisdom of Rafe Esquith

By Catherine Seipp

Rafe Esquith, who for 20 years has gotten amazing results teaching everything from algebra to Shakespeare to inner-city Los Angeles fifth graders, will make you rethink at least a few prejudices you may have had about education. Or at least, he made me do so. And that's an achievement in itself.

Because he's a public-school teacher, I assumed he'd complain about underfunding. Nope. "We always had lots of cash; we didn't always spend it wisely, but the money was there," he writes in *There Are No Shortcuts*, his fascinating book about his teaching career. Okay, I thought, then out of professional courtesy, he won't tell tales out of school. Wrong again. (Which is one reason, by the way, that this memoir is as page-turning as a thriller.)

William Shakespeare

"They said, 'Rafe, we don't want you to teach Shakespeare, we want you to teach something academic,'" recalled Esquith of his early days. "Because I was a coward, that first year my class decided to do Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*. And I didn't call downtown to see if Thornton Wilder was academic. But the region superintendent came; she cried at the end when Emily died. And she came up to me and said, 'Rafe, I've never seen Shakespeare done better.'"

Esquith was speaking at a PBS press conference for the excellent new P.O.V. documentary *The Hobart Shakespearians*, which premiered September 6th and was produced and directed by Mel Stuart, a Shakespeare buff and director of the original *Willy Won-*

ka and the Chocolate Factory. This isn't the first time the celebrated outside world has come to Esquith's classroom, though. One regular visitor over the years has been Sir Ian McKellan, who in the film reads a short speech from *Hamlet* to the class, then tells them, "I know you work hard, and you understand every single word. And that can't be said of all actors who do Shakespeare."

Another false idea I had was that only especially bright ten-year-olds would be interested in staying after school every day to put on a full-length Shakespeare play at the end of the year. The truth is that Esquith, who among other distinctions has been honored

say, 'How can I help?' Then you have kid three, in serious trouble, and the parents say, 'If you try to help my kid, we're going to kill you.' Most teachers spend their careers at one end or the other—they either love working with easy kids or spend all their time trying to control the incorrigible ones. My favorite kids are the kids in the middle—the average kid who kind of does his work but doesn't realize how great he can be if someone spends a little time with him."

What Esquith also does (and this may shock the sentimental) is refuse to waste time trying to teach those bottom students

"My favorite kids are the kids in the middle—the average kid who kind of does his work but doesn't realize how great he can be if someone spends a little time with him."

with Oprah Winfrey's Use Your Life Award, an MBE from Queen Elizabeth, and Disney's Teacher of the Year, teaches not gifted students but anyone lucky enough to end up in his fifth-grade class at Hobart Elementary, a huge (almost 2,400 students) school where over 90 percent of the children come from uneducated low-income immigrant families who don't speak English at home. (Most are from Latin America and Korea.)

Academic Triage

"I do a sort of triage," said Esquith. "You have kid one, the gift from God, the parents

who don't want to learn. Instead, he controls them to the extent that they don't drag down the middle, who are then free to rise to the top if they choose to put in the work. And despite his international acclaim, Esquith is still assigned his share of troublemakers.

"I had an interesting first day when one of my students took all his clothes off," Esquith shrugged at the press conference, shortly after the beginning of the school year. (At Hobart, like most schools in L.A.'s year-round system, that was in July.)

"Some children should be left behind,"

he likes to say. On the other hand, he can see potential in children that other teachers don't. In the P.O.V. film, one of Esquith's young Shakespearean stars remembers the fourth-grade teacher who would dismiss questions with an irritated "You weren't listening."

"And I was listening," the boy tells the camera in frustration. "I just didn't get it. Rafe will explain it to me 500 times if he has to." This is no exaggeration. In a remarkable scene, the film shows a roomful of ten-year-olds sobbing as they read in *Huckleberry Finn* that Huck has decided he'll go to hell rather than turn in Jim as a slave. How were these young children so moved by a book that's not normally taught until high school or (more typically) college? "What the film can't show," explained Esquith, "is me stopping, truly, every paragraph, going through things word by word. That kind of thing doesn't bother me."

Esquith also recalls with a laugh, on camera, the fourth-grade teacher's warning about the boy who wasn't listening, that he was unpredictable, maybe even dangerous: "I said, 'He's Hamlet!'"

