

Education Matters

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IN PRAISE OF (AND SYMPATHY FOR) TEACHERS



By Chester E. Finn

Another school year has ended, and another is beginning. It's time for a word in appreciation of teachers! Observing a focus group the other evening that pulled together a dozen AP teachers from a strong suburban school system, I was struck anew by their intelligence, their selflessness, their energy, their patience, the depth of their commitment to their work, and their genuine concern for the well-being and advancement of their youthful charges. Bravo for them and the many thousands of others like them without whom our schools could not function and would not produce even today's mixed results.

They came across as fairly satisfied, too. I didn't detect much self-pitying. Indeed, individual teachers, speaking for themselves, seldom spend a lot of time bemoaning their fate. They go about their work, reposing in tolerable comfort in a bed they made for themselves and taking well-deserved pride in their successes. Indeed, surveys by the National Opinion

Research Center indicate that teachers are relatively happy with their work, up there with artists and authors—and not far below clergy and firefighters.

Their “leaders,” however, and innumerable policy wonks, think tankers, interest groups, and assorted experts and politicians who claim to be looking after teachers' interests—these folks spend a lot of time lamenting the raw deal they want you to think American society is giving its schoolteachers. Their complaints generally center on tight-fisted legislators, mindless administrators, mean-spirited federal programs, incompetent, uncooperative parents, and unmotivated pupils.

Does this sound familiar? These critics suggest that we're supposed to feel teachers' pain, dig deeper into our pocketbooks to compensate them, and chuck out the evil bureaucrats, guileful politicians, and misbegotten programs that hassle and oppress them.

Which got me thinking. Do teachers truly deserve sympathy as well as gratitude?

And I concluded that yes, they do—great teachers and those who go above and beyond deserve more than others—but not primarily for the plagues that union leaders and sundry propeller heads, vote-seekers, and pundits like to recite. Sure, there's a basis for some of those. But what teachers genuinely deserve sympathy for are six afflictions, all of which could have been averted (and/or could still be corrected) via smart policy shifts:

1. An absurd and antiquated compensation system that pays bad teachers as much as good ones. That system is controlled by large bureaucracies instead of individual schools; is skewed to favor time-servers at the expense of newcomers; and is coupled to archaic, nonportable pension plans.

2. A personnel system designed for the 1930s that ignores the tenets of modern management and the need to empower individuals—both principals and teachers—to reach agreement on their job assignments, placements, retention and



such. Instead, it entrusts such matters to rule books, rigid seniority systems, and (again) large bureaucracies. The same HR system is blind to modern career trajectories and weeps whenever anyone exits the classroom even though the typical pattern

per it's printed on, much less the money that's spent on it.

4. Schools that, despite much blather about "professional" educators, give teachers surprisingly little control over fundamental decisions about their work.

of today's young college graduates is to try one thing for a few years, then another and then another.

3. A dysfunctional training-and-licensure regimen that, on the one hand, makes it slow, expensive, and arduous for eager would-be teachers to enter the public school classroom, and, on the other hand, burdens them with useless courses while failing to impart core knowledge of their subjects and the most effective methods of conveying those subjects to children. Superimposed on this is so-called "professional development" that much of the time isn't worth the pa-

Yes, it's still partly true that once the classroom door is closed, the teacher is queen of her domain. Yet that teacher often has little or no say about who is in her class; what textbooks will be used; the curricular scope and sequence; the quantity of homework (if any); the grading scale; how to communicate with parents, and much more. At the same time, that "professional" may not even have her own classroom and desk, and almost surely lacks her own work phone number and e-mail address.

5. A host of forces (including, let's face it, teachers' own desire for smaller classes) have conspired to swell America's teaching work force to three times its 1955 size even as student enrollments have risen by just 50 percent. Hence, even though we're spending tons more money per pupil, teachers' pay has barely kept pace with inflation. We've rashly opted for more teachers rather than better—or better-compensated—teachers. Then we wonder why we're not getting platoons of the best and brightest to work in our public school classrooms. Teachers—great ones, especially—should earn more, but that's destined not to happen, at least not to any appreciable degree, so long as most "new money" goes into hiring more people.

6. Finally, we've devised such narrow "accountability" systems for schools, and built those atop such shoddy standards and simple-minded tests, that teachers may legitimately be forgiven for not wanting to "teach to" those tests and for feeling shackled and blocked from teaching things they love and yearn for their pupils to love, too. Mindless accountability arrangements foster mindless instruction and, in time, mindless, robotic instructors.

Yes, sympathize with teachers even as you applaud them. But please identify the real problems rather than the fashionable ones. ■

The Professionals?

Teachers, we are told (mostly by teachers), are professionals—and they require treatment befitting such. Alas, the facts don't always support the claims. Take, for instance, the recent protest in Los Angeles, in which some 75 percent of that city's public school educators left their posts and their pupils to stand outside their schools, wave signs, and demand that state budget cuts in education be rescinded.

They were prompted to this display of unprofessionalism by the United Teachers Los Angeles, a union led by A.J. Duffy, who noted that any teacher not following his commands "will be crossing a picket line."

One's mental image of a professional isn't usually that of a brow-beaten employee who, threatened by union bosses, is forced from his place of work onto the street and there made to march and holler. Professionals generally retain autonomy. They are devoted to their work. They do not leave their jobs whenever legislators displease them. They do not actively undermine the purported goals of their institution. Teachers: if you want to be viewed and treated as professionals, you'll need to act accordingly.

