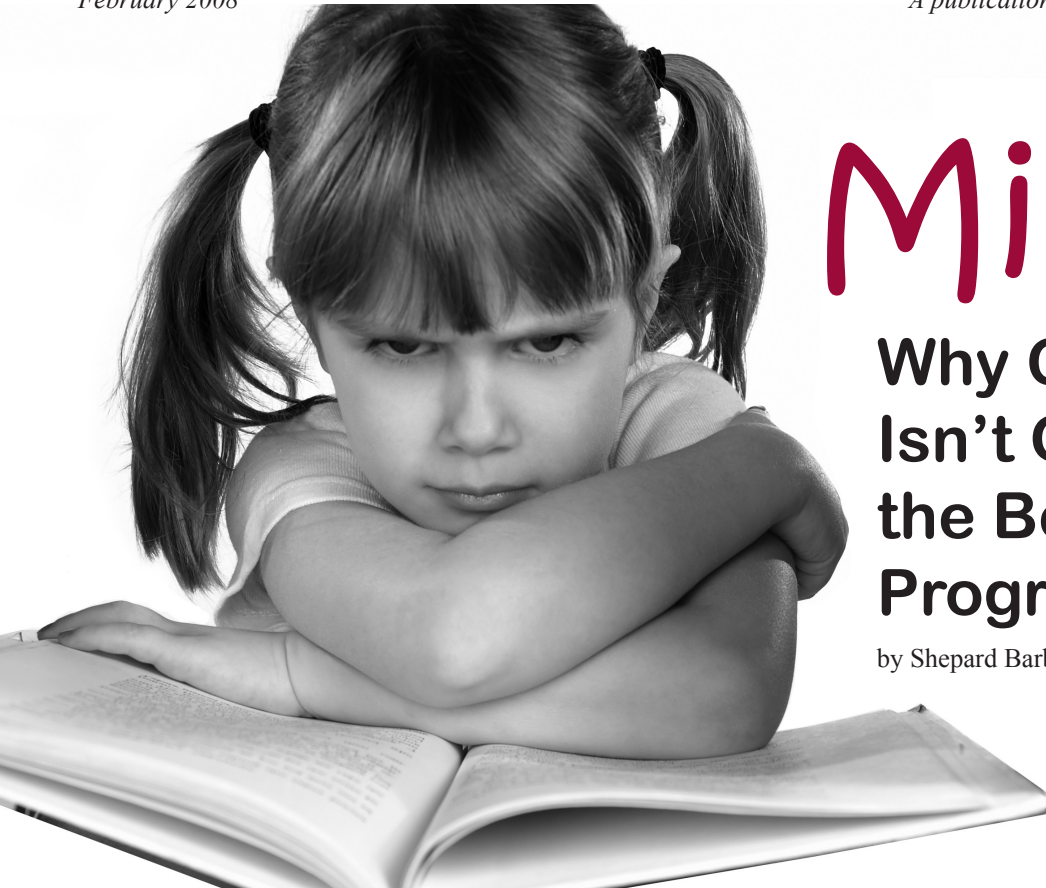


# Education Matters

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## Misread

### Why Congress Isn't Giving Her the Best Reading Program

by Shepard Barbash

Reading First, funded at \$1 billion per year, is among the most promising federal efforts to help the poor. Title I, funded at \$12 billion per year, is not nearly so effective. That President Bush has just signed into law a 2008 budget that gives the latter an 8.6 percent increase in funding and the former a 64 percent decrease confirms the wisdom of Lincoln, who observed, “In republican democracies, public sentiment is everything. With it nothing can fail; without it nothing can succeed.”

Notwithstanding Reading First's success increasing early literacy rates among the poor, public sentiment for the program remains weaker than that of its enemies, who have proved more influential in Congress and more determined than Reading

First's stewards in the administration.

Launched in 2002 as part of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), Reading First helps states help their districts improve reading instruction for poor students in low-performing elementary schools. Evaluations by the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB),

**“I want to scream!”  
a dismayed  
Los Angeles school  
district administrator  
emailed me.**

Congress's Government Accountability Office, the Center on Education Policy, and several states (e.g., Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, and Washington) have corroborated U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) findings that the program is popular among educators and is improving student achievement. Indeed OMB singles out Reading First as the only component of NCLB with enough evidence to be judged “effective.”

