

# Education Matters

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## What to Think, Not How to Think

**How schools of education regulate teachers' beliefs, ban academic freedom, and censor free speech.**

By Frederick Hess

For those who have been troubled by the tendency of universities to adopt campus speech codes, a worrisome new fad is rearing its head in the nation's schools of education. Stirred by professional opinion and accreditation pressures, teachers colleges have begun to regulate the dispositions and beliefs of those who would teach in our nation's classrooms.

At the University of Alabama, the College of Education explains that it is "committed to preparing individuals to promote social justice, to be change agents, and to recognize individual and institutionalized racism, sexism, homophobia, and classism." To promote its agenda, part of the program's self-proclaimed mission is to train teachers to "develop antiracist, anti-homophobic, antisexist...alliances."

The University of Alaska at Fairbanks School of Education declares on its website: "Teachers often profess 'colorblindness' ... which is at worst patronizing and

at best naive because race and culture profoundly affect what is known and how it is known." Consequently, the program emphasizes "the interrelatedness of race, identity, and the curriculum, especially the role of white privilege."

Professors at Washington State University's College of Education evaluate candidates to ensure they exhibit "an understanding of the complexities of race, power, gender, class, sexual orientation, and privilege in American society." The relevance of these skills to teaching algebra or the second grade is, at a minimum, debatable.

Brooklyn College's School of Education announces, "We educate teacher candidates and other school personnel about issues of social injustice such as institutionalized racism, sexism, classism, and heterosexism; and invite them to develop strategies and practices that challenge (such) biases."

One can sympathize with the senti-

ments at work. Moreover, in theory, academics can argue that merely addressing these issues implies no ideological bias.

However, in practice, education courses addressing "white privilege" and the "language of oppression" typically endorse particular views on issues such as affirmative action and student discipline. These codes have real consequences.

Ed Swan is pursuing a degree in teacher education at Washington State. *The Chronicle of Higher Education* reports that he flunked an evaluation of dispositions last year. The teacher who failed him explained that Swan, a conservative Christian and father of four Mexican-American children, had "revealed opinions that have caused me great concern in the areas of race, gender, sexual orientation, and privilege."

Washington State insisted that Swan agree to attend sensitivity training before being allowed to do his student teaching where observers could watch his class-



room performance.

In 2005, LeMoyne College's Graduate Program in Education informed Scott McConnell that he was not welcome to return and complete his degree. His offense? He wrote a paper advocating the use of corporal punishment. His paper was given a grade of A-minus; however, the department chairwoman's letter to McConnell cited the "mismatch between (his) personal beliefs...and the LeMoyne College program goals."

The conviction that teachers should hold certain views regarding sexuality or social class is rooted in a commendable impulse to ensure that they teach all students. However, even if scientific evidence established that certain beliefs or dispositions improved teacher effectiveness, colleges should hesitate to engage in this kind of exercise. The truth, of course, is that no such body of rigorous, empirical evidence exists.

In any event, there is good reason to be skeptical of claims that to be effective, teachers must have certain views or attitudes. Given that both kindhearted and callous doctors may be effective professionals, it is not clear why we should expect good teachers to be uniform in disposition. In fact, with the array of students that schools serve, it may be useful to hire teachers with diverse views and values. Ultimately, screening on "dispositions" serves primarily to cloak academia's biases in the garb of professional necessity.

Schools of education are not merely private entities; rather, in each state, they are deputized by licensure systems to serve as gatekeepers into the teaching profession. Even the vast majority of "alternative" training programs are sponsored by a school of education.

The National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education, which established requirements that would-be teach-

ers embrace "multicultural and global perspectives" and develop "dispositions that respect and value differences," has tried to backpedal recently by protesting that it did not "expect or require institutions to attend to any particular political or social ideologies."

Much more is needed. The cultivation of right-thinking cadres has no place in America's colleges and universities. ■



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# BABETTE'S LUNCH

## Low expectations mean missed opportunities for academic feasts

By Will Fitzhugh

You may have seen the movie, *Babette's Feast*, about a Frenchwoman in difficult financial circumstances who has to leave Paris and, seeking lodging with two sisters in a small village, agrees to cook for them. One of the sisters is patient enough to teach Babette how to soak the dried fish, which is the staple of their diet. While showing her the technique, she kindly explains, "Soak, soak."