Field Trips

Esquith generally uses the "some chil-



dren should be left behind" line in connection with field trips. And here he really won me over. Because when my 16-year-old daughter was in public elementary school, she preferred staying home and reading to going on class trips, which indeed seemed like the same pointless exercises in running around and screaming I remembered from my own childhood. Most parents, and every teacher, thought my attitude was antisocial and bizarre. I assumed Esquith would too, since every year he takes his class on two major trips.

Again, no. "I saw other school groups in Washington, D.C., running around without any concept of what they were looking at," he said with distaste. "They were jumping on the new World War II memorial and skateboarding across it. I'm serious."

Esquith's approach to field trips is rather different. His first field trip each year is to the Hollywood Bowl, *after* each child has demonstrated his ability to participate by writing a report on every composer featured at that evening's performance, learning and playing parts of the pieces on a musical instrument, and demonstrating (during a dry-run in class, listening to a CD) the ability to sit quietly and politely for two hours listening to classical music.

If he can't do all this, he's left behind, but not unkindly. "I explain that there are many

things students can't do yet: they don't drive a car, date, or vote," Esquith writes in his book, which I was surprised to find as page-turning as a thriller. "And they don't do these things not because they're bad people but because they need to acquire certain skills before they're allowed to do them."

As a result, Esquith's groups of ten-year-olds are so unusually well-behaved on public outings that astonished strangers often insist on picking up the tab when they see them at lunch. Occasionally, they take another tactic. While buying tickets at the Empire State Building, Esquith heard a ticket-taker approach his quiet group of kids and loudly exhort them, "You're only gonna be young once, so have lotsa fun and don't worry about bein' good."

The kids tolerated the man politely. But when Esquith came back, one girl reassured her teacher. "Rafe," she said, "that guy takes tickets in a line for a tourist attraction. You think we're gonna listen to him?" ■



Photo by Emmanuelle Richard

Catherine Seipp is a National Review Online contributor where this article first appeared.



Troops Turned Teachers

Washington's National Center for Alternative Certification recently released the results of a survey profiling a program called Troops to Teachers. The program recruits retired members of the armed forces to the teaching profession.

With roughly half of the 3,000 teachers responding to the survey, the program appears to make a real dent in correcting the profession's traditional gender and race disparities, with a profile of 82 percent men and 23 percent African-Americans. Perhaps reflecting previous battlefield experience as well as years of coping with military red tape, these soldiers-turned-teachers reported routinely being less concerned over problems that seem to drive other teachers crazy, such as unruly kids, paperwork, and NCLB compliance. And participants are more likely to take education coursework than traditionally trained teachers.

Unlike other teacher recruitment programs, the goal of Troops to Teachers is not to reform education but to provide gainful employment to retiring servicemen.

Source—NCTQ Bulletin, a weekly electronic publication of The National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ). Website: www.nctq.org.

New Online Writing Evaluation Tool for Teachers

Get immediate feedback on students' use of grammar, mechanics, style, organization, and development.

Writing proficiency is a critical life skill, but for many teachers, it is difficult to find and commit the amount of time it takes to help each student develop that skill. *Criterion* is a new online writing evaluation program for teachers that gives immediate feedback about students' use of grammar, mechanics, style, organization, and development. It also gives teachers the opportunity to take a microscopic look at each student's essay to make informed instructional changes.

Criterion recently received the 2005 Education Software Review (EDDIE) Award from *ComputEd Gazette*.

Criterion is a Web-based instructional tool that allows students to submit essays for immediate evaluation, including a holistic score and annotated diagnostic feedback about the use of grammar, mechanics, style, and organization and development. More than half a million elementary, middle, high school, and college students across the United States and around the world have used the *Criterion* service.

According to the *ComputEd Gazette* review, "Teachers can easily create and manage classes and students, choosing from a

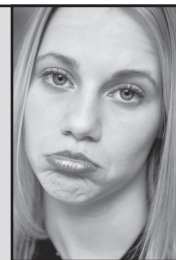


The *Criterion* library encompasses grade-school to graduate-level topics. Currently, there are 44 topics for grades 4-8; 29 topics for grades 9-12.

variety of tools and options. Essay projects are assigned to students, and subsequent progress reports include charts and graphs with detailed analyses. Students will find the service flexible and intuitive, allowing them to work offline, then copying and pasting. Drop-down menus and mouse-over functions are effectively used to access information. In fact, with a minimum of tech savvy, a teacher can design mouse-over feedback comments to students." The review also praised the *Criterion* service as "well-designed," "user friendly," and a "valuable aid to both teacher and student."

For more information about *Criterion* and an eight-minute online tour, visit www.ets.org.