#### Too Prescriptive

Unlike Title I, an entrenched entitlement that gives districts too much freedom to spend taxpayers' money, Reading First is controversial because it is prescriptive. The law requires USDOE to ensure that states and districts use curricula and practices that are based on “scientifically based reading research.” It requires educators to administer timely assessments for every child in grades K-3 and adjust instruction as needed based on the results. It funds close monitoring of states and districts and authorizes meaningful intervention when they fail to follow their approved plans. Such practices amount to a sea change for teachers, principals, district coordinators, colleges, publishers, state agencies—everyone in the field of reading education.

Implementation has not been easy. Pressure from a few vendors who felt unfairly shut out of the program led to an investigation and a series of unfavorable—and

largely uncomprehending—reports by USDOE’s Office of the Inspector General citing potential conflicts of interest and mismanagement. A congressional hearing presented the frustrating spectacle of Democrats attacking a program their own Democratic constituents have grown to love. “I want to scream!” a dismayed Los Angeles school district administrator emailed me while watching the hearings.

But not enough people did scream. Reading First reaches 10 percent of public elementary schools—not just any schools but historically the nation’s worst. Bottled up in their respective bureaucracies, educators in these districts and the state agencies

who support them have been no match for the well-connected vendors who have complained to Congress about the program. Principal among these are Robert Slavin of the Success for All Foundation (whose allies include Representative Dave Obey, chairman of the influential House Appropriations Committee) and the still more powerful Reading Recovery Council of North America (whose supporters include Senators Hillary Clinton and Susan Collins). Slavin and Reading Recovery understandably want for their programs a bigger slice of the federal poverty program pie. One way to get it is to starve or otherwise discredit Reading

First, under which their own programs, due in large part to their own limitations, have fared poorly.

How likely are Democrats in Congress to defend a program identified with President Bush, their poison, at the expense of Title I, their catnip? Not very likely so long as their constituents don’t prod them to.

“My district does not want to take this on because it fears that if Reading First is not cut, then Title I will be,” the Los Angeles official emailed, adding, plaintively, “Advice?”

There isn’t much advice to give, so long as districts care more about getting money than about whether the money they get is actually spent to improve student learning. Reading First’s administrators could try to insinuate their program’s virtues like a friendly virus into Title I, but that is a quixotic task, particularly if the accountability loopholes in NCLB are widened instead of closed.

The cut to Reading First’s budget comes just as states are reporting more interest in the program than ever before. “Three years ago they had to convince people to apply—now they don’t have enough money for all the people that want to apply,” says Stu Greenberg, who trains state and district leaders for the Eastern Regional

Reading First Technical Assistance Center, one of three university-based centers set up to help states implement the program.

“We could add 300 schools tomorrow if we had the money,” a staffer at the New York State Education Department says. That’s 300 schools ready to volunteer for the most exacting regimen the feds have ever dared to impose on educators accustomed to teaching their own way—added to more than 6,000 schools who have already successfully competed to get into the program. So much for the conservative mantra of local control. So much for the liberal cry that more money is all we need.

Reading First, with its disdain for fantasies and its seriousness about the details, is making our politicians (and a lot of others) look outmoded and slight. No wonder it has become a policy orphan, like the children it serves. One can only hope that the next administration will preserve the program for what it is and what it might become: a boon to the nation’s poor and to anyone who struggles to read. ■

*This article first appeared in Thomas B. Fordham Foundation’s Education Gadfly.*

*Shepard Barbash, the former Mexico City bureau chief for the Houston Chronicle, has written for the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Smithsonian Magazine, Washington Post, and other publications. He can be reached at [edjazz@mindspring.com](mailto:edjazz@mindspring.com).*

## What is Scientifically Based Reading Research?

First, research must address achievement in one or more skills in reading. Second, it must be generalizable to the larger population of students. Third, the research needs to examine the effectiveness of an approach by comparison with other types of instruction. Finally, other scholars from the field must review the research and consider it high quality.

Scientifically based reading research (SBRR) has identified explicit and systematic instruction in five key areas as essential to effective early reading instruction.

