

BULLETIN OF THE TEACHERS FORUM FOR EMPOWERMENT AND RIGHTS

# EDUCATION IS A RIGHT!

**SPECIAL ISSUE**  
**COMPILATION OF ARTICLES**  
**2001-2004**

**Oppose the  
Disinformation of  
"Violence Prevention"  
and "School Safety"**

**Teachers Are a Force for  
Enlightenment,  
Not Police for  
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**Character Education:  
Attacking Rights,  
Serving the U.S.  
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**"Failure," Rights and  
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to Go Broadly with  
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Bulletin of the Teachers Forum for Empowerment and Rights  
2001 to 2004**

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**TEACHERS FORUM FOR EMPOWERMENT AND RIGHTS**

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**[teachers\\_forum@hotmail.com](mailto:teachers_forum@hotmail.com)**

# Defend the Right to Conscience! Oppose the McCarthyite Notion of "Americanism"

November 25, 2001

With the "war on terrorism" as the pretext, the McCarthyite notion of "Americanism" is being pushed on students and teachers everywhere. Educators are being pressured to carry the line "either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists" into the classroom. At the heart of this notion of "Americanism" is the idea that anyone who does not submit to "values" deemed by those in a position of authority to be "American" or representing "our way of life" is a "security threat." On the contrary, it is those who pursue such arrangements who represent the real threat. These arrangements are a direct attack on the right to conscience and a violation of the most basic of democratic norms and must be opposed.

Across the country, students, teachers and professors are being attacked simply for voicing opinions on matters of war and security that differ from those of the U.S. government. Officials and the monopoly media are whipping up an atmosphere of suspicion and fear. Any individual or group who questions — or even appears to question — the government's program is labeled "anti-American" and/or a "security threat" and on that basis open season is declared on them.

With the Cold War justification of the "red menace" millions of people's lives were ruined. Any force or person fighting for progress and enlightenment was demonized and on that basis rendered as having no rights. The American people recall this nightmare of McCarthyism and recognize its Cold War presuppositions in the U.S. "war on terrorism." These presuppositions are strikingly evident now. For example, additions to education legislation in Nebraska, reportedly inspired by the tragic events of September 11, target Communism as the enemy. Under this law, teachers must be deemed by officials to "accept" the U.S. system of governance or face unstated sanction.

This new McCarthyism reveals that the U.S. cannot in rational terms justify its actions at home or abroad, and has no choice but to resort to state terrorism to suppress what is in fact growing dissent and discontent among the working class and broad masses of the people over the direction the society is heading.

It is of the utmost importance that all democratic and justice-loving peoples stand in opposition to this new McCarthyism now being pursued by U.S. imperialism and its allies and unite to defend the right to conscience as the most basic of all human rights.

## NEBRASKA

### State Board of Education Links School Accreditation to Teaching "Americanism"

Specific references to Nebraska's 52-year-old patriotism law will be included in the state's school certification requirements under a draft approved by the state Board of Education on November 2. All of the state's K-12 public, private, denominational, and parochial schools fall under the purview of this revised statute.

According to the board's web page, "The State Board of Education is an elected, constitutional body that sets policy and ensures that the State Department of Education functions effectively within the framework developed by the state Legislature and

the board." The new version of school accreditation requirements will be the subject of a December 5 public hearing before they are voted on at the board's December 7 meeting.

In a telling preamble, the statute reads: "Since youth is the time most susceptible to the acceptance of principles and doctrines that will influence men and women throughout their lives, it is one of the first duties of our educational system to conduct its activities, choose its textbooks, and arrange its curriculum in such a way that the love of liberty, justice, democracy, and America will be instilled in the

hearts and minds of the youth of the state." News sources report that "the law requires schools to teach the lyrics to patriotic songs including the 'Star-Spangled Banner,' reverence for the flag, and the dangers of Communism." Suggesting a link to the events of September 11, news sources report that an "earlier draft of the requirements for state accreditation of schools removed a reference to the law" but that at "last month's meeting [October], the board voted to put the reference back in."