Source—The Education Gadfly, *A Weekly Bulletin of News and Analysis from the Thomas B. Fordham Institute*. www.edexcellence.net/gadfly



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A PROFESSIONAL ALTERNATIVE

Unions Continue to Spread Falsehoods about AAE and Its Affiliates

By Gary Beckner



When you joined the AAE, did you think you were joining a movement to “privatize” public education? Or to destroy public schools? Or to promote vouchers? When we formed AAE, we weren’t thinking that either. But that’s what the unions continue to say about us. Just for the record, none of what the National Education Association (NEA) says about us is true. *(But rather than waste time rebutting their accusations in this article, I invite anyone interested in the truth to visit our website at www.aaeteachers.org. Go to the “About Us” page and click on “What Teachers Say about Us.” At the top of that page, click on “What the NEA Says about AAE” to discover more misstatements about us.)*

The Credibility Gap

In a perfect world, local union leaders would take the time to do a bit of research on their own instead of just taking what is handed down from their union bosses. They could keep from embarrassing themselves further. That is assuming they would be embarrassed to learn they are passing along misinformation.

Questioning our credibility seems ironic when one considers the results of a recent Harris Poll that asked Americans whom they would trust the most to tell them the truth. At the very top of the list at 86 percent were teachers!

Look who is at the very bottom of the list of those most likely to tell us the truth: trade union leaders! Perhaps that’s why the NEA

(the nation’s largest trade union) is spending hundreds of thousands of dollars trying to repackage itself as a professional association.

The reality is that the good job many of America’s teachers are doing in the classroom is being overshadowed by the negative image the NEA is burdening them with through its labor union mentality, partisan politics, and controversial social agendas. And when did monopoly unionism become synonymous with public education? If one criticizes the labor union’s militant tactics and extreme partisanship, does that mean one is out to destroy our public schools? Of course not! The AAE believes our organization can help save public education, not destroy it. More than 90 percent of the nearly 300,000 teachers who have joined with the coalition of independent state teacher associations across America are public school teachers.

It is a sad commentary that the NEA feels it must rely on the negative politics of misinformation to hold on to its members. That is the tactic of an organization that knows it’s in trouble.

An Institution at Risk

More than a decade ago, the NEA retained the Kamber Group, a Washington, D.C.-based consulting firm, to conduct an internal study to determine, among other things, why the NEA was not attracting the new generation of teachers entering the field of education. The NEA must have been dismayed by the results of the report, which the Kamber Group entitled “An Institution at Risk.”

The study found that young teachers view themselves as professionals and do not relate to labor unions or wish to be associated with them. Compounding the NEA’s problem is the fact that new millennium teachers actually like many of the reform ideas that are anathema to the NEA, such as performance pay tied to accountability tests. Just the opposite, the NEA is, for better or for worse, married to a one-size-fits-all salary structure for teachers and is against almost all accountability measures.

Americans who say they would generally trust each of the following groups of people to tell the truth:

Teachers	86% ✓
Clergy/Priests	85%
Doctors	83%
Scientists	79%
Judges	79%
Professors	77%
Police Officers	75%
Ordinary Citizens	71%
Pollsters	55%
Presidents of the U.S.	54%
Business Leaders	49%
Members of Congress	46%
TV Newscasters	44%
Journalists	43%
Trade Union Leaders	37% ✓

Source: Harris Poll



In short, the report summarized that in order to reach the new generation of teachers, NEA must begin projecting a “more professional image.” What has been the NEA’s response? It has been busily trying to merge its state affiliates with the state affiliates of the nation’s other large teacher union, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), a division of the AFL/CIO. This seems to fly in the face of the Kamber Group recommendation. How does merging with an organized labor coalition like the AFL/CIO project a “more professional image”? As one member of the Florida NEA affiliate, which recently merged with the AFT group, put it, “I thought we were teachers, not teamsters.”

At about the same time that the NEA was seeing the “hand writing on the wall,” a group of nationally recognized educators came together to form a new kind of teachers association. They felt the two unions had grown monolithic and were leading our public school enterprise in the wrong direction. This group of teachers, which includes a number of National Teachers of the Year, felt it was time for a new voice speaking for mainstream teachers in America.

Teachers by Calling, Professionals by Choice

Enter the Association of American Educators! AAE’s founders had observed how political and unprofessional the teachers unions were becoming and how union leaders frequently misrepresented the views of their members. And it wasn’t just the fact that the unions had become so politically partisan; it was also that their heavy emphasis on politics and the use of militant labor union tactics were simply not working. Teachers were not only losing respect from the public, they were going backwards in pay, when compared to other professions over the past thirty years. Something had to be done, and we didn’t feel the unions were capable of morphing back into a truly professional voice for teachers, as the Kamber Group suggested.

AAE was formally incorporated as a nonprofit, professional educators association, offering many of the same benefits to

teachers that the teachers unions provide, such as liability insurance—but at a fraction of the cost and without the partisan politics and controversial social agendas.

Teachers are indeed teachers by calling, but they can only be professionals by choice. That message seems to be resonating with the new generation of teachers, as well as with those veterans who feel disenfranchised by the unions. AAE is the fastest growing national, nonunion teachers association in America, and is leading the effort to create professional career options for teachers, unlike the other organizations that merely protect the status quo. AAE is also helping to establish state-based associations to give teachers better representation at the state level as well. When the AAE

was founded, we discovered what may still be one of the best kept secrets in America. There were already a number of state-based nonunion teachers associations extant that thought much like we did. Three of the groups, in Texas, Missouri, and Georgia, had grown larger than the union affiliates in those states, proving that when teachers are given choices, they exercise those choices.