1. **Phonemic Awareness**—The understanding that individual sounds of spoken language (phonemes) work together to make words. This allows readers to hear, identify, and manipulate the individual sounds.
2. **Phonics**—The relationship between the sounds of spoken language (phonemes) and the letters representing

those sounds in written language (graphemes). Skill in phonics helps students to recognize familiar words and decode unfamiliar ones.

3. **Vocabulary**—The ability to store information about the meaning and pronunciation of words. There are four types of vocabulary: listening, speaking, reading, and writing.
4. **Fluency**—The skill of reading texts accurately and quickly, which allows readers to recognize and comprehend words at the same time.
5. **Reading Comprehension**—Understanding, remembering, and communicating with others about what has been read. Comprehension strategies help readers to make sense of a text.

Reading First’s requirement for SBRR does not mean that there is an “approved list” of reading programs that schools may use. Reading First allows states and districts to make choices about reading instruction, as long as the programs and materials selected are based on SBRR.

*Source: [www.readingfirstsupport.us](http://www.readingfirstsupport.us)*

# Leaving A Legacy

## Trailblazer for Independent Teacher Organizations Retires

The Annual Conference of the Associated Professional Educators of Louisiana (A+PEL) not only marked its 20th year, it was also an opportunity to honor a very strong and well-respected leader of the organization, Polly Broussard.

The conference marked the last major A+PEL event for which Polly would serve as Executive Director. Polly announced her retirement to the public, and gave her final executive report with the note that Associate Director Kathy Campbell will be taking on the position of Executive Director beginning January 1. Through Polly's words of appreciation for A+PEL and its supporters, everyone sensed the great emotion and love she has for the organization.

Polly was among the first in the country to embark on leading an independent teacher organization. She was a public school teacher for over twenty years, serving as an early childhood educator. Polly also served on the Louisiana State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE).

She truly has set a precedent and will leave behind very big shoes to fill. To emphasize the impact that Polly has had, a scholarship has been named after her, the Polly J. Broussard Student Teacher Scholarship. This annual scholarship will be funded by Ross and Yerger Insurance, the company that provides A+PEL's members with liability insurance. When Joey Hutto, Senior Vice President of Ross and Yerger, completed his presentation of this award, Polly expressed her gratitude and stated, "There is no greater way to honor a person than to name a scholarship after him." With this honor, she will always know

that she is still having a positive impact on education.

Guest speaker Tracey Bailey, AAE Director of Education Policy and 1993 National Teacher of the Year, also lauded Polly in his address as he spoke highly of her contribution to the growth of independent teacher associations and her passion for A+PEL.

It is evident that many others share the feeling of gratitude, respect, and appreciation for all that Polly has done for A+PEL and the teachers of Louisiana.

"You mention A+PEL and people across the state will immediately ask about Polly," says Sammie Salsbury, the former Northeast Area Director of A+PEL. "I am so grateful for having had the opportunity to work with her! My life has been blessed by the association."

Dan Juneau, president of the Louisiana Association of Business and Industry, adds, "Polly has elevated the teaching profession in Louisiana to a new level. She is a consummate professional and a true friend to all teachers and students. She will be especially missed by all of us in the field of education who try to measure up to the bar of Polly's past accomplishments to improve the Louisiana public education system and the status of Louisiana's professional teaching corps."

Jeanie Achord, Livingston Parish Chapter president, summed up the feelings of so many educators who worked with Polly over the years, "She is the best example of a professional that I have ever known!" ■



Educational Leader Polly Broussard

# Protecting Educators' Freedom

## Iowa Educators Vigilant Against Forced Unionism

Last year, Iowa was consumed in a bitter battle over the status of Right-to-Work when House Democrats tried to make Iowa a forced unionism state. Right-to-Work prevailed when they realized they did not have enough votes to pass the "Fair Share" bill that would have eliminated Right to Work.

Professional Educators of Iowa (PEI), an AAE state partner, led the fight for teachers' rights. Jim Hawkins, executive director of PEI, reports that there are still forty-nine out of 100 representatives who have committed to gutting the Iowa Right-to-Work law by pushing the "fair share" bill again in 2008.

Lieutenant Governor Patti Judge has proudly announced that the executive office will be pushing for forced union dues. Governor Culver has stated that he will sign this legislation should it reach his desk.

The Association of Business and Industry, one of PEI's allies in this struggle, tried to persuade the majority party leadership to drop the issue.

