

The Blumenfeld Education Letter

"My People Are Destroyed For Lack Of Knowledge" HOSEA 4:6

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The purpose of this newsletter is to provide knowledge for parents and educators who want to save the children of America from the destructive forces that endanger them. Our children in the public schools are at grave risk in 4 ways: academically, spiritually, morally, and physically — and only a well-informed public will be able to reduce those risks.
"Without vision, the people perish."

A Second Open Letter to the "Education President"

Dear President Bush:

We listened to your State of the Union message on January 31st and were moved by the manner in which you expressed your hope, concern and obvious affection for the children of America. And we listened with great interest as you outlined America's education goals which presumably will be reached if certain reforms are made.

The first goal you stated is that by the year 2000 every school-age child in America must be ready to learn. This is a very peculiar goal, indeed, for as we all know children are ready to learn the moment they are born. In fact, by the time they are of school age they have learned to speak their own language quite intelligently and fluently. In the years 2 to 6 children master a speaking vocabulary in the thousands of words, all on their own, without the help of schools or teachers. In other words, every child, unless born with a serious handicap, is a very efficient self-teacher and self-learner -- a veritable dynamo of language learning. Yet, after one year in a public school, many of these same intelligent children become "learning disabled." How come?

Obstacles to Learning

The problem is not that the children aren't ready to learn, it's that the teachers aren't ready to teach! They supervise a myriad of classroom activities that give the impression that education is taking place. But what is really happening is that a myriad of psychological obstacles are being placed in the way of learning.

This can be easily proven by simply looking at the performance of black children. In 1930 the illiteracy rate among urban blacks was 9.2%. Today it is around 40 or 50%. Yet there are more black children spending more time in school than ever before! Have blacks, for some unknown reason, lost the ability to learn to read in the last 60 years? Obviously not. Then how is it that 60 years ago, without Head Start, without Title One compensatory education, without integration, black children learned so much better than they do today?

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Believe it or not, we know the reason. It was given to us by Dr. Rudolf Flesch back in 1955 in his famous book, Why Johnny Can't Read. Dr. Flesch told us that the reason why Johnny couldn't read was because Johnny's teachers weren't teaching him to read in the proper manner. He said: "The teaching of reading -- all over the United States, in all the schools, in all the textbooks -- is totally wrong and flies in the face of all logic and common sense."

How Reading Instruction Was Changed

And then he explained how in the early 1930s the professors of education changed the way reading is taught in American schools. They threw out the alphabetic phonics method, which is the proper way to teach children to read an alphabetic writing system, and put in a new whole-word, look-say, or sight method -- better known today as "whole language" -- that teaches children to read English as if it were Chinese, an ideographic writing system. Flesch said that when you impose an ideographic teaching method on an alphabetic writing system you get reading disability.

Flesch, by the way, was not the first to make this discovery. Back in 1929, Dr. Samuel T. Orton, a noted neuropathologist, made the same observations in an article published in the Journal of Educational Psychology entitled, "The 'Sight Reading' Method of Teaching Reading as a Source of Reading Disability."

And so we know the cause of our reading problem. It's a teaching problem, not a learning problem. American children are quite capable of learning to read provided they are taught correctly. In fact, Marva Collins has proven that to be true. She has taken the same children that the Chicago public schools have designated as uneducable and has turned them into literate human beings with a future. There is more to be learned in Mrs. Collins's West Side Preparatory School than in all the graduate schools of education in America.

Making Teachers Ready to Teach

In short, the goal ought not to be to make children ready to learn, as if they weren't, but to make teachers ready to teach as they ought to teach, and not in the faulty manner they are presently being trained. If this were being done, we would not even need Head Start or Title One, (now known as Chapter One), thereby saving the taxpayers billions of dollars.

But pouring more money into these programs, which incidentally have not produced better reading scores, will simply signal to the educators that America is willing to tolerate blatant educational malpractice indefinitely and pay for it through the nose.