AAE is a much-needed source of revitalization—advancing the field of education through cooperation, not conflict.

AAE immediately entered into partnership agreements with eight of those state-based groups that saw the need to build a force that can blunt the monopolistic influence of the unions at the national level as well as in their states. Since that time, the AAE has been working hard to launch new, independent state-based groups in states where no compatible organization exists.

In the last two years alone, AAE has helped start new groups in Colorado and Utah. In addition, AAE has opened a Washington, D.C., office to better represent the voices of this growing independent teachers association movement.

The good news is that teachers across America are beginning to ask some introspective questions, such as: Have teachers gained the pay and support they deserve since the unions began organizing teachers into bargaining units in the 1970s? Has the connection with unions helped advance the profession? Has public education improved academically?

The answer to that last question is obvious, or we wouldn’t be seeing so many urgent attempts at reforming the system. However, it would not be fair to lay the entire blame for our nation’s academic decline at the teachers unions’ doorstep, although it is fair to say, they haven’t helped a great deal.

It is no secret that the unions have been fighting tooth and nail against every educational reform initiative over the past twenty years (except for the ones they introduced). Nearly all of the old guard education organizations offer one, and only one, solution to reforming our overwhelmed school system—more money. These groups are constantly lobbying for more federal and state

funding because they say public education is in a financial crisis. AAE believes we are at a financial *crossroads*, not *crisis*. Do we need to repair our eroding school buildings, buy more books and computers, and redesign and improve teacher compensation in order to attract and keep good teachers? Of course we do. However, until there are major *systemic* changes, most of the new money will never make it to where it can do the most good: the classroom.

A Crossroads, not a Crisis

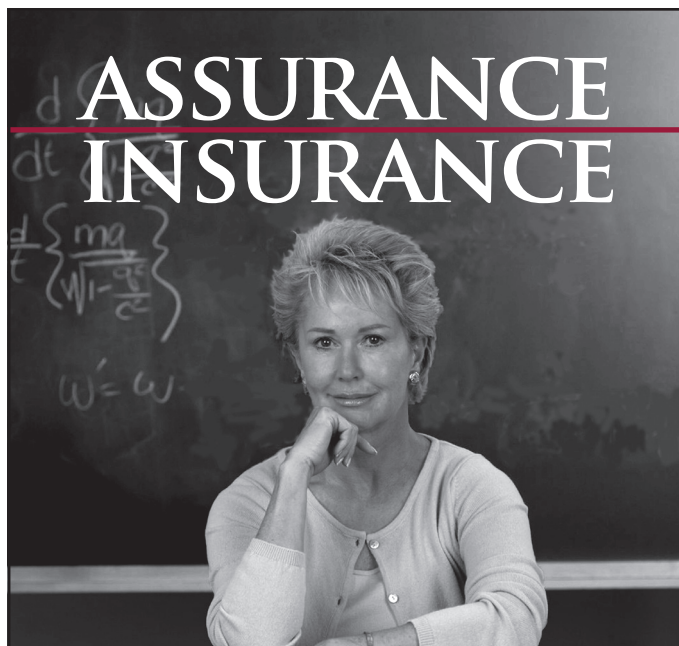
Protecting the status quo will only put America farther behind. Besides, America already spends more per student than any other industrialized nation (although it's difficult for a teacher at the classroom level to see the evidence of that). Ironically, unless and until the public school system is turned upside down—so that more funds can reach the classroom—pouring more money into the system could actually exacerbate our problems and inhibit true reform. A well-known economic rule is, if you subsidize something, you just continue to get more of it. Do we really want more bureaucracy? Still, surveys show that Americans are willing to put even more money into education, but they are beginning to demand that our schools be held accountable for the results.

That is where the AAE separates itself from the rest of the pack. AAE is a much-needed source of revitalization—advancing the field of education through cooperation, not conflict. Our members do not fear accountability. The kind of teacher that joins AAE considers himself or herself a true professional. Reform initiatives such as performance pay tied to accountability measures are standards in other professions and something the new generation of teachers is more willing to embrace. In addition, AAE looks at each new initiative through a lens of what is best for children, not just is it in our best interest? AAE is attracting the very best in the profession, and as professionals they know they will always be in demand. These types of reform initiatives will only create more opportunities for teachers—opportunities to work in less constrictive environments, and with different and commensurate ways of being rewarded for a job well done. Teachers need choices too.

Frankly, teachers who have a labor union mentality should indeed fear changes to the system, as the union leaders do. AAE thinks it makes more sense to get out in front of the reform movement rather than be dragged kicking and screaming into the twenty-first century. The leadership of the AAE is excited about the future of our profession, and will be helping to create a new vision of what a career in teaching can and should be. ■



Gary Beckner is the Founder and Executive Director of Association of American Educators.



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BUILDING A TOTAL SCHOOL DISCIPLINE PLAN

Do your discipline strategies and solutions measure up?

By Gene Bedley

Students can and will make responsible choices when administrators, teachers, and adults implement comprehensive plans for schoolwide discipline programs in their schools. All too often one of the major components of a comprehensive discipline plan is neglected—helping students see the correlation between cause and effect and what ultimately strengthens or weakens them. Eight essential components will enable your school to implement a successful discipline program.

