

## Is the Character Education Movement Stalled?

By Dr. Kevin Ryan



Dr. Kevin Ryan

For over fifteen years, parents, politicians, and some educators have been calling for a revival of moral education in our schools. Choosing a less inflammatory word than “moral,” they have called on teachers and administrators to institute “character education,” an effort to directly teach our nation’s core values. While historically this was a central mission of American education, it slipped from the educational scene during the social turmoil of the late 1960s and early 1970s. In an era swamped with moral conflicts over the Vietnam War, the civil rights struggle, the “new sexuality,” and the advent of recreational drugs, traditional messages about basic values were drowned out. The efforts of educators were stilled by questions such as, “In our divided and pluralistic nation, whose values can we teach?” and by catchy mottos such as, “Different strokes for different folks.”

In the intervening years, while the nation’s wounds slowly healed, our morally neutralized schools have focused on other problems, particularly students’ falling academic performance and the rising tide of violence and disorder in our schools. Somehow educators have failed to see the rather obvious connection between teaching students the good habits of character and academic achievement, and the link between habits of character, such as personal responsibility and self-control, and students’ vandalism and hostile behavior.

We are now well into what some would say is the revival of character education. Organizations have been formed and are prospering; books and articles on the topic are readily available; conferences focusing on character education abound; and public support is extremely high. However, to this observer, the results look meager and progress appears stalled. No noticeable improvement has been made in either student achievement or behavior. On the other hand, many school administrators and

teachers claim that the increased pressure to raise achievement test scores has left them with little time or energy to focus on a “frill-like character education.” As one apologetic administrator told me, “Our state’s high-stakes testing has sucked all the oxygen out of our character education initiative.”

While this is undoubtedly the case (and as suggested above, a rather wrong-headed case), our attempts to revive character education have serious problems. Our recent efforts can best be described with the label “character lite.” These initiatives include mission statements, character education committees, service learning programs, virtue words for the week and the month, posters with snappy slogans, and, yes, even character t-shirts and coffee cups. While each of these efforts can have merit [well, maybe not the coffee mugs], they tend to be a superficial overlay on the existing schooling process.

One of the most flawed aspects of our current schooling process is the “disengagement” of students and teachers. By that I mean educators’ loss of moral authority, and the lack of true connective tissue between teachers and students. It is not accidental that the current educational fashion is to transform teachers into “facilitators.” They are urged to be “a guide-on-the-side,” rather than “a sage-on-the-stage.”

This disengagement is evidenced most dramatically in the higher grade levels. While many elementary teachers are quite engaged and still exercise a degree of moral authority in their classrooms, few high school teachers do. They deliver courses. They dispense information. They test and grade students, but they give a wide berth to their students’ personal lives and the issues surrounding what kind of people they are and are becoming. They believe it is not in their current job description. Meanwhile, the wall-to-wall media world that is so influential with teenagers is continually telling them what to do with their

lives, what to wear, what to think, how to treat those around them, how to spend their free time, how to relate to the opposite sex, and, most worrisome, what is a worthy life. There is little disengagement here.

Ten years ago, psychologist Robert Coles completed a large-scale study of high school students’ attitude. One of his major conclusions was that teachers have very rare or “thin” presence in the moral lives of high school students. Coles refers to this marginal influence of teachers as “the wallpaper effect.” Teachers were there in the background, hardly noticed. They have become, in large measure, moral eunuchs in the lives of their students.

A second flawed condition of our schooling process that goes to the heart of character formation is its aim. The true goal of character education is for a student to become a complete human being, a person of virtue, possessing a moral compass that guides one’s life. Authentic character education, as opposed to indoctrination or recycled psychobabble, is about teaching young people how to craft their own characters. However, to be creators or craftsmen, they have to have a vision of the end product. They need to know what they are making. Our schools, and sadly, contemporary culture, are failing to show students truly noble

lives, the stories of the men and women who have molded their own characters and contributed to the common good.

A third flaw is our failure to show students *how* to craft their characters, *how* to acquire habits of responsibility and kindness, and *how* to root out the bad habits, such as shirking homework, doping out in front of their TVs, and being uncooperative in class. The great opportunity and obvious connection between crafting good habits and becoming achieving students is rarely made, and even less rarely taught.

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Continued on page 7,  
 See “Is the Character Education Movement Stalled?”

## AAE to the Rescue

Dear AAE,

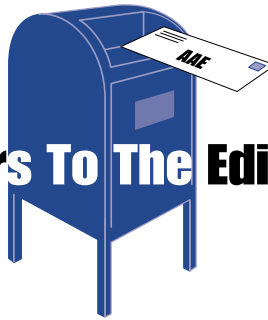
Thanks again for your professional service. I can't tell you how much it means to have someone in your corner when it comes to a negative evaluation.