Mr. President, you also said that the United States must increase the high school graduation rate to no less than 90 percent. A laudable goal. But how is it to be achieved if so many children are academically crippled by what is done to them in the first three grades? U.S. News magazine reported in 1987 (May 18) that: "Nationwide, nearly a million students graduate each year unable to read and write." So graduation alone is no guarantee of competence. But the educators may very well increase the graduation rate by simply giving out more meaningless diplomas. They've been doing this for years and getting away with it.

But your third goal is supposed to prevent such chicanery. You stated: "And we're going to make sure our schools' diplomas mean something: In critical subjects -- at the fourth, eighth and 12th grades -- we must assess our students' performance."

Revising the Assessment Tests

Are you aware, Mr. President, that the educators are at this very moment in the process of radically revising the present assessment tests so that they can better hide the deficiencies of their students? One of the great embarrassments the education establishment has had to bear is the periodic release of test scores that reveal the dismal performance of their students. This glaring discrepancy between the establishment's pride and arrogance and its disgraceful record of achievement has soured many Americans on public schooling. Our education system has become the curiosity of the world: it gets more money and has more political clout than any in history, yet produces an increasingly inferior product.

A Failed Monopoly

In fact, David Kearns, Chairman of the Xerox Corporation, denounced the public schools as "a failed monopoly," producing workers "with a 50 percent defect rate." For a time we held Mr. Kearns in high regard for his realism and courageous remarks. But now we find that he has joined the establishment and is helping it raise \$25 million of the taxpayers money, plus \$25 million from private sources, to finance its latest scheme for total control: a National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. Apparently, Mr. Kearns wants to help the board transform a "failed monopoly" into a successful one. But we fear that the result will be a bigger and more obnoxious monopoly, not a better one.

The next goal you proposed, Mr. President, is that by the year 2000, U.S. students must be first in the world in math and science. All we can say is that, judging by the performance of our educators in the past and the current vicious battles going on over reading instruction methods and textbooks in district after district, you're dreaming an improbable dream. Not an impossible dream, for maybe the David Kearnses of America will finally break away from their establishment brainwashers and find out the truth once and for all. It is indeed disheartening to see this great nation led to mediocrity by educrats who have become the cleverest bilkers of public money in history.

Redefining Literacy

Another goal you stated is that every American adult must be a skilled literate worker and citizen. There was a time in our history when every American adult was indeed exactly that. Visitors to our shores were amazed at the high level of literacy Americans enjoyed, the large number of newspapers, the thriving book publishing industry, the number of schools. But, unfortunately, today's educators are no longer interested in high literacy. How do we know? We read the journals of education. We know what they are interested in: the environment, ecology, sexuality, alternate life styles, values, feminism, sexism, New Age mysticism, death and dying, etc. As for literacy, they have redefined it for their own purposes. And their definition would relegate most Americans to a low-level reading skill that would eventually reduce us to the intellectual level of the hillbilly.

Remember "Right-to-Read"

Remember, Mr. President, that in 1970 a federal program was launched by the Nixon administration to wipe out illiteracy in ten years. It was called the Right-to-Read program. Well, here we are twenty years later and the reading problem is

worse than ever. The educationists were able to bury Right-to-Read after enriching themselves with its proceeds. And now the prospect of getting billions more from the treasury must cause their corrupt little hearts to go pitter patter with gleeful excitement. They will say all the right phony words, flatter the heck out of David Kearns and his business associates, and then laugh all the way to the bank.

And, finally, you said that every school must offer the kind of disciplined environment that makes it possible for our kids to learn -- and every school in America must be drug-free.

Well, who could disagree with that? If only wishing could make it so! To get the disciplined environment you want, Mr. President, is going to require the educationists to change their philosophy of education. Old-fashioned discipline is considered exactly that, old-fashioned. It's in the same category as rote learning, arithmetic, intensive phonics, penmanship, and other quaint educational antiquities. The educators are involved in far more interesting and progressive experiments: multiculturalism, globalism, restructuring, curriculum integration, cooperative learning, peer coaching, interdisciplinary teaching, problem-solving labs, holistic reading and writing assessments, higher order thinking skills, generic thinking skills, critical thinking, cognitive apprenticeships, consensus building, attention deficit hyperactive syndrome, networking, conflict resolution, etc. There is no end to the wonders in the brave new world of billion-dollar education.