There are other significant features of the proposed law which have not been reported by news sources. The most significant section of the revised statute calls on each school board to annually "appoint from its members a committee of three, to be known as the committee on Americanism." The function of the

committee is to approve textbooks and to "assure themselves as to the character of all teachers employed and their knowledge and acceptance of the American form of government." The statute goes on to give the committee broad authority, saying it shall "take all such other steps as will assure the carrying out of the provisions of this section."

In a green light to arbitrariness, the statute does not stipulate how such "character" is to be ascertained or what steps are to be taken if it is "found to be lacking."

In another proposed statute on "character education" and "duties of teachers" approved the same day, teachers must "arrange and present his or her instruction to give special emphasis to ... respect for the national flag, the United States constitution, and the Constitution of Nebraska."

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***PLEDGES, CHARACTER AND THE RIGHT TO CONSCIENCE***

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## **Teachers Are a Force for Enlightenment, Not Police for Attacks on Rights!**

*September 20, 2002*

Within the recent past, the government has stepped up its push for "values" or "character education." The government is striving to impose what it considers the "universal" values of "free markets" and "free and fair elections," with the U.S. the model for both. The push for "character education" programs is exemplified by those being promoted by Secretary of State and former General, Colin Powell.

In this situations, the question is posed: what are teachers to do? What is their role, and what role are they being obliged to play with the increasing pressure to "promote patriotism" and "character education"?

Teachers and school administrators are increasingly being compelled to enforce a broad attack on the right to conscience. New York State law mandates, for example, "instruction in patriotism" and "character education." With this, the state is deciding for everyone what constitutes patriotism and what kind of character is desirable.

Specifically, Article 17, Sections 801-02 grant the Commissioner of Education authority to develop and enforce a "program providing for a salute to the flag and a daily pledge of allegiance to the flag, and instruction in its correct use and display." Revealing the state's conception that one is not a full member of "the community" unless the state deems them to have the "right values," students are also to be

instructed in "the principles of honesty, tolerance, personal responsibility, respect for others, observance of laws and rules, courtesy, dignity and other traits which will enhance the quality of their experience in, and contribution to, the community."

New York State law also requires any employee of a public school, college or university must also take an oath to support the federal and state constitution.

While these laws may not currently be strictly enforced, chances are they will be utilized more, as part of the "war on terrorism" and its effort to attack the "enemy within".

By positioning educators as enforcers of what state authorities deem correct thinking, they are being compelled to act contrary to their role as a force for enlightenment. This is reminiscent of feudal arrangements, where only the views of the King and Church were acceptable. Under these conditions, investigation was heresy.

Educators recognize the fight for the right to conscience as an essential part of learning and teaching, that it is needed for human beings to think. How is it even possible to teach the youth about society, political and economic systems, culture or even the natural sciences if an atmosphere is created where only one set of ideas and values can be explored? Youth cannot be taught to investigate things for themselves and contribute to solving the problems facing society when their teachers are mandated to

police students' thinking and punish them for standing up for their own convictions, where, for example, a student was paddled for not saying the Pledge of Allegiance. It is in fact by defending the right to conscience that real education can take place.

The issue then is not whether someone supports this or that pledge or this or that value, for everyone has a right to hold whatever view they want. It is not people's values that are the problem, nor is

having different views the source of conflict. Making the issue one of values or beliefs someone must have is an all out attack on the right to conscience.

Teachers and students inherently reject being divided on the basis of their views, for such division serves to, among other things, block investigation and real education. It is the overall progress of society that is threatened when educators are blocked from playing their role to provide enlightenment.

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*DEFEND THE RIGHT TO CONSCIENCE!*

## **Students Disciplined for Expressing Anti-War Views**

*March 12, 2003*

In a number of recent cases, high school students have been suspended or forced to go home for taking stands against war and U.S. state terrorism. These attacks are indicative of a growing trend of impunity by police and government officials and now school authorities.

The youth and their parents continue to stand up for their rights, though they have no means of redress. One student, for example, has been told he cannot participate in graduation ceremonies, with his parents left with no option but to try and sue the school.

In Broomfield, Colorado, 17-year-old David Dial was suspended for a day for "disobeying authority" for posting fliers as part of student efforts to mobilize for the March 5 International Student Day of Anti-war of Actions, *The Denver Post* reports. Officials sought to justify their attack on Dial's rights by focusing on the fact that Broomfield students had decided to take part in the March 5 actions by staging a walkout.