1 Develop a clear discipline plan. A total school discipline plan begins with a sound definition of discipline: training that enables students to make appropriate choices in a climate of warmth and support, always beginning with clear, concise limits, practiced procedures, and numerous options to meet specific temperament types.

A discipline plan should clearly identify who is responsible for what. It should outline administrator responsibilities, teacher responsibilities, parent responsibilities, and student responsibilities. Have everyone sign the document.

2 Focus your discipline plan on student responsibility rather than identifying various areas where you need control. Help students see that every person deserves what his attitudes produce. Involve students in constructing

lists of behaviors that enhance or destroy learning. Use the list that enhances learning to write a class mission statement titled “What We Need from People.” Require students to sign the class mission after they assist in designing it.

3 Be mindful of and use the high correlation between motivation and student behavior. Be an expert in “child currency,” that is, what the child values. What a teacher does before the misbehavior occurs largely determines whether there will be violations of behavioral standards. Identify from seven major motivators those that contribute the most in promoting a productive learning environment. The seven major motivators are:

INDEPENDENCE - Some children are motivated by having the opportunity to play with a special tub of toys and games. They like doing things on their own. You might want to have a number of items in a “rental tray” that students can “rent” from you based on accomplishing their behavior goals.

COMPETITION - Students who are motivated by competition can't wait to see how they're doing relative to other class members.

PEER APPROVAL - Many students will do the right thing to gain a positive response from their peers.

ADULT APPROVAL - Many students love to perform for adults, especially the adults they like.

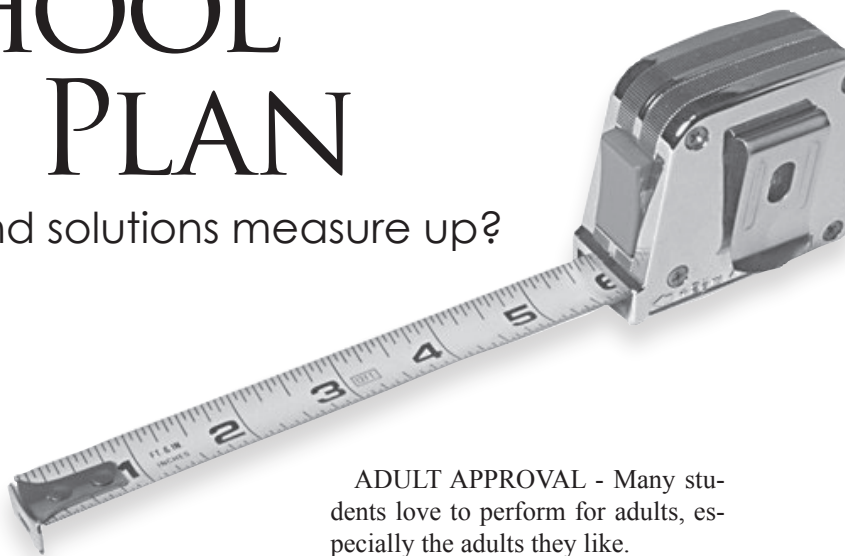
MYSTERY DISCLOSURES - If you place a highly prized puppet into a paper bag, you'll only have to do it once and the bag will forever be magical and prized as one of the top kid currency.

FOOD - There's no doubt about it, students are motivated by all kinds of snack foods. However, because food has allergy implications and dependency issues, be selective about the kinds of food you use in the classroom.

ANIMALS - I discovered one of the most powerful kid currencies was when I introduced students to a monkey that taught them how to set goals and behave. I have since learned how really powerful and life changing a stuffed animal can be in transforming negative classroom behavior to positive constructive behavior.

4 Avoid an overindulgence in either praise or punishment. Instead, focus on identifying agreements and replacement behaviors that ultimately serve both the student and the teacher.

Be intentional about making and keeping agreements. Make sure your child is able to verbalize the agreement after you have decided on a course of action.



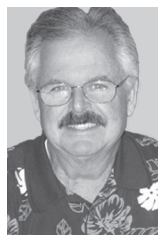
In seeking to find replacement behaviors for children who are out of control, check the things that are contributing toward the frustration/injury that is fostering the lack of control. Building the child's confidence is critical in helping him overcome his unrealistic demands on himself and others.

5 Provide training in ethics for all students and include discussions on how to build an ethical community. Conduct forum sessions discussing ethical actions when faced with various choices. Promote schoolwide value themes, including themes of respect and responsibility.

6 Implement options for students who learn in different ways, allowing for various temperaments and learning types.

7 Institute problem-solving strategies that include fact finding (What happened?), personal responsibility (How are you going to fix it?), and action steps to correct the problem (What would you be willing to do to fix it?).

8 Distinguish between compliance issues (required choices) and those issues that are negotiable (optional solutions and strategies). Help everyone see that when individuals do not comply with certain expectations, there are little, if any, options other than consequences. At the same time, help students see that most interactions are negotiable within the context of responsible choices. ■



Gene Bedley is the Executive Director of the National Character Education Center (NCEC). NCEC provides educators with hundreds of solutions and practical strategies through its free online newsletter; Values in Action!, The Best in Ethics

Education, and a comprehensive character development program, "Values in Action!" Visit NCEC online at www.ethicsusa.com. Gene Bedley's latest book is called Discipline Solutions and Strategies.