The assistance of your Legal Services Department was prompt and supportive. As a member I will continue to promote the AAE for teachers, and believe some day we, as teachers, will be supported for doing our jobs.

Sincerely,

—Barnaby Logan  
San Marcos, CA

## Letters To The Editor



## Another Happy Camper

Dear AAE,

Thanks for being such a super organization! You have saved me from a militant union (and approximately \$400 a year)!!

—Amanda Buckley  
Andover, Massachusetts

### Good News for “Religious Objectors”—

## AAE Member, Union Settles Suit Over Dues Payments

Dear AAE,

Since I am a happy member of the AAE, I would really like to get the word out about my lawsuit that was successfully settled with the California Teachers Association (CTA). I hope you will print this letter in our newsletter.

The CTA recently settled my federal lawsuit concerning their discrimination against non-union members. Prior to the settlement, only union members had the choice of paying their annual \$736 union dues in ten monthly payroll deductions. Non-union members (religious objectors), were forced to pay the mandatory \$736 fees in a lump sum at the beginning of the year to a designated charity. Considering teachers' modest pay scales, this requirement was an economic hardship for many. Teachers who could not pay the fees up front were effectively forced into involuntary payment to the union. This CTA tactic has been highly effective in maintaining membership.

Thanks to the assistance of the National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation, the CTA and all local union affiliates in California will now offer non-union members the option of paying their fees on the same terms as union members.

This is truly a breakthrough for religious objectors whose consciences prevent them from associating with the social activism of the NEA and state affiliates like the CTA. As evidenced in CTA publications, this organization overtly uses its members' dues to finance ultra liberal political candidates and causes. This is a troubling fact for teachers whose consciences dictate otherwise.

California school district payroll offices should now ensure that non-members can pay their charity fees in monthly installments. For further details concerning their rights, I strongly suggest teachers contact the National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation at 1-800-336-3600.

—Victoria Heggem  
Pasadena, CA

### Editor's Note:

We will be reporting more details about the ramifications of the above case in the “Court Watch” section of the next issue of *Education Matters*.

## Saving Big Bucks in Texas— Eliminating Block Scheduling

Dear AAE,

Buried in the midst of a December 29, 2002, article in the *Houston Chronicle* about Sandra Mossman being chosen as superintendent of the Clear Creek Independent School District was a fascinating nugget of information.

We veteran teachers remember the time when block scheduling was touted by the education gurus as the greatest thing since indoor plumbing. Administrators went full bore to implement block scheduling in their school districts; and if we veteran teachers in our local high school had not formed a united coalition, our district would have also adopted block. The way that we kept block out of our high school was by doing careful research, and we published this research far and wide among our local citizens. Besides the loss of fifteen to thirty clock hours of classroom instruction per semester, we found out that block was very expensive to implement because it required the hiring of more teachers and the buying of extra equipment.

In her newly acquired post as superintendent, Ms. Mossman indicates she is very concerned about how her district can cut back on its budget because it is considered under the “Robin Hood” plan of funding in Texas to be a property-wealthy district. It is required to give part of its money to property-poor districts as a means of achieving equity. In explaining ways she plans to cut the Clear Creek budget she states, “Next fall, the district will save about \$3.1 million by going from an eight-class block schedule to a seven-class schedule, which will eliminate the cost of seventy-eight teachers.” To put it another way, block scheduling is costing the Clear Creek ISD \$3.1 million dollars, and the sad thing about it is that there is absolutely no research to show that block scheduling increases academic achievement. In fact there are studies that show that Advanced Placement test scores have actually fallen in districts that employ block scheduling. Alas, it is yet another failed education fad, a mistake that has cost the taxpayers millions of dollars. **EM**

—Donna Garner is an AAE advising member. Donna taught at Midway High School in Hewitt, Texas for over 26 years. She was appointed by President Reagan and reappointed by President Bush to the National Commission of Migrant Education. Donna can be reached at wgarner1@hotmail.com.

# AAE's First Year in Washington, D.C.

*A Report from our Director of National Projects, Tracey Bailey*



Tracey Bailey

Last year was exciting for the AAE, as we accelerated our growth in four new state affiliates (Alabama, Arkansas, Virginia, and Washington state), and opened our national office in Washington, D.C. to better serve our mem-

bers. AAE now has both an East Coast office and a West Coast office, in addition to a dozen state-based affiliates serving our members around the country.

Because of the increasingly important role of federal legislation in education policy and funding, AAE leaders determined that 2002 was an appropriate time to establish a full-time permanent presence in Washington, D.C. However, rest assured that we remain committed to a minimal and cost efficient office staff: we are actually sharing office space with several other education organizations in order to reduce costs through shared expenses.

With a D.C. presence, we can represent our members much more effectively on key issues such as special education, accountability, teacher quality, and the No Child Left Behind Act. We can also connect our members to many more opportunities for teachers to contribute their expertise and opinions at both the state and federal levels.