At the end of the movie, Babette wins a lot of money in a lottery and it becomes apparent that this boarder, who has been trying in little ways to vary the diet of the sisters, had in fact been, in happier times, the head chef at one of the principal restaurants in Paris.

Before returning to Paris she prepares one last elegant meal that none of them will ever forget. We cannot help but be

reminded of those early days, in which, without any comment, she accepted the instruction: "Soak, soak."

I thought of this movie the other day when I read about students in summer programs at the Johns Hopkins Institute for the Advancement of Academic Youth in Baltimore. The *Boston Globe* article reported: "Students from twenty-one states and fifteen foreign countries—some as young as seventh grade—devour full-year high school courses in the arts, math, science, and languages in only three weeks. For a rare few, a normal nine-month curriculum is absorbed in seven days."

These students are our Babettes, perhaps, and when they return to our regular classrooms, they will not be surprised to hear us say, in a nice way, "Soak, soak," as we try to help them stand a two-semester

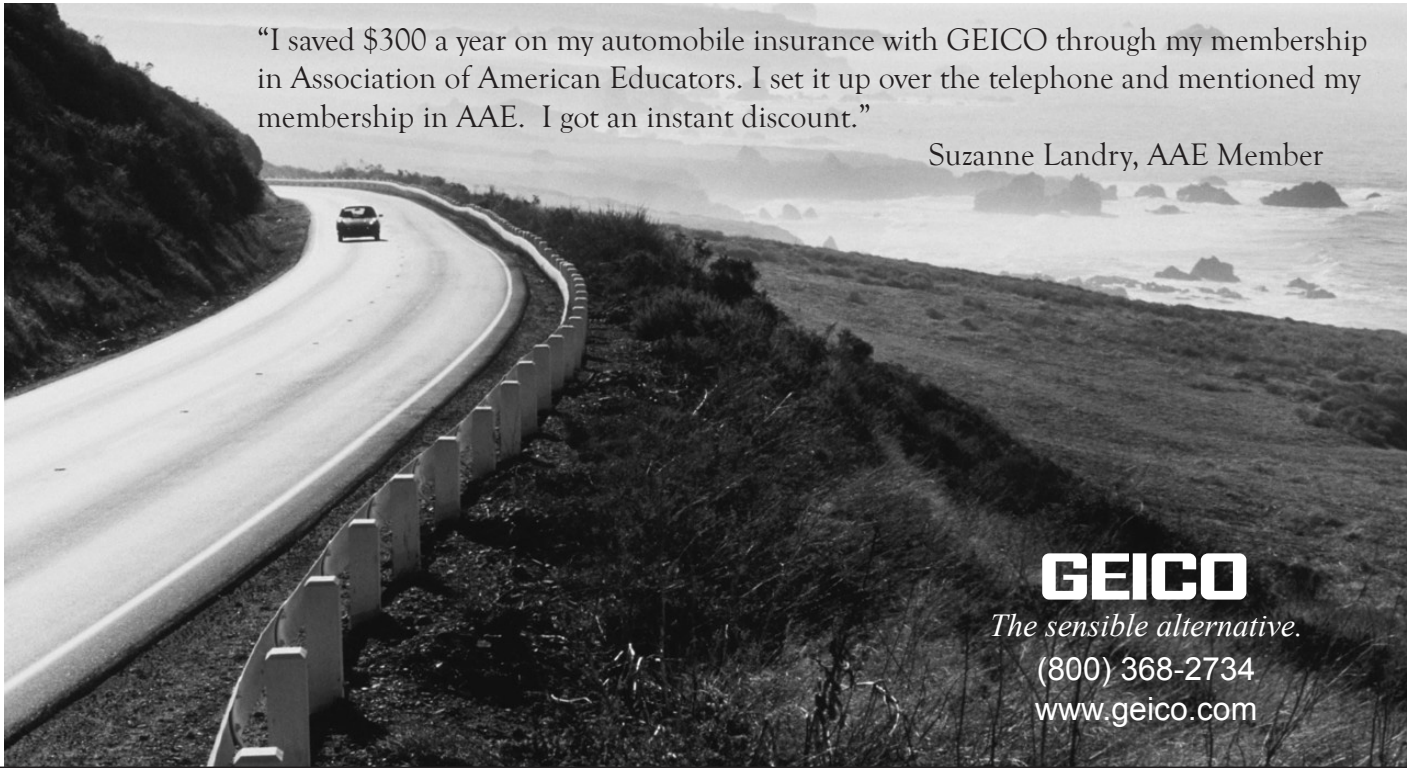
curriculum that some might be able to master fairly easily in a week.