Florida Teacher Wins Special Award!

Member of AAE Florida Affiliate Honored

On May 13, Professional Educators Network of Florida (PEN) presented its 2008 Educator of the Year award to Mr. Joseph Cofield of Bonita Springs Middle School in Lee County, FL. Mr. Cofield is a history and computer science teacher, and has been at Bonita Springs for nine years.

After retiring from the U.S. Army nine years ago, Mr. Cofield entered the field of teaching through the Troops to Teachers program. He has received numerous awards, including a Gerald Read Scholarship, which enabled him to take part in a global education tour in China. He is also active in a teacher mentorship program that helps teachers become leaders in their schools and communities.

Mr. Cofield was selected due to his commitment to the professional model of education, excellence in teaching, and educational leadership within the community. As part of the award, Mr. Cofield received a cash prize of \$2500.

"I am honored to be recognized by my professional association as an educator who focuses on excellence in the classroom," said Mr. Cofield. "I attempt to be fully committed to my students by giving them my very best each and every moment that I have an opportunity to serve them."

Of Classrooms and Computers

Mr. Cofield spends much of his time working with low-income students. His students, he found, were at a disadvantage because their families could not afford computers, so he began a program that allowed local businesses and communities to donate used and new com-

puters for the homes of each student who needed one.

He has helped countless students improve their grades and has worked with them to obtain college scholarships. He even started the College Reach Out Program (CROP) at Bonita Springs Middle School. The program gives motivated students with financial need a chance to learn about college, do volunteer work, and, if they keep up their grades, earn a college scholarship.

Mr. Cofield is very dedicated to making sure each student has the opportunity to get the best education possible, and can often be found in his classroom long after the traditional school day has ended.



From left: Cathy DeMoisey, PEN Executive Director; Joseph Cofield, PEN scholarship recipient; Tracey Bailey, 1993 National Teacher of the year and Director of Education Policy for AAE.

"Joseph is an outstanding educator who exemplifies what's working today in education," said Cathy DeMoisey, PEN Executive Director. "His commitment to professionalism has been evident throughout his teaching career, which is why he was selected for this distinguished award."

The PEN Professional Educator of the Year is an annual award based on personal educational history and professional development, teaching philosophy, and knowledge of education issues and trends. ■

Professional Educators Network (PEN) of Florida is an affiliate of the Association of American Educators (AAE).

PRINCIPALS DO THE DARNDEST THINGS

Crazy principal antics to encourage student involvement in a PTO fundraiser just might get your school featured in the local newspaper.

By Emily Graham

Maryland elementary school principal Brian Baudoin is serious about education—so serious that one day last fall, he roamed the halls dressed as a rooster and did the chicken dance during physical education classes.

That's also why a principal in Wisconsin puckered up to a goat, and one in Tennessee sampled a rare delicacy: a chocolate-covered cockroach.

These administrators, and many like them, are finding that a little public humiliation goes a long way toward motivating students to meet fundraising and achievement goals. As the trend grows, principals are using ever more creative ways to inspire students, from eating worms to shaving their heads during school assemblies.

"Promising a stunt at the end can be a really effective way to get kids motivated," says Frank Sennett, author of *101 Stunts for Principals to Inspire Student Achievement*. The stunts appeal to kids because they get to see a side of the principal they don't glimpse every day.

In addition to boosting fundraising sales, these types of antics can help build school spirit. Remembering his day as a chicken, Baudoin says, "It really galvanized the community. I don't know who was more excited, the children or their parents."

Motivational stunts don't necessarily have to be outrageous to be effective, Sennett says. They just need to capture students' imaginations. There's no need to worry if your principal isn't up for kissing farm animals or eating bugs.

"The biggest thing is just enjoy it," says Kellye Goostree, who's done both as principal at her elementary school in Tennessee. "Do whatever fits your school and have fun and don't take yourself so seriously."

Roughing It

Principal Wes Nicholas promised his students last year that if they raised \$10,000 in the PTO's first Fun Run, he would spend a night on the school roof. The students at Asotin (Wash.) Elementary collected \$22,000 in pledges, and Nicholas headed to the roof with a tent and a sleeping bag—in the middle of October.



When students assembled the next morning on the playground for the pledge of allegiance, Nicholas emerged from the tent in his pajamas, carrying a large stuffed animal and letting the students think they had woken him up.

The principal also allowed the top-earning student to cut his hair in any style. The student shaved a strip down the middle of his head, giving him a reverse Mohawk.

Nicholas is quick to note that it could have been worse. He previously worked at a middle school where "they wanted to see someone dressed up as a lady and put makeup on you and stuff."

Hanging Around

Mike Dmiterchik has a habit of losing bets with his students. Most recently, he wagered with students at Rehoboth Elementary in Rehoboth Beach, Del., that they couldn't raise \$40,000 from the PTO gift-wrap fundraiser. He ended up duct-taped to a wall in the school gym, hovering several feet above the floor.

The school's top 25 sellers had the privilege of taping Dmiterchik while the rest of the students watched. As a final blow, a student placed a pink bow on his head.

Earlier in his career, he's had his head shaved and had worn a dress and a toga to school. Dmiterchik explains that he's willing to do these things because it gets kids excited about coming to school.

"I like having fun and seeing the smiles on kids' faces," he says, "and if it's at my expense, I've got big enough shoulders, I can take it."