Outlined below is a sampling of some special opportunities that have come our way in the past year, largely because of our increased national presence and contacts.

## **Working with the U.S. Department of Education:**

### **• AAE Teacher Serves on the The No Child Left Behind Act Rulemaking Committee**

One of the most exciting opportunities for AAE this past year came when one of our members, Patsy Fischer from Oklahoma, was chosen as one of only two teachers in the United States to serve on the negotiated rulemaking committee for the new No Child Left Behind Act. This committee was given the responsibility of clarifying the regulations for implementing this law, which will have a major impact on almost all public schools around the country. Patsy is a member of our Oklahoma state affiliate, the Association of Professional Oklahoma Educators.

### **• Teaching American History Grants—\$100 Million in Funds to Universities and School Districts**

AAE teachers were given an opportunity to serve as readers and reviewers for this

important grant process. It was a unique opportunity for social studies and American history teachers. Afterward, our participating members commented that it was both “professionally rewarding” and “an opportunity to help ensure that a more accurate, traditional view of American history was presented in university teacher-training programs and in school curricula.”

### **• USDOE Conference on Teacher Quality**

The AAE was asked to present at an historic U.S. Department of Education Conference on Teacher Quality. We were asked to share our ideas on recruiting the best candidates into the teaching profession and retaining the best teachers we already have.

### **• USDOE Character Education Grant Opportunities**

AAE assisted teachers and administrators in over twenty school districts in four different states apply for grants from the U.S. Department of Education. Many of these small, rural school districts did not have the grant-writing staff or resources to apply on their own. AAE will let our members know when more of these grant opportunities arise.

## **Working with the U.S. Congress:**

### **• Special Education—The Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (I.D.E.A.)**

AAE has been working with policymakers for many months to ensure our members' input is included in the reauthorization of this legislation. Our members have told us through our surveys that several key issues need to be addressed:

1. The federal government should more fully fund its proportional share of special education expenses.
2. Teachers should have greater authority to enforce appropriate discipline and behavioral expectations for special education students. Too often, our members say, these students are allowed to get by with inappropriate behavior that is not a manifestation of their disability.
3. The excessive paperwork burden and over documentation related to special education students should be reduced, or some portion of these duties shifted to support personnel.

### **• The No Child Left Behind Act—Legislation and Rulemaking**

AAE was asked to provide input on this legislation, during not only its develop-

ment but also the rulemaking process. As mentioned, an AAE teacher was one of only two teachers from the entire nation who served on the formal rule-making committee.

### **• House of Representatives—Education and Workforce Committee**

AAE testified several times before this committee on education reform, recruiting and retaining the best teachers into the profession, and protecting teachers' rights against forced union dues or “coercive” unionism. AAE is also working to help protect teachers' rights, including their religious rights, and to ensure a “level playing field” in all school districts for teachers who are members of nonunion, professional teacher associations.

## **Working with the White House:**

### **• The White House Conference on Teacher Quality**

The AAE was given a special invitation to this event and one of our key policy advisors, Dr. Michael Poliakoff, former President of the National Council on Teacher Quality, was a featured presenter.

### **• The President's Conference on Character Education**

Gary Beckner, AAE's Founder and Executive Director, and Dr. Kevin Ryan, an AAE board member, were special guests at the White House for this conference on Character Education. AAE has been a national leader in promoting a return to teaching students basic concepts of integrity, virtue, responsibility, and a strong work ethic.

### **• The White House Office of Domestic Policy**

The White House Office of Domestic Policy, which oversees education policy, has been overtly friendly to AAE and has been open to the equal input of nonunion teacher associations. A representative of this office recently told the Coalition of Independent Education Associations at a meeting in D.C. that “If you have concerns or issues that you want to bring to the Administration's attention, please remember that AAE is in touch with us on all these issues.”

### **• Special White House Summit on States' Implementation of The No Child Left behind Act**

AAE was an invitee to this special Summit and briefing at the White House in September 2002.

*Continued on page 7,  
See “AAE's First Year in Washington, D.C.”*



## For Whom the Doorbell Tolls

You have probably heard of the tempest among educators about a provision in the No Child Left Behind Act that requires high schools to provide student names, addresses, and phone numbers to military recruiters upon request, unless their parents opt out. The typical image is of burly uniformed Marines showing up unannounced at your door, waiting to shanghai little Johnny for a short jaunt to Iraq. But the military isn't the only organization recruiting door-to-door.

There is Beth Adelesen, vice president of the Kenosha Education Association (an NEA affiliate). When the *Kenosha News* published a letter to the editor critical of public education and the Wisconsin union, Adelsen tracked the letter writer down and paid him a visit. The man invited Adelsen into his home and they evidently had a reasonable discussion of the issues for thirty minutes. "He and I ultimately ended up agreeing to disagree," reported Adelsen.