The Need for Common Sense

Unless the professors of education, the curriculum developers, and the psychologists working in their education labs can be brought back to common sense, there is no hope whatever that your goals will be reached. The education establishment, in spirit and purpose, has gone beyond the point of no return. This may sound unduly pessimistic. But after studying and observing our educational behemoth for the last thirty years, that is the only realistic conclusion we can come to.

The present education establishment is simply too big, too self-serving, too financially secure, too smug, too arrogant, too self-righteous, too infatuated with its own political power, too corrupt, too monopolistic, too utopian to do the simple, efficient job that needs to be done.

In essence, there is nothing terribly difficult about teaching a child the three R's. Several thousand years of experience prove this, and thousands of parents do it every day. And yet, American educators have made that basic task so difficult, so complex, so tedious, so insane that the goal of high literacy for our people has become as difficult to attain as getting a man on Mars and bringing him back alive.

Encouraging Private Alternatives

So what is to be done? As we stated in our first open letter back in November 1988, the best and fastest way to increase literacy in the United States is to encourage the development of private alternatives -- your thousand points of light. All across America parents are removing their children from the public schools and educating them at home. In fact, home-schooling is now the fastest growing educational phenomenon in the United States. Not only are the home-schoolers doing a better job in teaching their children the basic skills, but they are creating better and stronger families, well-bred moral children, and better educated parents. In addition, they are saving taxpayers billions of dollars.

Nothing would accelerate the growth of this movement more than encouragement from you, Mr. President. One simple way to do this would be to proclaim a National Home Education Week during the first full week in May of each year. Such a proclamation would not only show recognition of the value of home education, but would also serve notice on the education establishment that if it doesn't deliver on the goals you and the Governors have set, private alternatives will be increasingly resorted to.

The Poor Have Suffered Most

Mr. President, there is nothing sacred about a government education system -- especially one that is failing so miserably. The minimal task of a government system is to provide free education for the poor so that they can better themselves. But the poor have suffered the most in our public schools. The result is a growing underclass of citizens in America, all of whom have attended public school but none of whom have emerged at the end of the process with any employable skills. No education system can do worse than that.

What is needed, Mr. President, is realism and good faith. Realism requires that we see our education system as it is and not continue this endless charade of reforms that waste billions and do not produce the desired results. Good faith requires that we acknowledge the right of a free people to seek alternatives to failed government institutions and programs.

Privatization is the Answer

Privatization of education ought to be the theme of an administration imbued with realism and good faith. It ought to be the theme of every politician who seriously wants to begin solving our insoluble education problems. The scared cow of public education has not only been eating us out of house and home, but has become so huge, powerful and intimidating, that none dare oppose it. But the time has come to do exactly that. Leave education to the private ingenuity of the American people, and they will get the job done!

NEA Wants Stricter Requirements For National Board Certification

The National Education Association is calling on its members who serve on the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards to lobby the board to revise its policy on who is eligible for national teacher certification.

The union's 136-member board of directors opposes the National Board's decision to offer the opportunity to become certified to any teacher with a bachelor's degree and three years of successful teaching experience at one or more primary or secondary schools.

Instead, the NEA directors last month approved a motion stating that

the union "will take whatever steps are necessary" to ensure that eligibility for national certification is tied to possession of a state teaching license and graduation from an accredited teacher-preparation program.

NEA and AACTE Join Forces

The union has joined with the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) which called for these prerequisites back in Sept. 1989. The 64-member National Board declined to reconsider the issue of prerequisites for certification at its October meeting.

In its initial policy statement of July 1989, the National Board noted that conditioning certification on state licensure and graduation from a teacher-education program would exclude many talented private- and postsecondary-school teachers from recognition.