If the most gifted students can finish a full year's high school course in seven days, and the next brightest in three weeks, we might wonder whether even some of our slower students are being restrained in their seats by our need to fill 180 school days with something to keep them off of the streets and generally out of trouble.

We could stand to admit that the ways in which we dumb down and slow down our curriculum, in fact, do a lot to cause the excess boredom, tardiness, absences, and even dropping out that we see more frequently in our schools. This doesn't include the students who stay in school but, given the glacial mindlessness of the challenges presented to them, decide they can

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Suzanne Landry, AAE Member

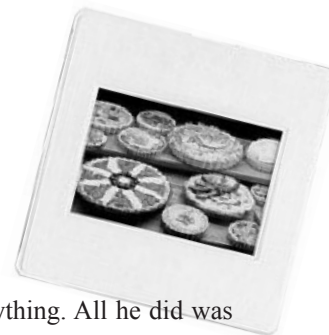


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easily work forty hours a week, get paid, and waste their money (and their time) on CDs, clothes, cars, and shoes.

How much are we doing to drive all of our students, not just the gifted, to distraction because we have done so much to lower our expectations for them? The United States Marine Corps has, for many years, been working with some of these same teenagers, and managed to convince them that both the curriculum and the Drill Instructor merit their very closest attention and their very best efforts. Many high school coaches achieve a similar degree of focus among their charges.

In our classrooms, however, most researchers now report finding disaffection, anomie, boredom, napping, efforts to change the subject, and other evidence of the absence of real challenge for our stu-

dents. The teachers often feel challenged, sometimes even overwhelmed, but that is not really the point of the exercise.

Albert Shanker liked to tell the story of the move of famed math teacher, Jaime Escalante to Sacramento, California. It appears that after Mr. Escalante moved to Sacramento from East Los Angeles where he made his name, the local press was very interested in the success of this teacher about whom a movie had been made. They were thrilled to find a ninth-grade girl who said he was a bad teacher.

"Tell us!" said the media. She reported that she had a problem with something in algebra and went to him, and he kept her after school for several days and brought her in on a Saturday morning. "And what happened?" asked the media. "Well, I finally got how to do it," she said, "but he

didn't teach me anything. All he did was make me work!"

How many Babettes do we face who would like us to make them work and let them shine? ■



*Will Fitzhugh is a Harvard graduate who taught high school for ten years in Concord, Massachusetts. He founded the Concord Review, the National Writing Board, and the National History Club. For more information visit, [www.tcr.org](http://www.tcr.org).*

# POLL FAULT

## Survey shows divide among parents, teachers

By Ben Feller, AP Education Writer

Considering they share responsibility for 50 million children, parents and teachers sure have some different views about what goes on in school.

From discipline to standardized tests to the quality of high schools, parents and teachers disagree on basic aspects of education, an AP-AOL Learning Services Poll finds.

They come together, though, on the need to hire and keep good teachers.

Parents and teachers literally see children differently. The setting at home is often not at all like the one at school, where kids hang out in groups and social pressures climb.

In the poll, for example, less than half of parents say student discipline is a serious concern at school.

Teachers scoff at that. Two in three of them call children's misbehavior a major problem.

With over fourteen years of teaching, Carol-Sue Nix has watched discipline problems trickle down from the fifth grade to prekindergarten. A parent-teacher conference usually follows.

"Some parents will work with us. If you talk to them, you see a change in the child," said Nix, who teaches second grade in Tuscaloosa, AL. And the rest of the parents? "They say, 'We'll deal with it,'" Nix laments, "and nothing changes."

Jeff Gillette, a retired respiratory therapist with two children in school, wouldn't mind if teachers had more power to take charge of unruly students.

"When I went to school, they could

actually paddle you or put you in detention," recalled Gillette, 50, of Phoenix, AZ. "Teachers can't do that anymore. It's a loss of control."

The survey also found:

- 73 percent of teachers say they know more than their students about learning tools available on the Internet. On this topic, 57 of parents say they know more than their kids.

- 71 percent of teachers say class work and homework are the best ways to measure academic success; 63 percent of parents say the same. A minority of both groups favored test scores.

- 79 percent of teachers say high schools do a good, if not better, job in preparing students for college. A smaller but still strong majority of parents, 67 percent, agree.