The Wisconsin Education Association Council (WEAC) thought so highly of this tactic it posted the story on its web-site. We wonder if WEAC really thought this one through. Suppose that instead of writing his letter to the editor in the first place, that gentleman had shown up unannounced at Adelsen's home to voice his displeasure with union policies. Humm? **EM**

Source—*The Education Intelligence Agency's (EIA) Communiqué*. You may find more information about EIA at [www.eiaonline.com](http://www.eiaonline.com).

## Government Investigating Alleged Abuses of D.C. Teachers' Union Funds

Federal investigators are accusing former top officials of the Washington Teachers' Union (an AFT affiliate) of using more than \$2 million of members' dues to buy themselves luxury items, including a \$20,000 fur coat and a \$57,000 Tiffany silver service. The FBI, Internal Revenue Service, Labor Department, and District of Columbia inspector general are conducting

the investigation. An FBI affidavit filed in U.S. District Court in Washington named the local's former president, Barbara A. Bullock; Gwendolyn M. Hemphill, Bullock's assistant; and former treasurer James O. Baxter II. The affidavit charges that Bullock spent more than \$1 million in union funds to buy nearly \$500,000 in custom-made clothing; \$11,000 worth of shoes; a \$6,800 ice bucket from Neiman-Marcus, the high-end department store; and two sheets and two pillowcases that cost \$1,195.

The document alleges that Bullock and Hemphill also conspired with relatives to spend and launder union funds for their personal use. Hemphill, the former co-chair of Washington, D.C., Mayor Anthony Williams' re-election effort, left the campaign last September after elections officials uncovered thousands of forged signatures on the mayor's nominating petitions. Her lawyer, Fred Cooke, said Hemphill was cooperating with an AFT investigation. Baxter's lawyer had no comment. Both Bullock and Hemphill have resigned their posts and Baxter was suspended, the union said. Whatever the outcome for Bullock, Baxter, and Hemphill, AFT members will be paying the bills for the misspending. The WTU's Fidelity bond only covers losses up to \$100,000. **EM**

Source—*The Associated Press*

## NYC Schools' Chancellor To Award Top Principals Battle Pay

Chancellor Joel Klein says that New York City's best principals will get up to \$75,000 in bonus pay if they agree to work for three years with a principal-in-training in a failing school. In addition to opening a leadership academy for new principals, Klein also plans to remove the fifty lowest performing school leaders by documenting "persistent educational failure." The intent of Klein's overhaul is to "infuse the ranks of New York's principals with new blood, put the most experienced administrators where they are most needed, and weed out those who preside over schools plagued by low test scores, poor discipline, and other problems." **EM**

Source—*Education Gadfly, news and analysis from the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation*.

## Small Class Size—A Magic Bullet?

A comprehensive study done by the Ohio-based research service, SchoolMatch, analyzed the SAT and ACT scores of 12,916 high schools, or 86 percent of the nation's total, and discovered that "there simply appears to

be a no positive relationship between small classes and student success on college entrance examinations." For more information, go to [www.schoolmatch.com](http://www.schoolmatch.com). **EM**

## Teacher Testing and Schools of Education—Headed in Right Direction?

Graduates of schools of education are often asked to pass tests of general, pedagogical, or subject matter knowledge in order to obtain a teaching license. Now, the No Child Left Behind Act requires that new teachers who did not major or earn a graduate degree in the subject they wish to teach pass a rigorous subject matter test to be considered highly qualified. In an effort to raise the quality of their teachers, some states have recently raised the passing scores required on these tests or made the tests more rigorous. Unfortunately, the results of these tests have often been embarrassing—a troubling indication of how little graduates of some teacher education programs know. However, some good things are coming out of these low scores.

A recent study by researchers at Boston College examines the responses of a number of Massachusetts schools of education after a large percentage of their graduates failed the Massachusetts Test for Educator Licensure (MTEL). Massachusetts inaugurated its teacher testing program in 1998; that year, only 41 percent of those taking the test passed. Since then, administrators at some schools have hired statisticians to identify the strengths and weaknesses of their programs and to track the performance of individual students so those students may get the extra help they need to pass the test. The low scores have also inspired increased collaboration between education school faculty and liberal arts faculty on the subject matter preparation of prospective teachers. In some schools, additional faculty has been hired to teach writing skills, and other schools have changed their curricula to require additional courses to improve their students' English language capabilities. A few schools have administered pretests in order to identify students at risk of failing early on in their programs and provide them with the appropriate support. While not all institutions have responded as well and as thoughtfully as others, the Massachusetts study clearly indicates that testing teachers can spur schools of education to produce more knowledgeable graduates. **EM**

Source—*Teacher Quality Bulletin is a weekly e-mail newsletter brought to you by the National Council on Teacher Quality ([www.nctq.org](http://www.nctq.org))*.