The National Board also decided that such prerequisites would run counter to its "fundamental orientation toward performance rather than design standards."

The NEA's directors believe that national certification should not be seen as an isolated recognition of advanced teaching skills that is unrelated to other professional standards, said Sharon Robinson, a spokesman for the NEA. The union is concerned that "certification be developed in a manner that complements other quality-control mechanisms in education."

Prerequisites: A Live Issue

James A. Kelly, president of the National Board, said that the topic of prerequisites remains "a live issue," and that he expects the subject to be discussed at the board's March meeting in Miami.

Twenty of the National Board's 64 members belong to the NEA.

According to Gary Sykes, an assistant professor in the college of education at Michigan State University and consultant to the National Board, the latter, in deciding who will be eligible for national certification, faced the dilemma of alienating either "powerful forces" favoring alternate routes into teaching, or educators arguing in favor of "a complete set of professional standards similar to medicine and law."

The board's eventual decision, Mr. Sykes said, was based in part on the fact that it faced a formidable fund-raising task. The National Board must raise an estimated \$50 million to pay for research and development of the

assessments and to begin certifying teachers by its target date of 1993.

At present, the U.S. Congress is considering a bill giving the National Board \$25 million in federal funds.

AFT Versus NEA

Bella Rosenberg, assistant to Albert Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers, the NEA's biggest rival, said the March meeting of the National Board will present "the first real test of the independence of the NEA members on the board."

The AFT has maintained that the effort to create national teacher certification -- and with it a true profession -- will be destroyed if the board is seen as being controlled by a teachers' union. (Educ. Wk. 1/17/90)

Comment:

In this battle over certification prerequisites we have a wonderful microcosm of the interplay of forces within the education establishment. On the one hand we have the "reformers" and their allies in the business community trying to save public education, and on the other, we have the monopolists like the NEA and the AACTE whose main concerns are control, power and money. The National Board's meeting in March should tell us which faction will prevail. There will probably be some kind of a compromise. The NEA may be willing to take a small step backward, so that later it can take two giant steps forward.

It was probably easier for Gorbachev to persuade the Communist Party of the Soviet Union to give up its monopoly on political power than it will be for the National Board's "reformers" to persuade the NEA to give up its dream of total monopoly control over the teaching profession in America.

Meanwhile, the American taxpayer may wind up funding the scheme if the liberals get their way. Recently Secretary of Education Cavazos testified against the \$25-million grant because it is being awarded non-competitively and there is absolutely no government input into the use of the funds, the composition of the board, or the nature of the final teacher standards. In addition, the National Board is a private entity created by the liberal Carnegie Endowment in New York with not a single conservative on the Board.

An Establishment Board

Among the 64-member Board are such luminaries as former Governor of North Carolina James B. Hunt Jr. (chairman); James A. Kelly, formerly of Teachers College, Columbia, and the Harvard Graduate School of Education (president); Lewis M. Branscomb of the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard; C. Leonard Anderson, member of NEA's board of directors; Mary Hatwood Futrell, president of NEA 1983-1989; E. K. Fretwell, Jr., chairman of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching; Bill Honig, Supt. of Public Instruction for California since 1982; Nancy Jewell, vice-president of Oklahoma Educational Association, past member of NEA board of directors; Vera Katz, liberal Speaker of the Oregon House of Representatives; Thomas H. Kean, former Governor of New Jersey; David T. Kearns, chairman of the Xerox Corporation, member of the Council on Foreign Relations; Albert Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers since 1974.

When all is said and done, reforming public education in order to save it is a gigantic exercise in futility and a tremendous waste of money. The reformers would get better results faster and at less cost if they simply encouraged and developed private alternatives. But this is a lesson that will have to be learned the hard way.

Honig Targets ICR in Assault On Academic Freedom

Bill Honig, California's Superintendent of Public Instruction and a member of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, has taken aim at the Institute for Creation Research (ICR), the Christian graduate school of science that teaches evolution as an unproved theory and offers alternative explanations and scientific investigations. Mr. Honig sent an evaluation team to the Institute, which, until now, has had state "approval" for its degree conferring authority. The team recommended that state "approval" be withdrawn. This would effectively shut down the pioneering nine-year-old institution.