On testing, the poll found teachers are much more likely than parents to say standardized exams get too much emphasis. Yet most parents and teachers agree testing has weakened the ability of educators to give individual attention to students.

Dottie Hungerford is one of those parents.

"I don't see where the testing is going to come in handy for 90 percent of students down the line," said Hungerford, a truck loader from Syracuse, NY. "For science-minded kids taking English tests, I don't think they care where the period goes when you are up in space."

Speaking of English, teachers cite it as the one subject students should study more in school. Parents disagree, but not by much. They put English second, be-

hind math.

What troubles Jason Cleveland, a 34-year-old teacher in East Troy, WI, are the students who show no interest in learning. "How do you motivate somebody like that?" Cleveland said. "They are kids who, for whatever reasons, don't see a connection for themselves."

This is where things can get sticky, as parenting and teaching overlap.

In the poll, 43 percent of parents say low expectations of students is a serious problem; 54 percent of teachers say the same, including almost two in three teachers in high school.

So who sets the expectations?

Parents look to teachers to challenge and reward their kids. Teachers look to parents to instill manners, respect, and motivation. Sounds like a natural partnership. Not always.

"I hear these parents saying, 'Well, my children aren't doing very well, so you must not be a very good teacher,'" said Mike Randall, 48, who teaches abstinence-based health courses in Montgomery County, IN. "Wrong. Sorry. It's more like, 'If your child would follow the curriculum, open the book and apply himself, you would see how good this could all be.'"

In Columbus, GA, custodian Billy Hicks still thinks about the teacher who didn't get along with his 16-year-old son. "The teacher is there to teach and help the child," he said, "not show animosity toward an individual student."

Even grading can be grating.

A total of 46 percent of teachers say



a parent or student has asked them to change a grade even if it wasn't deserved. It happened about eight years ago to Steven Weisman, who teaches social studies in the suburbs of Chicago.

He sent a note home about one boy's struggling grades. When the student eventually failed, the parents asked Weisman to change the grade. Turns out the boy had intercepted the warning sent home, which got him in double trouble. Now Weisman makes parents sign a receipt.

Teachers can take heart in knowing that

parents do, ultimately, appreciate their value.

The poll asked about overcrowding, discipline, low expectations of students, violence and gangs, poor building conditions, and the availability of sports facilities. Yet the problem that ranked highest for parents and teachers was getting and keeping good teachers.

The AP-AOL Learning Services Poll of 1,085 parents and 810 teachers of children in kindergarten through 12th grade was conducted online Jan. 13-23

by Knowledge Networks after respondents were initially contacted by using traditional telephone polling. The margin of sampling error is plus or minus 3 percentage points for parents, 3.5 points for teachers. ■

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## NEA Looking to Play Larger Role in U.S. Presidential Primaries

The National Education Association is considering holding a U.S. Presidential nominating convention for its activists in 2007. Delegates to the convention would be given the choice of recommending a candidate from one, both, or neither of the major political parties.

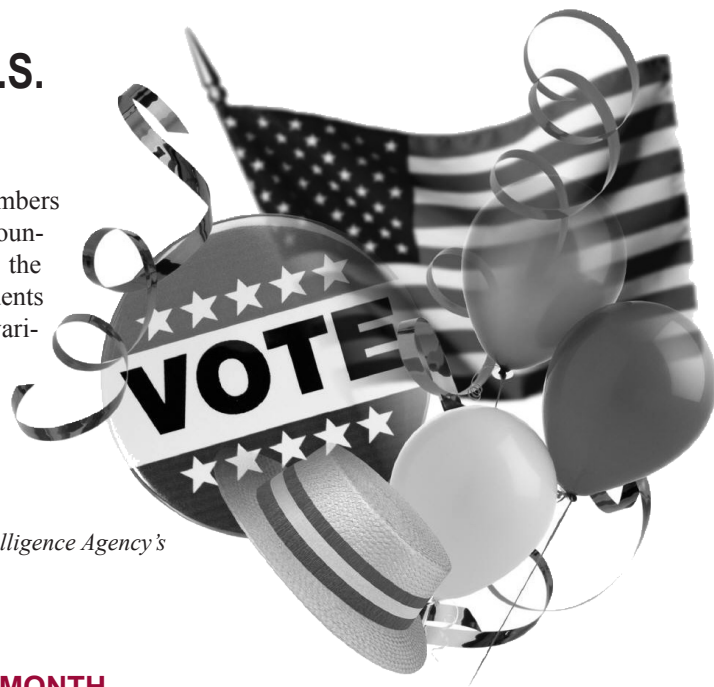
The idea arose from the union's experience in the 2004 election, when the California Teachers Association, among others, recommended Howard Dean in the Democratic primary, while Michigan Education Association President Lu Battaglieri personally endorsed John Kerry, and NEA remained neutral until Kerry won the nomination. The union hopes to hold the convention no later than October 2007, before the Iowa caucus in January 2008.