"No deal," the leadership said. Hawkins warns "they will work very hard to persuade two more to change and give them the fifty-one votes they need to pass this assault on freedom."

"Our freedom and the freedom of every independent teacher is at stake," Hawkins warns. "Think about what it would be like to finance organizations you don't want. Do PETA members want to pay NRA dues?"

PEI is urging its members to continue to build support for the current Right-to-Work law and resist attacks on educators' freedom. ■



Jim Hawkins, Executive Director of Professional Educators of Iowa



# 10

Over the last year, since I retired as a public high school teacher in northern Virginia, countless people have asked me the same question that plagues some professional educators: What makes a good teacher? And since I had been selected by the students as their “Outstanding Teacher of the Year” for three out of the last five years, my questioners expected me to know the answer.

Having heard the question for one too many times, I attempted to make my own criteria and failed miserably. Each time I developed a list, it seemed somewhat inadequate to the rather profound question that really asked what students truly want in a teacher, who can motivate them beyond their levels of self-acceptance expectations.

Having drawn a blank portrait of the ideal teacher, I decided to ask some of my former high school students. After all, they were the ones who had to endure the teacher all year long. I prefaced my questions with the caveat that the students should consider basic qualities and not concentrate on a particular subject matter. In fact, what I discovered was that the students compiled a list that ranked a teacher’s knowledge of the subject near the bottom of the list, while passion and enthusiasm for the subject, the classroom, and the students as individuals was universally ranked uppermost in the students’ minds.

Here, then are the rankings, as compiled by some high school students themselves. The listing is not meant to be the result of an exhaustive research project but a rare glimpse into what the students think of – and want from – us.

**1 PASSION AND ENTHUSIASM**—Those two words emerged repeatedly from my students. If a teacher “does not care” about the subject he/she is teaching, the students instantly recognize the absence of commitment and immediately turn themselves off. This does not mean the teacher must be totally committed to the subject but, according to the students, must recognize and appreciate the value of mastering the material.

**2 NATURAL**—Be yourself. Do not try to emulate someone else’s teaching style or classroom demeanor. If it is not you, that “phoniness” will shine through your mask and be quickly spotted by the students.

**3 HONORABLE AND TRUSTWORTHY**—While these words may carry different definitions for different people, what I took away from the students was a sense that the teacher must be fair and be perceived as fair to all of the students in the class. No pets and no favorites! Especially, no clear targets! They also seemed to be telling me that when they confided in a teacher, they expected the teacher to honor the sanctity of their confidence.

# Characteristics of a Good Teacher

## What Students Want in Their Teachers

By Bill Rhatican

**4 ENGAGING AND HUMOROUS**—Although listed third, the students really wanted a teacher who could reach across the barriers of age and intellect and engage them on a level that, while it may require them to reach above their own expectations, was founded in their “comfort zone.”

**5 DEMANDING**—While this may seem incongruous with the qualities just listed, it is clear that students really want a teacher to take them where they have never gone before and in a way that challenges their intellect and stretches their horizons. One student at my high school, for example, asked me, even though he was not a student of mine, if he could submit a twenty-page essay to me, a requirement for my students. I, of course, told him he could. It was one of the better essays I read that year.

**6 COMMUNICATIVE**—No matter how much a teacher may know – or care – about his/her subject, it matters little unless the concepts that underlie that information can be transferred to the students in an easily digestible form. A teacher must be able to do more than spew facts, mathematical equations, or dates and locations of significant battles. What is even more important than the facts transferred are the concepts that brought the facts to light in the first place.

**7 REASONABLE**—Expect the best from the students but understand that there might be some circumstances that may impact a student’s attention in class or to homework assignments over which the student has no control. Provide a certain degree of “wiggle room” within which the student feels comfortable operating, sometimes under difficult circumstances.

**8 CARING**—Truly care about your students, their outside interests, clubs, and sporting events. By attending as many of those events as possible, the teacher demonstrates a much greater awareness of the student as an individual and is much more likely to get the academic response being sought in the classroom. Don’t be afraid to show affection for the students. Although most states, including Virginia where I taught for nine years, have laws about touching students, I found it unnatural

and very uncaring to not allow my emotions to come to the surface with a student.