Chickening Out

With school enrollment cut in half last year by redistricting, it was more important than ever for the Tulip Grove Elementary PTA catalog sale to be successful. So when the fundraising coordinator at the Bowie, Md., school asked principal Brian Baudoin whether he was willing to wear a chicken costume to get students excited about the sale, he didn't think twice. Baudoin challenged students to sell 740 items, and they exceeded the goal by almost 30 percent.

Baudoin donned the multicolored suit for an entire school day, but it wasn't all fun and games. "I reinforced the message while I was in the suit about setting goals in life, making a plan to achieve them, and achieving them," he says.

When he worked at another school, faculty members shaved his head and painted it blue and gold, the school colors, after the students had perfect attendance for a state test.

Wrapping It Up

Principal Shawn Maguire is always looking for new ways to motivate students at Rockport (Mass.) Elementary. Known for his extensive tie collection, he once allowed students to cut 2 inches from his ties after they met reading goals. The cut-up neckcloths were displayed on bulletin boards around the school.

To fire up the kids about the fall gift-wrap sale, Maguire promised that students from the two top-selling classes could wrap him in toilet paper in front of the whole school. The assembly took place on Halloween, and Maguire, who was wearing a devil costume, soon looked like a mummy. The following week, he shaved his head when Rockport Elementary staff lost a basketball game to staff from another school. The game was a fundraiser for the elementary's PTO.

"It really improves the school climate," says Maguire of the incentives. "There's a climate here of support and nurture and camaraderie...and that transfers to what students do."

Although his stunts so far have been relatively simple, he has an idea for something really big: riding an elephant to school to promote reading.

Bugging Out

In her years as an elementary school principal, Kellye Goostree has shown that she's up for just about anything. The principal at Cedar Grove Elementary in Smyrna, Tenn. (winner of PTO Today's 2007 Parent Group of the Year search), bravely lets students decide what she'll do if they meet their PTO fundraising goals. Cedar Grove staff members turn the stunts into educational exercises, having students suggest ideas, categorize them, vote, and make graphs as they progress toward their sales goals.

"It's a lot more fun and we've raised more money when we let the kids get involved in it," Goostree says, noting that she always retains final veto power over their selection.

In previous years, she and the assistant principal have held and kissed an 8-foot boa constrictor, kissed a cow, and eaten canned dog and cat food. One year, the assistant principal wore an inflatable clown suit and Goostree served as the ringmaster. When Goostree ate a chocolate-covered cockroach last year, staffers

positioned a video camera to give students a close-up look at the bug, and she stood next to a microphone so they could hear it crunching in her mouth.

Getting the Goat

At St. Anthony Parish School in Athens, Wis., a pledge by the staff to sing karaoke and kiss a goat motivated students to more than double scrip sales. Principal Lucy McCarthy promised the reward if students made at least \$60,000 in sales. Over two weeks, the fundraiser brought in \$68,000, nearly three times as much as the year before.


Students, parents, and some grandparents gathered to watch the entire St. Anthony Parish School staff kiss a pet goat belonging to two students whose mother teaches at the school. "The goat didn't seem to mind at all. It was a very friendly goat," McCarthy says.

After receiving the kisses, the goat was led outdoors and the volume was cranked up on the karaoke machine. McCarthy sang a Shania Twain song, dressed as Shania, and the parish priest performed his own version of "Que Sera, Sera." The rest of the staff members, who were dressed as lions, sang "The Lion Sleeps Tonight."

A few parents had originally suggested that McCarthy ride a donkey on the playground, but she opposed the idea for safety concerns. She's already brainstorming ideas for next year, looking for "something cute but safe."

"This will be hard to top," she says. ■

Emily Graham is senior editor of PTO Today magazine and ptotoday.com.



COMMON STUNTS

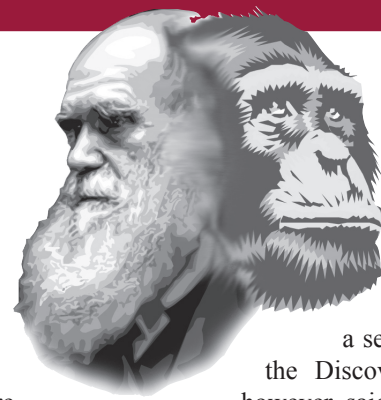
Kiss, Kiss: Kids love to see grownups smooch just about any kind of animal. Newspapers have written stories about principals kissing pigs, cows, goats, donkeys, even a fish.

In Costume: Students get a kick out of seeing normally serious teachers and principals wearing costumes. Popular options include dressing as an animal or a book character and making an avid sports fan wear a rival team's jersey.

Grossed Out: Inspired by Fear Factor and How To Eat Fried Worms, principals have ingested a variety of insects and unpalatable fare like pet food.

Dishing It Out: Kids get to play with food, drenching the principal in ice-cream sundae toppings or covering the principal in a hot dog suit with ketchup and mustard.

On Top of Things: Several principals have camped out on the school roof overnight or moved their entire office to the roof. A brave few have skydived onto school grounds.



State Frees Teachers to Critique Evolution

Global warming, origins of life, cloning also may be scrutinized

Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal signed into law the Louisiana Science Education Act, which allows school districts to permit teachers to present evidence, analysis, and critique of evolution and other prevalent scientific theories in public school classrooms.

The law came to the governor's desk after overwhelming support in the legislature, including a unanimous vote in the state's Senate and a 93-4 vote in the House.