Gap between Grades & Achievement Troubling



Anyone who has seen a student suffering from "senioritis" could have predicted the findings of a recent survey of high school students. An Indiana University study shows that a majority of high school students (55 percent) spend no more than three hours a week studying, yet are still managing to maintain good grades (65 percent). Further, only 11 percent of college-bound seniors report spending seven or more hours a week studying. This pattern—receiving good

grades while doing very little work—is terrible preparation for both college and the real world. It's also a further example of what Michael Barone has famously called the division between "soft America," whose mushy center is our K-12 system where self-esteem and easy achievement are the rage, and "hard America," the meritocratic world of high education and work.

Source—The Education Gadfly, an e-publication of the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation. Website: www.edexcellence.net/gadfly.



For information on AAE member benefits, visit www.aateachers.org.

LET FREEDOM RING!

January 16 is Religious Freedom Day. Here are some ideas for commemorating the day at your school.

By Eric Buehrer

Each year, the President declares January 16 to be Religious Freedom Day, and calls upon Americans to “observe this day through appropriate events and activities in homes, schools, and places of worship.” The day is the anniversary of the passage, in 1786, of the Virginia Statute on Religious Freedom. Thomas Jefferson drafted the legislation and considered it one of his greatest achievements. It stopped the practice of taxing people to pay for the support of the local clergy, and it protected the civil rights of people to express their religious beliefs without suffering discrimination.

The men who drafted the U.S. Constitution leaned heavily on Jefferson’s statute in establishing the First Amendment’s guarantee of religious freedom.



Today, that protection is as important as ever. In too many instances, public school teachers tell students they cannot include their faith in their homework assignments or classroom discussions.

The U.S. Department of Education has issued guidelines explaining student religious liberties. Talking about religious liberties (especially explaining student liberties to parents) will make an administrator’s job easier because it will clarify that schools need not be “religion-free zones.” It is often the case that parents who complain to school officials about what they think are violations of the separation of church and state do not understand the appropriate and lawful place religious expression can have at school.

Religious Freedom Day is not “celebrate-our-diversity day.” Freedom means the freedom to disagree (respectfully). The main message students need to hear is that they shouldn’t feel that they have to be “under-

cover” about their religion or that somehow they have to be “hush-hush” about their family’s beliefs.

Ideas for the Classroom

This January, Religious Freedom Day falls on the same day as Martin Luther King, Jr., Day and you can make thematic connections between the Rev. King’s religious liberty and his civil rights action.

Here are ideas you can use to recognize Religious Freedom Day (for more help, visit www.ReligiousFreedomDay.com):

1. Read the Presidential Proclamation to the class. The Proclamation is on the Web at www.whitehouse.gov. At the White House website, enter a search for “Religious Freedom Day.” If the 2006 Proclamation is not posted in time for you to use it in class, consider using the 2005 Proclamation.

2. Have students write a paper on “What religious freedom means to me.”

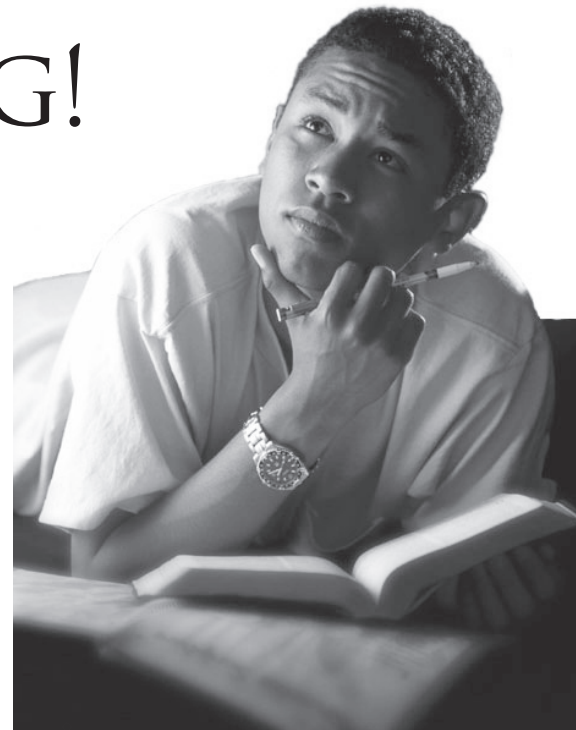
3. Distribute to students copies of the U.S. Department of Education’s guidelines on student religious liberties. If you do nothing else to commemorate Religious Freedom Day, this alone would do more to promote real freedom at your school. You can also write a letter to parents and staple it to the guidelines. The letter can introduce Religious Freedom Day and convey, “Our school is a safe place for your child to express your family’s religious faith.”