This assault on academic freedom is being watched closely by all Christian schools who fear more governmental interference in their operation and curricula.

The ICR was notified of the evaluation team's findings through the news media and not by Mr. Honig's office. A San Francisco Chronicle reporter called ICR on January 16 to get ICR's response to the report which had not been seen by ICR. On that day Supt. Honig told a Los Angeles Times reporter that the panel's recommendation "seems reasonable," and that he would act on the report in a month or so. Honig told the reporter that the panel's recommendation was unanimous when, in fact, one of the five members dissented and argued in favor of approval.

Honig's Threats

Honig has been threatening to deny the ICR Graduate School its license to operate unless the creationist content is removed from its courses or its degrees are labeled theological rather than scientific. Honig has maintained that science can only be taught in a framework of evolution, even in private Christian institutions. The ICR has rejected any such compromise.

The ICR Graduate School has been offering masters' degrees in four areas (biology, geology, astro-geophysics, and science education) since 1981. About 20 students have received degrees and about 40 others are currently enrolled in the program. In previous years the school had received unanimous recommendations from two state review committees.

ICR's graduate programs are strictly scientific with courses taught by scientists who have doctorate degrees in science from such prestigious institutions as Harvard and Berkeley. ICR's graduate program is comparable in content to other graduate science programs. It is the small amount of creationist interpretation that Supt. Honig objects to.

According to Dr. Henry Morris, President of the Institute for Creation Research in Santee, California, the school intends to exhaust all feasible methods of appeal to defend its academic freedom. "As a non-public institution, we have the constitutional right to teach science as we understand it, not as the state defines science and commands us to believe," said Dr. Morris.

Comment:

Supt. Honig's attempt to shut down the ICR is just one more manifestation of the totalitarian mindset of the education establishment. The fact that these totalitarians are now in the process of creating a National Board for Professional Teaching Standards financed partially by a \$25 million federal grant should cause concern among all advocates and defenders of educational freedom.

If Honig gets his way, other superintendents will be emboldened to force Christian schools in their jurisdictions to teach only what the state approves of. Add to that national certification and you've got the ingredients for an educational dictatorship.

Ironically, a world-renowned Soviet biochemist, Dr. Dmitri A. Kuznetsov, recently visited the ICR. He met with

ICR scientists to discuss ways in which they can combine their efforts in conducting creationist laboratory research in Moscow.

Freedom in Moscow

"It seems that scientists have more academic freedom these days in Moscow than they do in California," remarked Dr. Kuznetsov, referring to Bill Honig's attempt to close down ICR. During "glasnost," many Soviet scientists like Dr. Kuznetsov have become free to publicly challenge evolutionary atheistic Marxist dogma.

In 1983, Dr. Kuznetsov, at the age of 29, won the coveted Lenin Komsomol Prize, an award given annually to the Soviet Union's two brightest young scientists. Dr. Kuznetsov, who has earned three doctorate degrees, heads a biochemistry lab for LaserInvest, a joint venture involving the Soviet Union, Great Britain, and India.

While working in Moscow in the 1980's Dr. Kuznetsov converted from evolutionism to scientific creationism and then from atheism to belief in God. He subsequently joined the Moscow Baptist Church and is currently writing a column "Science Without Atheism" for an independent monthly newspaper The Protestant.

And so, while in the communist world people are throwing off the shackles of totalitarian dogma, in our own "free" country the educrats are working overtime to create bigger and better chains for the American people.

Will the American people rebel? After 70 years of "progressive" education most Americans haven't the faintest idea what hit them. Their educators have bequeathed them the intellect of the National Enquirer, the morality of Playboy, and the wisdom of Mickey Mouse. Had the East Europeans waited for Americans to liberate them, they would have waited forever. Fortunately, awareness is growing among a small minority of Americans who may eventually be able to halt and reverse the present trends.