The union's Representative Assembly in July 2008 will still vote up or down on NEA's recommendation in the general election.

The delegates to the nominating convention will be limited to the NEA board

of directors and members of the union's PAC Council, which includes the state affiliate presidents and the leaders of various NEA special interest caucuses. NEA expects this will total some 370 participants. ■

*Source—Education Intelligence Agency's Communiqué*



### QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"I realize, of course, that not all members of the Chicago Teachers Union are Democrats, and it certainly is not my desire as an editor to produce a newspaper that is nothing more than a pipeline for one political party's message. However, it sometimes is hard to make positive comments about Republican officeholders when writing about the needs of folks employed in the public schools and who belong to labor unions. The fact is, most of the true friends of public education and of organized labor are Democrats."

—John A. Ostenburg, editor of Chicago Union Teacher.

## Georgia Juxtaposition

We were struck by the listing of items on the website of the Georgia Association of Educators (GAE), the NEA affiliate in the state. The first item is an op-ed by GAE President Mercuria Chase Williams titled "Merit pay for teachers too flawed to be fair" that was published in the January 12th, 2006, *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. Dr. Williams wrote, "It [merit pay] has proved problematic in a profession as complex as teaching, where professionals don't have control over their students' innate ability and where they must discern the most effective way to reach and motivate each student to learn."

Agree or disagree, that is the union's position. However, the very next item on the union's website is "GAE congratulates newest class of National Board Certified teachers." In the press release, Dr. Williams says, "They deserve all of the



accolades, prestige, and rewards that accompany such a designation."

The rewards are substantial. Georgia teachers receive a 10 percent raise upon achieving national certification. Since there is no evidence to suggest that nationally certified teachers do "have control over their students' innate ability," it must be GAE's position that the national board knows how to evaluate teachers' ability. If the board is capable, why aren't others?

The final irony is this story from the December 11th, 2005 *Augusta Chronicle*, headlined, "Certification no guarantee of excellence." The story suggests the board may not be capable of evaluating teachers' ability. However, there is no accompanying GAE editorial headlined "National certification for teachers too flawed to be fair." ■

*Source—Education Intelligence Agency's Communiqué*

## Humble Pie All Around

It has attracted less attention than the gold-plated 2004 Mathematica study of Teach For America (TFA), but the National Bureau of Economic Research is out with a major study comparing the teaching effectiveness of alternate route teachers with teachers from traditional routes. While both sides of the teacher certification debate may cherry-pick findings, the most appropriate response by all ought to be a dose of humble pie.

The study tracked some 65,000 New York City teachers of grades 4 through 8 through their first five years of teaching. In the first year, alternate route teachers do not perform as well as traditionally certified teachers, most notably at the elementary school level and in reading. However, alternate route teachers prove to be fast learners, able to make up lost ground and occasionally even capable of surpassing tradition-



ally certified teachers by as early as their second year, but consistently by their third. By the third year, fellows in The New Teacher Project—a crew as sharp as TFA teachers, but who are older and likely to stay about as long as traditional teachers—are producing learning gains in middle school language arts and math that leave their traditional counterparts in the dust.

What are the policy implications here? As a guiding principle, secondary schools may be the best place for teachers coming from alternate route programs, reserving elementary assignments for teachers who have gone through a formal program—if such teachers are available (though in many instances they are not). However, the real problem here is retention, and few solutions are in sight. While the gap in effectiveness between training pathways narrows relatively quickly, the percentage



of teachers who stay long enough to make up for those early deficits makes it almost impossible for schools to build strong faculties; this holds true for teachers from all routes, but not surprisingly, TFA teachers leave at the highest rate. ■

*Source—TQBulletin, a bimonthly electronic newsletter by the National Council on Teacher Quality, [www.nctq.org](http://www.nctq.org).*

## GENDER GAP INVESTIGATED

Teacher's gender makes a difference

While Harvard University's recently ousted president, Larry Summers, provoked a fury last year by raising the specter of differences in cognitive ability between men and women, a recent study from the National Bureau of Economic Research examines the measurable differences in performance between boys and girls. Researcher Thomas Dee examines the marked achievement gaps between girls and boys in reading, science, and mathematics in light of their teachers' gender.