**9 KNOWLEDGEABLE**—The fact that the students ranked this characteristic so low on their priority list honestly surprised me. It is true that students expect their teachers to know the subject they are teaching but an in-depth knowledge of subject matter is less important than the other qualities listed above. Frankly, some of the students commented that some teachers know so much about their subject that they frequently – and unnecessarily – find fault with the students’ grasp of the issue at hand.

**10 APPROACHABLE**—Remember that these students are in high school and not college, where they may expect their professors and instructors to be aloof and stand-offish. On the high school level, students expect – and want – their teachers to be available to them after class and on other occasions throughout the school year to explain concepts in greater detail.

So, these are the top ten qualities my former students said they wanted in their high school teachers. I had the common sense not to ask them how I measured up to their criteria, nor how other teachers I still know at school might have fared.

I wonder, however, how this nonscientific compilation might compete with what other teachers around the country discover as they ask their students what they want. I would bet that these ten would survive virtually any serious challenge. ■



*Bill Rhatican is an Adjunct Instructor in American History at Northern Virginia Community College and longtime Virginia Professional Educators member; an AAE state partner. He recently retired after eight years as a history, government, and Advanced Placement Government teacher at West Potomac High School in Fairfax County, Virginia. Bill can be contacted at [wrhatican@cox.net](mailto:wrhatican@cox.net).*

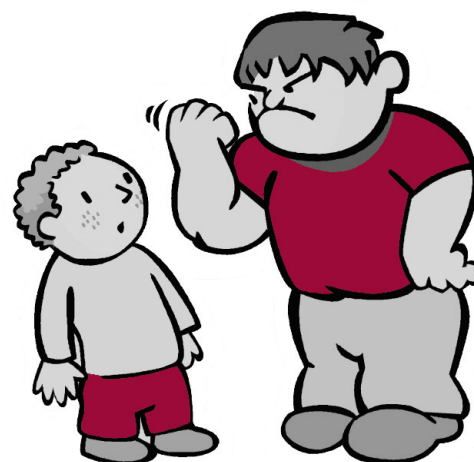
## Will Better “Loos” Decrease Bullying?

The recommendations in a recent £45 billion (around \$92 billion) program to better schools in the United Kingdom include creating better environments in public school restrooms. “Toilets are recognized as a hotspot for bullies to threaten and intimidate others,” says Tim Byles, chief executive of Partnerships for Schools, the agency behind the program.

The recommendations, which cover schools being built or refurbished, include making toilets unisex, creating central sink troughs, putting locks on all stall doors, removing all urinals, installing

blurred glass stall walls, and requiring that all restrooms be kept clean. Proponents of the program believe that making rest rooms unisex will discourage students from gathering in areas; larger groups of students tend to pick on students who enter rest rooms alone. Also suggested is placing newly built toilets near staff rooms or office for “subtle supervision.”

As of now, UK business employers are legally obligated to provide clean, private facilities with sinks with hot and cold running water, but there are not legal



requirements about the standards of rest rooms in schools beyond a certain ratio of lavatories and sinks to students.

Source—BBC News

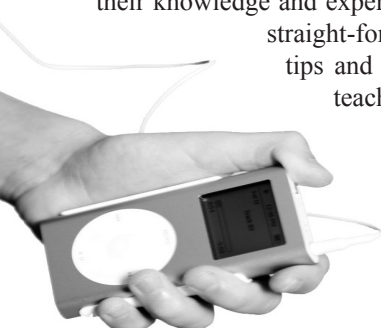
## The New Teacher Hotline

The *New Teacher Hotline* podcast features Dr. Glen Moulton, a supervisor of instruction and lifelong teacher trainer, and Michael Kelley, the author of *Rookie Teaching for Dummies*. These dynamic hosts use their knowledge and experiences to provide straight-forward, practical tips and strategies to new teachers.

These entertaining shows begin with a warm-up discussion of an issue that often affects new teachers. During the second half of the show, the hosts answer listener questions for new teachers who are facing obstacles.

A new episode of the *New Teacher Hotline* is released every two weeks. Listeners can access the streaming audio online at [www.newteacherhotline.com](http://www.newteacherhotline.com), download the episode, or subscribe to the show via iTunes and have episodes automatically delivered to their computers. The show is absolutely free!