The Act has been criticized by some as an attempt to insert religion into science education, and hailed by others as a blow for academic freedom in the face of pressure to ignore flaws in politically correct scientific theories.

Robert Crowther, director

of communications for The Discovery Institute, a Seattle-based think tank on science and culture, called the act necessary.

"Many school administrators and teachers are fearful or confused about what is legally allowed when teaching about controversial scientific issues like evolution," said Crowther. "The Louisiana Science Education Act clarifies what teachers may be allowed to do."

Specifically, the Act allows teachers in the state's public schools to present evidence both for and against Darwinian theories of evolution, and allows local school boards to approve supplemental materials that may open critical discussions of evolution, the origins of life, global warming, human

cloning and other scientific theories.

Teachers are still required by the Act to follow the standardized science curriculum, and school districts are required to authorize both the teachers' classes and additional materials. The state's Board of Elementary and Secondary Education will have the power to prohibit materials it deems inappropriate, and the act prohibits religious instruction.

Marjorie Esman, state director of Louisiana's ACLU told the New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, "To the extent that this might invite religion in the public school classroom, we will do everything we can do to keep religion out."

John West, a senior fellow of the Discovery Institute, however, said opponents of the bill are misunderstanding it. Rather than being about infusing intelligent design or creationism into the classroom, he contends, the bill is about giving teachers the freedom to talk about the debates that already exist in science, even among evolutionists themselves.

"This bill is not a license to propagandize against something they don't like in science," West told the *Times-Picayune*. "Someone who uses materials to inject religion into the classroom is not only violating the Constitution, they are violating the bill."

Source—WorldNetDaily

Impressive Results found in Teach for America

Though the 2004 *Mathematica* findings on the "do no harm" effects of Teach For America didn't quite quell critics of the popular program, perhaps the latest study from the Calder Center will. Researchers looked at the effectiveness (in terms of student performance) of Teach For America secondary teachers compared with traditional teachers, and found some impressive results, particularly in math and science.

The effects were especially pronounced because not only did TFA teachers have less experience on average than the comparison group, they were also assigned to more academically challenged classrooms in already low-performing districts and schools.

The authors suggest that TFA teachers were able to offset their lack of experience (and we might add traditional pedagogical preparation) with better academic preparation. They also suggest that perhaps an unmeasured, but nonetheless important factor—motivation—plays a role in the findings.

Source—TQBulletin, a publication of National Council on Teaching Quality. For more information, visit www.nctq.org.

News Service for Students Adds New Feature

StudentNewsDaily.com, a current events website for high school students, is pleased to introduce "Answers by Email." This FREE service provides answers to questions from its Daily News Article, Tuesday's News Issue and Friday's News Quiz. To sign-up for Answers by Email, visit its home page at StudentNewsDaily.com.

The goal of StudentNewsDaily.com is to build high school students' knowledge of current events and strengthen their critical thinking skills. This is done by providing comprehension and critical thinking questions along with posted news articles and other current events items.

Our mission is two-fold: 1) To provide additional news resources for the high school classroom, presenting students with a broader perspective of the news; and 2) To provide news in a manageable format, avoiding "news overload."

To sign-up for Answers by Email, visit its home page at StudentNewsDaily.com.



Americans' Views on the Nation's Education System Revealed



In a recent poll conducted by the Associated Press, 854 parents and 833 members of the general population were surveyed about their views of public schools in the United States.

Sixty-one percent of parents surveyed believe public schools are preparing their children for college, while 54 percent of the general population believe students are prepared. On the question of whether students are prepared for the workforce, the numbers declined slightly with only 44 percent of the general population surveyed believing students are prepared, and 57 percent of parents trusting that public schools have adequately prepared students.

On the issue of pay for teachers and teacher strikes, 61 percent of respondents in the general population category and 58 percent of parents surveyed believe that teachers pay should be based at least in some part on student achievement. Fifty-three percent of respondents in the parents and general population believe teachers should be able to strike.

The survey was conducted by Knowledge Networks and funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

Providing Resources Early for Kids Act



On June 26 the House Education and Labor Committee passed the Providing Resources Early for Kids Act (HR 3289). The bill directs the Secretary of Education to award states competitive grants to expand state-funded preschool programs. Recipients of the grants will be able to use them to increase the number of early childhood educators with bachelor degrees; increase

the benefits given to teachers, teacher aides, and program directors; decrease class sizes; implement research-based curricula; and expand services such as health screenings and nutritional assistance.

Achievement Gaps Closing in U.S. Schools



According to a new report by the Center on Education Policy (CEP), students in the U.S. are improving in reading and math, and the achievement gaps between various groups of students are closing. The researchers of the study analyzed state test data from all fifty states during 2002 to 2007 as well as data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). When looking at states with sufficient data, the study found that twenty-one states made moderate-to-large gains in math at the elementary level, twenty-two states showed gains at the middle level and twelve states showed gains in math at the high school level. In reading seventeen states showed gains at the elementary level, fourteen states made gains at the middle level, and eight states showed gains in high school.

Achievement gaps, especially for African-American and low-income children, were narrowed more than they were widened between 2002 and 2007. In 327 instances, the achievement gaps narrowed when analyzing proficiency levels, subjects, and grade levels. In only seventy-six instances did they increase and in twenty instances they stayed the same.