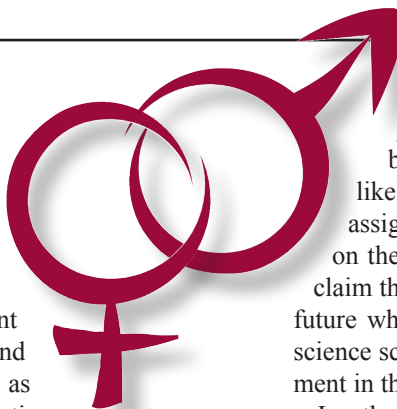
Thomas Dee found that "assignment to a same-gender teacher significantly improves the achievement of both girls and boys as well as teacher perceptions of student performance and student engagement with the teacher's subject." While boys tend to fall behind girls' test scores in reading, Dee found that just one year with a male English teacher would eliminate nearly a third of the reading gap among 13-year-olds, by improving the performance of boys, and simultaneously harming that of girls.

Similarly, boys are more likely to look forward to a particular academic sub-

ject when the subject is taught by a female, and are also more likely to be seen as disruptive when assigned to a female teacher. Girls, on the other hand, are more likely to claim that science is not useful for their future when taught by a male, and their science scores reflect their lack of investment in the subject.

In other words, gender gaps in educational outcomes may depend largely on the gender distribution of teachers by subject. Just a few years ago, Dee surprised the research community with his study of the impact of teacher race on student achievement, producing the first serious scholarship suggesting that teacher-student racial matches are in fact beneficial. ■

*Source—TQBulletin, a bimonthly electronic newsletter by the National Council on Teacher Quality, [www.nctq.org](http://www.nctq.org).*



# Tennessee On The Right Track

## “Fast Track” teachers finding jobs easily

New educators coming out of Tennessee’s “fast track” teacher certification program are having no trouble finding jobs.

Teach Tennessee, a pilot program created by Gov. Phil Bredesen, allows mid-career professionals to bypass traditional training and get into the classroom much quicker.

From the first round of classes, thirty-two educators out of the total thirty-five are working in middle and high school classrooms.

The second round of new teachers finished over the holidays, and six of those twenty-four have already secured teaching jobs.

“My work is rewarding,” said Debbie Sudduth, a former information technology director who was recently hired to teach eighth grade in Bedford County. “I feel like I’m contributing and it’s fun, too.”

The program is intended to help schools fill some of the most neediest departments such as math, science, and foreign languages.

**“Teach Tennessee allowed me to get up and running quickly,”**  
**Debbie Sudduth**

“Teach Tennessee allowed me to get up and running quickly,” Sudduth said. “It’s a compressed program because it’s aimed at people with professional experience. They’re able to give us a lot of informa-



tion in a short time.”

Becky Kent, who oversees the program for the state Department of Education, said that the experience and maturity the professionals bring enhance students’ understanding of how the subjects are applied outside of school.

“The concept is that it’s their work experience that makes them a successful teacher,” Kent said. “It means something because they’ve been there, done that.”

Often schools are forced to use waivers to hire teachers who aren’t trained in the subjects or hire college graduates who

aren’t trained as educators.

State Education Commissioner Lana Seivers said that 125 waivers or permits were issued in math and 90 in science during the 2004-05 school year.

“Over the next three years, we estimate that we will need 210 additional science teachers and 300 additional math teachers,” Seivers said.

Applicants to the program must have at least twenty-four college hours in the subject they are going to teach. Class sizes are limited to 25-35 enrollees.

“We’re very selective,” said Kent, who said the state will provide one or two training sessions each year. “These are the people who would not have entered the career of teaching without this opportunity.” ■

Source—Knoxville News Sentinel

### Professional Development Credits

The Bill of Rights Institute has conducted 149 professional development programs in eighty cities, reaching teachers in thirty-two states. Is your state next?

The Institute is also offering summer institutes during July and August at George Washington’s Mount Vernon estate. These workshops will be offered to fifty teachers at three different times during the summer of 2006: June 19-23; July 17-21; August 7-11. For more information and an application, go to [www.billofrightsinstitute.org](http://www.billofrightsinstitute.org).