## Where are the Easy A's on College Campuses?

While grade inflation is generally rampant, a new study at the University of Alabama shows that the problem is much greater in some departments than others. A student looking for an easy "A" would be well advised to take Women's Studies, where "an almost unbelievable 78.1 percent" of the grades were A's. Evidently, students who slept through the entire course received only a B.

Other departments with easy grading standards were Theater/Dance (51.4 percent A's), Religious Studies (48.5 percent), and Music (48.1 percent). The departments with the toughest grading standards were Biological Sciences (11.1 percent), Geography (13 percent), Geological Sciences (14 percent), and Anthropology (14.8 percent).

The study was conducted by professors Charles Nuckolls and David Beito, and released by the Alabama Scholars Association, an affiliate of the National Association of Scholars.

The authors concluded that the grading system "creates perverse incentives for students to 'shop around' for professors who have reputations for giving 'easy A's' and serves to degrade the efforts of those students who might otherwise take harder courses."

The study compared the percentage of A grades given in all undergraduate courses in 1972-1974 with 2000-02. The percentage in the earlier time period—22.6 percent—was considered startlingly high at the time by the university's Office of Institution Analysis, but it steadily rose to reach 31.6 percent in the most recent period.

The study discusses two possible remedies for the problem. Professors could be required to rank students and not just give letter grades. Also, transcripts could reflect not only the grade received, but also the average grade for all students in the course—letting prospective employers and post-graduate programs know which are the easy courses.

One consolation: the authors found an exception (only one) to the upward trend in grades. The College of Engineering has raised its standards and actually gives fewer A's than before. At least we don't have to worry about bridges falling down or buildings collapsing.

The report is available at [www.alabamascholars.org](http://www.alabamascholars.org). **EM**

Source—*Inside Academe*, Fall 2002, Vol. VII, No. 1, a quarterly publication of the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, 1726 M Street, N.W., Suite 800, Washington, D.C. 20036, web-site: [www.goacta.org](http://www.goacta.org).



## Colleges Continue to Flunk History

**D**espite growing public alarm about historical illiteracy and a Congressional resolution calling for action, not a single one of America's top fifty colleges and universities now requires the study of American history of its graduates, according to a study released September 16, 2002 by the American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA).

In February 2000, ACTA issued a Roper survey and report entitled *Losing America's Memory: Historical Illiteracy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. The survey revealed that seniors from America's elite colleges and universities were graduating with an alarming ignorance of their heritage and a profound historical illiteracy. Seniors could not identify Valley Forge, words from the Gettysburg Address, or even the basic principles of the U.S. Constitution. Given high school-level questions, 81 percent of the seniors would have received a D or F. Despite this lack of knowledge, ACTA found that students could graduate from 100 percent of the top colleges without taking a single course in American history. At 78 percent of the institutions, students were not required to take any history at all.

Alarmed by these results, the U.S. Congress unanimously adopted a concurrent resolution in July 2000, calling on trustees, state administrators, and citizens across the country to address America's historical illiteracy.

The bipartisan resolution was introduced by Sen. Joe Lieberman (D-CT), Sen. Slade Gorton (R-WA), Rep. Tom Petri (R-WI) and Rep. George Miller (D-CA). Prominent historians—including David McCullough, Gordon Wood, John Patrick Diggins, and Oscar Handlin—endorsed the effort.

Despite this outcry, ACTA's 2002 study, *Restoring America's Legacy: The Challenge of Historical Literacy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, reveals that colleges and universities have ignored the call for action.

Not a single one of the top fifty national and liberal arts colleges, as defined by U.S. News & World Report in 2002, requires a

course in American history. And, only 10 percent—just five schools—require history at all, a drop from 22 percent just two years ago.

Although many institutions claim requirements in history, in fact, the requirement may often be satisfied by courses in other fields, including English, psychology, education, and music. For example, at the University of California-Berkeley, "Alternative Sexual Identities and Communities" fulfills the American Cultures requirement. At Dartmouth, "Music of Southeast Asia" and "From Hand to Mouth: Writing, Eating, and the Construction of Gender" both meet the World Culture requirements. At Washington University in St. Louis, "Race and Ethnicity on American Television" is classified as a Textual and Historical Studies course. To rule out courses such as "The History of College Football" offered in a physical education department, the study defines a history course as a course taught in the history department.

"Our ability to survive as a nation depends upon our understanding the principles and values that the Founders established and that we all share as Americans," said ACTA Executive Director Anne D. Neal. "This appalling ignorance of our history and heritage bodes ill for the future of a free republic."

National Endowment for the Humanities Chairman Bruce Cole agreed: "Today, it is all the more urgent that we study American institutions, culture, and history. Defending our democracy demands more than successful military campaigns. It also requires an understanding of the ideals, ideas, and institutions that have shaped our country."