While achievement gaps narrowed in many instances, there is still room for improvement. In Mississippi, for example, between 2003 and 2007 the achievement gap in high school reading was reduced by 8 percentage points but there is still a 24-point gap between whites and blacks with 43 percent of white students proficient in high school reading and only 19 percent of blacks.

U.S. Supreme Court Rules on Union Neutrality



With a 7-2 decision, the U.S. Supreme Court has recently struck down a California law that placed restrictions on what employers were allowed to say when union organizing campaigns were occurring in the workplace. The California law had prohibited private employers that received more than \$10,000 in state funds from using those funds to "assist, promote or deter union organizing."

In the case *Chamber of Commerce v. Brown*, the Supreme Court decided that the law infringed upon employers First Amendment Rights by not allowing them to speak out against union organizing. The Court also noted that the National Labor Relations Act "expressly precludes regulation of speech about unionization" as long as employees are not threatened or promised anything.

Study Analyzes Schools of Education



According to the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ), many schools of education are not adequately preparing students to teach math effectively in elementary schools. The authors of the report, *No Common Denominator: The Preparation of Elementary Teachers in Mathematics by America's Education Schools*, looked at the teaching methods of seventy-seven education schools in forty-nine states, and found that only 13 percent of education schools provide sufficient amounts of math coursework for graduates of the schools to effectively teach math. To read the report, visit www.nctq.org



Read AAE press releases at www.aateachers.org. Click on "press room."

Jaime Escalante still stands and delivers advice

78-year-old Educator Still Inspiring Students and Teachers

Jaime Escalante, whose success in teaching advanced mathematics to inner-city Los Angeles teenagers was immortalized in the movie *Stand and Deliver*, was honored in May at the California State capitol.

Escalante, 78, is one of fourteen trailblazers who received Latino Spirit Awards from the California Latino Legislative Caucus.

Escalante, now living and teaching college classes part-time in Bolivia, taught for seventeen years at Los Angeles' Garfield High School and for seven years at Sacramento's Hiram Johnson High School, retiring in 1998.

Here's what he had to say in an interview with *The Sacramento Bee*.

“One of the greatest things you have in life is that no one has the authority to tell you what you want to be. You're the one who'll decide what you want to be.” — Jaime Escalante

Q: If you were a young man, would you choose to become a teacher again?

A: Absolutely. That's the only thing I can do. Believe me, I had fun, especially when I used to deal with gang members or kids who weren't motivated.

Before class and after class, I'd talk to them, to make them believe they could do it. I used to tell them, “Remember this: No one is better than you.”

Q: How do you feel about the term “hero”? Do you feel like a hero?

A: Not really. I'm just an honest man.

An honorable man who did the assignment and the homework because California gave me the chance.

Q: Do you have any regrets supporting Proposition 227 (the 1998 ballot measure that virtually ended bilingual education in public schools)?

A: I was in favor of monolingual language, and it was controversial in those days because people thought I was going in the wrong direction. No. The tremendous success I had at Garfield High School was because I emphasized English. I used to say, “Unfortunately, the test comes in one language, and you have to master that language.”

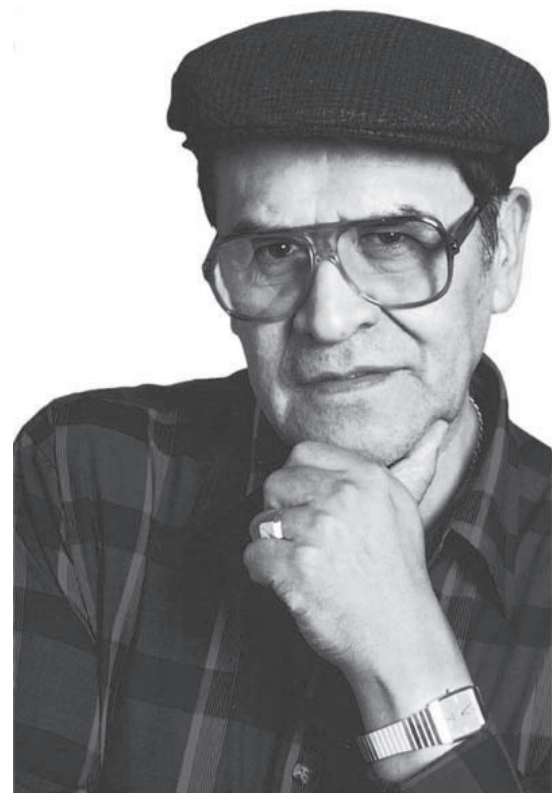
Q: Do you support the concept of a high school exit examination?

A: Yeah, I would say so because when kids graduate... I assume that in four years, they'll learn something. What they have to do on the test is to emphasize their basic knowledge.

Q: Some say public education isn't getting enough money. Others say money is not spent wisely. What do you think?

A: Money is not the problem. ... We have to know how to spend it. We put too much money (in programs) that don't achieve results. We waste a lot.

Q: What should California do about its dropout rate?



A: Schools alone cannot educate, they need the help of parents. ... At Garfield High School, a high percentage of dropouts were kids who didn't want to come to school. So I made them sign a contract.

And before that, I got in communication with their mom – mom is the one who calls the shots. I said, “Mom, ... this is what we're going to do, and you're going to help me out. ... I need you to control him. I'll be calling you.”

Q: Advice to teenagers?

A: Set your goals and go for it. You're going to have to go to college to be something. Otherwise, you're going to be pumping gas all the time.

Source—Jim Sanders, Sacramento Bee



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