4. Talk about countries where freedom of religion is not allowed. For research on this, visit www.freedomhouse.org/religion.

5. Distribute and discuss the Virginia Statute on Religious Freedom drafted by Thomas Jefferson. Since the writing style of the statute is difficult to read, discuss each sentence with the students and have the class paraphrase the statute. (Find a sample paraphrase at www.ReligiousFreedomDay.com to use with younger students.)

Student Liberties

Freedom of speech can take different forms. It includes what you say to other



people as well as your freedom to speak to God in prayer; it includes what you write in school assignments or what you create in an art class; it includes the words you give to a friend either by speaking or in writing. The information below comes from the U.S. Department of Education’s document *Guidance on Constitutionally Protected Prayer in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools* (Feb. 7, 2003). Here is a summary:

1. Students can pray, read their Bibles or other scriptures, and talk about their faith at school during school hours.

2. Students can organize prayer groups and religious clubs and announce their meetings.

3. Students can express their faith in their class work and homework.

4. Teachers can organize prayer groups and devotional study groups with their colleagues.

5. Students may be able to go off campus to have a Bible study during school hours.

6. Students can express their faith at a school event.

7. Students can express their faith at their graduation ceremony. ■

Eric Buehrer is president of Gateways to Better Education, a nonprofit organization based in Lake Forest, California, helping public schools teach Judeo-Christian history, thought, and values. Visit www.ReligiousFreedomDay.com.

Take Advantage of NCLB Options

Money is available to help students

By Cindy Omlin

Much to educators' consternation, education policymakers at times forget that students are marvelously unique. This uniqueness often challenges educators. It demands that we have the flexibility and skills to help students learn in ways that best accommodate their needs. However, the mandates and regulations of "the system" often tie teachers' hands. They frequently remove effective tools from our teaching toolkits, forcing us to treat every child the same. This closes doors of learning for some students.

Despite its own tendency to perpetuate a one-size-fits-all model, the No Child Left Behind Act recognizes that some students may need additional assistance or alternatives to help them achieve. One of these options is free tutoring for students who are falling behind. Money is available for this tutoring. The act requires that "chronically failing schools must set aside at least 20 percent of their Title I funding for tutoring and choice programs to help boost scores."

Unfortunately, it has been reported that few low-income students in failing public schools are taking advantage of the free tutoring provided by private vendors. *Investors Business Daily* reports, "Across the country more than 5 million students are eligible for tu-



toring services, known in the law as supplemental educational services, or SES. Only about 750,000 are being tutored."

Parents who don't know about the service, however, cannot fully partner with the classroom teacher to increase student achievement. Teachers have a professional obligation to know about this provision of the law, inform the parents, and open doors for students who need additional resources.

Some may view these referrals as admissions of failure or inadequacy. Far from it. Referring a student for tutoring is not an indictment of your worth as an

educator or that of the school. Rather, it is an acknowledgment of children's uniqueness. If the "system" is to truly open doors for all students, we must be humbly willing to share the responsibility for educating students.

Don M. Randel, President of the University of Chicago, comments in the *University of Chicago Magazine* that educators must do all we can to "lift the lives of children out of the slavery of ignorance to which they might otherwise be condemned." Having the power to improve the lives of others imposes a certain responsibility, he says. For the University of Chicago, that has included operating charter schools with good ideas "born of faculty research that can improve the ability of children in some of the nation's worst schools to read and learn." For educators in public schools, it means that, in addition to our individual efforts, we ensure that all doors are open for students, including knowledge of and access to private tutoring. ■



Cindy Omlin is Executive Director of Northwest Professional Educators (NWPE), a state affiliate of AAE. You can visit NWPE's website at www.nwpe.org.

association of
american educators 

Education Matters is a publication of the
Association of American Educators (AAE)
27405 Puerta Real, Suite 230
Mission Viejo, CA 92691-6388

www.aaeteachers.org; (800) 704-7799
E-mail: info@aaeteachers.org
Gary Beckner, Managing Editor
Kelley Autry, Associate Editor & Researcher
Diane Meyer, Editorial Assistant
Bobette Craycraft, Editorial Assistant

Presorted Standard
US Postage Paid
#400
Laguna Niguel, CA