The report is posted on ACTA's web-site [www.goacta.org](http://www.goacta.org), and is also available upon request. **EM**

Source—*Inside Academe*, Fall 2002, Vol. VII, No. 1, a quarterly publication of the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, 1726 M Street, N.W., Suite 800, Washington, D.C. 20036, web-site: [www.goacta.org](http://www.goacta.org).

# Reforming Education: The Hard Part Lies Ahead

A Word from Chester E. Finn, Jr.



Chester E. Finn, Jr.

**A**S 2003 opens, hollow public treasuries will make it tougher than ever to revitalize American K-12 education—not because more money will improve our schools but because the most painful parts of the reform process lie

ahead and, without dollars to cushion the discomfort, politicians will be loath to ask people to endure it.

The education renewal efforts of the past decade were easy compared with the miseries of the next few years. We've passed the laws, designed the necessary changes, and put measuring sticks in place, but by and large we haven't yet caused many people or institutions to alter their ways.

That's why, as we approach the twentieth anniversary of "A Nation at Risk," America's test scores remain flat. Graduation rates are actually sagging. Racial gaps are still wide. The U.S. Department of Education's "Failing School" lists now contain thousands of entries.

We surely haven't been idle or chintzy. We've spent billions on reforms of every sort. We've shrunk classes, hired more teachers, installed computers, built new schools, stiffened graduation requirements, added kindergartens, replaced textbooks, devised tests, written manifestos, conducted studies, held summits, set standards, created charter schools, experimented with vouchers, out-sourced school management, "in-serviced" teachers, hired nontraditional superintendents, and on and on. Dozens of governors have pledged to turn around their states' education systems. President Bush persuaded Congress to enact the boldest federal education law in history. Business leaders beyond counting have signed up for commissions, task forces, and roundtables, all pledged to fix the schools.

Some progress can be glimpsed. A few states, such as Texas and North Carolina, can display rising scores, as can a handful of local school systems (e.g., Charlotte, Houston, and Chicago.) There are promising signs in Massachusetts. Where gains are being made, the formula seems to include strong, sustained political leadership over many years with a regime of tests that carry palpable consequences for children and schools alike. But even these "poster states" and districts have yet to turn any big corners. Most of their gains amount to modest

upticks in basic skills among low-income youngsters—much needed, yes, but far from an education renaissance. Nobody would claim that all, even most, of the kids in those jurisdictions are learning what they should. And the policy changes that they've made require constant vigilance against relentless attacks from testing opponents, educators who feel that results-based accountability cramps their style, civil rights groups alleging that "high stakes" tests discourage minority youngsters, and state and local officials asserting that Uncle Sam must pay for any changes he seeks.

Reforming education is like stretching a Godzilla-size rubber band. If you don't keep tugging hard, it reverts to its former shape. The crusading governor leaves office or the dynamic superintendent gets fired. The elastic snaps back. Few changes remain. This has partly to do with public education's feisty and obdurate interest groups. (Note that teacher unions are relatively weak in Texas and North Carolina, both "right to work" states.) It has partly to do with the education profession's view that children are more like wild flowers to be left to blossom than rose bushes in need of cultivation. And it has much to do with parents, who generally believe that someone else's little darling must study harder and somebody else's school needs to be transformed.

For a nation that has long placed education reform atop its list of urgent priorities, it's striking how superficial most of the reforming has been so far. Yes, nearly every state has written academic standards and installed a testing program. But most states find it exceedingly difficult to enforce their standards by "holding back" the children who don't meet them, denying diplomas to those who fail the exit tests, ridding schools of ineffective teachers, firing inept principals, and closing bad schools.

Washington has now inserted itself big time into "standards-based" reform with the mammoth No Child Left Behind Act. But even as we observe hundreds of conscientious educators and local officials gearing up to give NCLB implementation their very best shot, we see too many states and districts balking at, or simply ignoring, some of its key provisions, protesting its

rigid schedules, even softening their previous achievement standards to boost the odds that more kids will attain them. This past autumn's sorry experience with making districts provide educational alternatives for youngsters stuck in failing schools hints at the trouble ahead. Certainly the vexed history of federal education interventions says Uncle Sam will find it hard to effect changes in places that don't want to change.

Standards-based reform is not the only kind that hasn't yet borne much fruit. There's also the education marketplace with its boldly different theory of change: competition and choice via charter schools, outsourced management, home-schooling, vouchers, etc.

The U.S. now boasts nearly 3,000 charter schools but too many are doing a punk job of educating children and more than a few face acute management, governance, and fiscal problems. Such faltering, in turn, emboldens enemies of choice to crack down on the charters' freedoms, curb their numbers, and generally allow the rubber band to snap back. Hence realizing the promise of charter schools may turn out to be as hard as remaking the public school "system."