Join Glen and Mike as they help you stop, drop, and roll your way through your first few years of teaching!



## What Works

### New Reports to Help Educators

The What Works Clearinghouse (WWC), an initiative of the U.S. Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences, released five new reports synthesizing the available research for the following interventions.

#### Beginning Reading Review

*Accelerated Reader/Reading Renaissance* (now called the *Accelerated Reader Best Classroom Practices*)—A guided reading intervention in which teachers direct student reading of text.

*Auditory Discrimination in Depth (ADD)*, currently called the *Lindamood Phonemic Sequencing (LiPS) Program*—A program designed to teach students skills to successfully decode words and to identify individual sounds and blends in words.

*Little Books*—A set of books designed for interactive book reading between parents and children or teachers and students.

#### Dropout Prevention Review

*High School Redirection*—An alternative high school program for youth considered at risk of dropping out.

#### Elementary School Math Review

*Progress in Mathematics 2006*—A new core curriculum for students in kindergarten through grade 6 that uses a sequence of systematic lesson plans to teach mathematical concepts and skills.

For more information, visit [www.whatworks.ed.gov](http://www.whatworks.ed.gov) and go to “Reviews Available Now.” ■



### February is Black History Month

For lesson plan ideas, visit [www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov) and search on “black history month.”



## NCLB Marks Sixth Anniversary



January 8th marked the sixth anniversary of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). In a speech at the National Press Club on January 10 Education Secretary Margaret Spellings stated, "...today, we've reached a tipping point. It's up to us to define our future. If that future does not have accountability at its very core, then we'll all lose most importantly, the kids."

NCLB was up for reauthorization last year but a comprehensive bill failed to get through the House Education and Labor Committee. The Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee did not introduce a bill. Secretary Spellings has vowed that if Congress does not pass a strong NCLB bill this year she will move forward.

"Congress has had over a year to consider these reforms, but students and teachers need help now," said Secretary Spellings.

In her effort to give the teachers and students the help they need, Secretary Spellings will partner with states and districts to support advancements in education through the use of pilot programs and other administrative tools.

In the next three to four months, Spellings will travel to nearly half the states to discuss NCLB and to seek support for the department's changes. Some of these changes include expanding a program that gives schools credit for the progress individual students make from year-to-year (i.e. growth models); allowing differentiated consequences for chronically underperforming schools and those that barely miss the stated benchmarks; and requiring states to use uniform high school graduation rates.

On the anniversary of No Child Left Behind, the Education Department released a new resource for parents, teachers, and policymakers. Small booklets, referred to

as dashboards, were published for each state in the union, Washington, D.C., and the nation as a whole. The dashboards provide a synopsis of the condition of education in each state by analyzing the state's performance on factors such as NAEP scores, the percent of teachers who are highly qualified, graduation rates, and their progress in closing the achievement gap. "What we're trying to do is put it into simple, plain language," stated Holly Kuzmich, deputy chief of staff for Spellings. For more information, visit [www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov).

## Lawsuit Against NCLB Renewed



In the wake of the NCLB's anniversary, a lawsuit against the law has been revived. In 2005, the National Education Association, along with school districts in Michigan, Texas, and Vermont, brought a lawsuit against NCLB claiming that the law violated the Constitution by requiring states and school districts to spend their own money to meet federal requirements, such as administering standardized tests.

The case was originally dismissed by a federal judge in Michigan. The United States Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit ruled, however, in a 2-to-1 decision, to reverse the lower court's decision. The case is being sent back to the lower court. The Court of Appeals said that the states were not clear of their financial obligations when they accepted federal funding for NCLB.

"Because we conclude that NCLB fails to provide clear notice as to who bears the additional costs of compliance, we reverse the judgment of the district," the ruling said. The Court also ruled that, "injury has already occurred and is ongoing," due to the fact states and local districts have had to spend their own money to meet the requirements under the law.

"The federal government is exploring all legal options available," Secretary Margaret Spellings stated. "This decision could undermine efforts to improve the education of our nation's children, in particular those students most in need."

## Record Year for Union Fund Restitutions and Convictions



The Office of Labor-Management Standards (OLMS), a division of the U.S. Department of Labor, recently released its criminal enforcement data for 2007.