★ ★ ★ ★ ★  
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like stretching a  
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What about vouchers, then? The evidence suggests that helping disadvantaged black children switch from bad public schools to decent private schools yields a rise in their achievement. But it doesn't seem to do much for poor white and Latino youngsters. In any case, there aren't enough private schools to go around and it's uneconomic to build more unless the vouchers are amply funded. The unions and their allies will fight this one to the death—and few political leaders have the guts to defy them.

Results-based accountability and school choice aren't the only education reforms that stick in establishment craws. Try paying teachers according to the subjects they teach or their effectiveness in the classroom. Try bringing into that classroom instructors who didn't pass through colleges of education. (That's why most states' "alternate certification" schemes are tiny, and the ed schools are doing their utmost to seize control of them, too.) Try lengthening the school year or day. Watch the rubber band snap back.

*Continued on page 7,  
See "Reforming Education..."*

## AAE's First Year in Washington, D.C.

Continued from page 3

### Working with the National Media:

Our presence in Washington, D.C. has opened the door for more press interviews and for reporters looking to “balance” the frequently one-sided view of teachers presented by the NEA and AFT labor unions. AAE leaders were interviewed more in 2002 by the national media than ever before. Interviews included the *USA Today* and *Education Week*, several live television interviews with *Fox News Channel*, and many syndicated radio programs across the country. AAE was an invited guest for an hour on the *Dr. Laura* program. We were invited on her program both to defend public education and to encourage parents to take more responsibility for influencing their children's behavior in school.

All in all, 2002 was a banner year for the AAE. We will continue to carry that banner for independently minded professionals around the nation until America's educators regain the respect and admiration they deserve. **EM**

*Tracey Bailey was the 1993 National Teacher of the Year. Tracey's recent experience includes working with the Florida Commissioner of Education in the creation of Florida's new charter school laws. He is still on leave from teaching while serving as the Director of National Projects for the AAE.*

## NCLB Update

The Department has released an updated version of the guidance on standards for “highly qualified teachers.” One of the most significant additions clarifies when teachers not certified by traditional means can be considered qualified. Although they must have a four-year degree and show mastery of subject matter, teachers moving through alternative certification programs may begin teaching before they are fully licensed. However, he or she must receive high-quality professional development that is sustained, intensive, and classroom-focused; participate in a program of intensive supervision; function as a teacher only for a specified period of time—not to exceed three years; and demonstrate satisfactory progress toward full certification. Also, the guidance reiterates that only elementary school teachers do not have to demonstrate specific competence in academic subjects. Middle school teachers must show mastery of any subject they teach. **EM**

*Source—Ed Review, a biweekly update on U.S. Department of Education activities relevant to the intergovernmental and cooperate community and other stakeholders.*

## Reforming Education: The Hard Part Lies Ahead

Continued from page 6

Although it seemed hard at the time, what we've done so far under the reform banner was a cakewalk compared with the next steps. We've made many moves that allow for change to occur, yet naught will come of this until millions of individuals actually alter their behavior, until thousands of institutions amend their ingrained practices, until the alternatives win the freedom to be truly different, and those in charge pay as much attention to their effectiveness as to their existence.

What's a President, Governor, or Legislator to do? Faced with ballooning health care costs, shrinking budgets, and escalating college tuitions, what chance is there to pay for the summer schools that might get more kids up to speed, for bonuses for great teachers, or technical assistance for charter schools? The logical way to fund such improvements is to close bad schools, lay off bad teachers, or make the sports program pay for itself. But who needs such misery?

There's simply not much payoff in a democracy from hassling people to do things they don't want to do and defying powerful interest groups on behalf of nebulous future gains. Particularly as election campaigns rev up and candidates and political parties vie for the “education reformer” crown, don't expect public officials and wannabees to inflict more pain on parents, students, or teachers, especially

when budgets won't allow them to offset the discomfort with new education goodies. Hence as the school-reform lifting gets heavier, we may not see much leadership coming from the usual places. **EM**

*Chester E. Finn, Jr. is President of the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation in Washington, D.C., and a former U.S. Assistant Secretary of Education.*

## Is the Character Education Movement Stalled?

Continued from page 1

G. K. Chesterton once wrote, “It is not that Christianity has been tried and failed. It is that it has not been tried.” Ditto character education. **EM**

*Dr. Kevin Ryan has recently retired as professor of education at Boston University and director of the Center for the Advancement of Ethics and Character. The Center's mission is to support elementary and secondary schools in efforts to aid children in acquiring good moral judgment and habits.*

*Since entering the higher education profession with degrees from Stanford, Harvard, Columbia, and the University of Toronto, Kevin has written and edited fifteen books, including Reclaiming Our Schools: A Handbook For Teaching Character, Academics and Discipline. Dr. Ryan and the Center for the Advancement of Ethics and Character garnered national praise for writing the Character Education Manifesto, which has been endorsed by fifty of the nation's most recognized educators, legislators, and business executives in America.*