OLMS had a record amount of court-ordered union fund restitutions and convictions in 2007. There were \$32 million in restitutions for workers and 118 convictions. In 2001 the amount of court-ordered restitutions was just under \$2 million with 102 convictions.

"Workers' union dues are being aggressively protected with more than \$100 million ordered returned in this decade," said Deputy Assistant Secretary for Labor-Management Standards Don Todd. "Criminal activity such as we've found in these cases must be uncovered and prosecuted wherever possible. The workers who own this money deserve nothing less."

The criminal enforcement program of OLMS is responsible for investigating embezzlement from labor organizations, extortionate picketing, deprivation of union members' rights by force or violence, and fraud in union officer elections. The civil program publicly discloses unions' annual financial reports, conducts compliance audits of labor unions, and seeks civil remedies for union officer election procedures.

For more information about OLMS, visit [www.dol.gov](http://www.dol.gov).



Read AAE press releases at [www.aeteachers.org](http://www.aeteachers.org). Click on "press room."

# Teaching Secrets

## Students Behave When Teachers Engage

By Anthony Cody

I started teaching at a middle school in Oakland, California, about twenty years ago. My first year was pretty rough. I was prepared to teach science, but my first semester I was given two periods of beginning Spanish, one of English, and two of science. My credential program had not really dealt much with behavior issues. The idea was to deliver a rich curriculum, and the management would take care of itself. If you are already teaching, you know this does not always work.

I floundered a bit the first year or two, and took help wherever I could find it. My best resources came from my colleagues down the hall. They had been at the school a few years and passed along valuable ways to make things work.

### What I Learned

Here are a few of the things I learned:

- I learned to post a short list of clear, unambiguous rules and enforce them consistently. This is much harder to do than it sounds, and it took me many years to master.
- I learned how important it was to phone parents early in the year, with positive news if at all possible. Then the first phone call would not be one from me complaining about their child's behavior. One parent I phoned in September told me that mine was the first positive call she had ever received about her child. When I had to call about some problems a few months later, she was there to back me up 100 percent.
- I learned to balance a negative phone

call with a positive one. The days after I would make phone calls, the students would often come in and ask me, "Why did you call my house?" It was great to be able to point out that I was working with their parents in their best interests, and that I would make positive calls when behavior improved. I also found that my own disposition greatly improved after I made a positive call.

- I learned to keep a record of student behavior, along with any referrals to the office, so that the problems I had with a few students were clearly documented. I kept a record of phone calls home in the same book.

- I learned how easy it was to get into entertaining but fruitless dialogues with students when I was trying to enforce rules. It took me a while, but eventually I learned the best method was to give a warning or consequence clearly, and allow for discussion only after class.

- I learned it was important for students to understand that I cared about their well-being, and that I was on their side. This was done through caring communication and showing an interest in them as individuals by giving attention to their interests and abilities, and also through developing assignments that gave them more than one way to demonstrate their knowledge. Some students shine when speaking to the class, others excel at creative projects that illustrate what they've learned.

- I tried using the textbook quizzes and tests but found my students were performing miserably. These tests featured 40 multiple-choice questions that required memorization. My students refused to memorize the textbook facts—they were bored with that, and their behavior reflected their boredom. So I began to think about the main points I was trying to get across and looked for engaging ways

to make those main points stick. Then I made my tests reflect those main points and found the students did much better. I also looked for different ways for students to demonstrate their understanding through more creative projects, and I found the students became even more engaged.

For example, when learning about states of matter, I had students team up and design their own experiments focusing on dry ice. They came up with ideas like measuring the amount of time the dry ice took to turn to vapor in different liquids; attempting to measure the temperature of the dry ice; or collecting and testing the vapor that the dry ice produced. After a review process, the teams carried out their experiments. Then, each team created a display and presented their results to their classmates. In the process, they all learned about the properties of dry ice—that it turns to vapor much more quickly in water than in air, that frozen carbon dioxide is much colder than water ice, and that the vapor is heavier than air and puts out a candle. Their findings led us into other explorations of the states of matter. They were having too much fun to misbehave!

The secret to behavior management is really about having the students fully engaged in the learning process, and it involves more than just rules and office referrals. ■



*An award-winning middle school science teacher, Anthony Cody is now the secondary science content coach for the Oakland, California, Unified School District.*