## Lewis & Clark Expedition in the News Again

**A** new web-site, [www.lewisandclark200.gov](http://www.lewisandclark200.gov), a partnership among thirty-two federal agencies and organizations, offers a single easy-to-use web portal with information about various Lewis and Clark historical places. Online, students can read about stops along the trail using an interactive map, teachers can download lessons on the multiple disciplines—from art to world languages—applied by the team in order to complete their mission, and interested parties can find biographical information on Corps of Discovery members and American Indian tribes encountered on the route. From 2003 to 2006, the U.S. will observe the bicentennial of Lewis and Clark's journey through the Louisiana Territory. For more information, go to <http://www.lewisandclark200.org>. **EM**

# A Sad Charter School Story

By Lisa Snell



Lisa Snell

**In** a November 27th *Newsweek* column, Jonathan Alter surprisingly asks, "Why are teacher unions and school boards trying to kill charter schools?" He argues that, "Instead of judging by results, some states (under pressure from "The Blob") have started heavily regulating charter schools, trying to make them more like the ordinary schools they are meant to challenge."

A recent case in my own county seems to confirm Alter's thesis.

What should be more important to school district administrators: the fact that a school is the highest performing school in a city or how the school organizes its school hours? You decide.

By any reasonable judgment, the Indio Charter School would be considered a success. The school, located in the desert of Riverside County, California, offers a four-day week for 300 mostly Hispanic students in grades K-12. Children attend school from 8 a.m. until 4 p.m. Indio charter school students attend class for 1,910 minutes a week versus 1,800 minutes in other California public schools. Of the nine public elementary and four public middle schools in the city of Indio, Indio Charter School had the highest average score on California's Academic Performance Index (API). In fact, the school was twenty points ahead of the second-place school. Indio Charter School also had the highest average reading scores in all grades, except 7th, where it was second.

Despite the Indio charter's academic performance, the county of Riverside continues to penalize the school for offering a nontraditional school schedule. A ruling by the Riverside County Superior Court upheld the state's right to withhold nearly \$240,000 from the Indio Charter School. The state penalized the school, saying it failed to follow state attendance laws requiring students to attend classes for at least 175 days a year. Indio Charter School officials contend that

their four-day week contains more than the required minutes of instruction and that California law allows charter schools more flexibility in their schedules.

Riverside County looks punitive in its enforcement of the attendance regulations. Although the school had been operating on a four-day week since 1999, Riverside County waited until February 2002 to begin withholding funds. In other words, the four-day week became a problem only after it was a long-established instructional practice that contributed to the charter school's number one academic standing in the City of Indio. The Indio Charter School plans on appealing the ruling. Meanwhile, Riverside County has announced plans to audit the Indio Charter School's financial and attendance records back to 1999, despite never having audited the numerous failing schools in Riverside County.

More recently, virtual charter schools in California have also run up against this attendance regulation. The point of a virtual school is that students and their parents have the flexibility to organize their school hours. Students enrolled in the California Virtual Academy, which uses Bill Bennett's K12 program, for example, must still record attendance and instructional minutes as if they were going to class 175 days, on a Monday through Friday schedule. So even when children complete lessons on Saturday or do two lessons in one day to compensate for a field trip, the official K12 record must reflect 175 school days, or the charter school will not get paid, regardless of how many instructional minutes the child completes.

In the case of K12's California charter schools and the Indio Charter School, these California attendance regulations defeat the spirit of the charter school movement. The point of a charter school contract is that school operators have the flexibility to try something different in exchange for accountability.

These regulations reveal the typical bureaucratic mindset of focusing on inputs rather than outputs. School administrators have little regard for academic achievement as long as schools follow the rules. The charter school movement reflects the first time in recent his-

tory that education reform efforts focused entirely on performance, rather than inputs. The charter authorizer would specify what the performance goal should be, but not how the charter school organized its resources or school day to meet that performance goal.

The highest performing school in the city of Indio can stand in as a poster child for the nationwide struggle of the charter school movement against regulations from which these schools are supposedly liberated.

Look here to learn more about the Indio Charter School's high academic performance and innovative programming: [www.indiocharter.org/test.htm](http://www.indiocharter.org/test.htm). **EM**

*Lisa Snell is director of the Education and Child Welfare Program at Reason Public Policy Institute, where she oversees Reason Public Policy Institute's research on social services and education issues. Visit Reason Public Policy Institute's web-site at [www.rppi.org](http://www.rppi.org).*

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(949) 595-7979

(800) 704-7799

Fax (949) 595-7970

E-mail: [info@aaeteachers.org](mailto:info@aaeteachers.org)

Website: [aaeteachers.org](http://aaeteachers.org)

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