"It's not the message of the flier," district spokesperson Janelle Albertson claimed, "it's the fact that he's advocating the walkout." Officials said that "a walkout would disrupt the educational environment, and that is against the rules."

Dial denounced the hypocrisy of curricula promoted by the school which are said to call for student "civic and political involvement," while those that are organizing students for just that purpose are met with threats and punishment. "It's not like we're promoting violence or any kind of discrimination," he added, "It's just a peaceful protest against the war in Iraq." Dial also reports that in fact he requested permission to post the fliers only to be told they could be left on

the "community information" table, in the administrative offices, behind a chair. Saying it was "a place where few teachers would see it, let alone students," Dial refused to be silenced and posted the fliers anyway.

In a further indication of the officials' aim to target organizers, Dial reports he was threatened with expulsion in the event of any walkout. Nonetheless, he and 50 others did walkout March 5.

School officials have said nothing about the broad disruption of the "educational environment" caused by massive cuts to education and the insistence, backed up by disciplinary action, that all youth express their loyalty to the government. Parents and students alike are asking how learning can take place when the right to conscience is suppressed and those with dissenting views punished.

Issue no. 23 of *Education Is A Right!* reported that in Dearborn, Michigan, high school junior Bretton Barber was told last month to turn his shirt inside out, take it off or go home. He decided to go home rather than surrender his freedom of expression, according to *The Detroit News*. Barber, 16, said he wanted to express his opinion when he wore a T-shirt that shows a picture of President Bush and reads, "International Terrorist." He emphasized, "Bush has already killed over 1,000 people in Afghanistan - that's terrorism in itself."

Ian Itani, an eighth-grader at Finley Junior High School in a Chicago suburb, was not given the option of removing his shirt, NBC reports. He was suspended on February 19 for wearing a shirt which made reference to the September 11 attacks. Itani, whose father is of Lebanese descent, said the shirt was an effort to oppose having all Arabs and Muslims blamed for

September 11, racism he himself has experienced.

School officials told Itani's mother in a letter that wearing the shirt "could be taken as a promotion of terrorism." The youth was immediately suspended after being sent to the principal by a teacher who said

the shirt was "unacceptable." The principal also said Itani will now not be allowed to participate in onstage graduation ceremonies. His parents report they are considering bringing a lawsuit against the school for their blatant violation of his right to free speech.

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***EDUCATION AND THE "WAR ON TERRORISM"***

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## **School and Government Officials Step Up Attacks on the Right To Conscience**

*March 18, 2002*

According to news sources, since September 11 many states have passed or are considering legislation to "promote patriotism." Requiring the motto "In God We Trust" be prominently displayed in schools and making recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance mandatory are two common approaches.

Michigan passed a law in December of last year that makes it clear that the motto "In God We Trust" can be hung in schools. In Illinois, some lawmakers have proposed requiring that the motto be posted in every public school. Florida, Utah, Arizona, Virginia, Louisiana and New Jersey are considering similar legislation. "With things that are facing us today, like terrorism, I think we need a pulling together of this country," Lay County, Fla., schools Supt. David Owens said earlier this month. Owens is putting up the motto in schools near Jacksonville without waiting for Florida to pass a law. "If putting these mottos in the schools can help build patriotism, it has served its purpose," he said.

The U.S. Treasury first placed the motto "In God We Trust" on coins in 1864, during the Civil War. In 1955, Congress passed a bill to have the motto placed on paper currency, and it first appeared on bills two years later. In 1956, Congress passed a resolution declaring "In God We Trust" the national motto. "It's been tested for its constitutionality in federal court," said Michigan State Rep. Stephen Ehardt. "It's not a religious statement, and it's something we should be proud of."

In a similar development this year, bills to make the Pledge of Allegiance mandatory have been brought up in Connecticut, Illinois, Missouri, Minnesota, Colorado, Mississippi, Ohio and Indiana. Half the states now require the Pledge as part of the school day, and half a dozen more recommend it, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

Last year New York State Assemblyman Steve Levy, a Democrat, announced he would introduce

legislation to punish school districts if their schools do not lead students in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance daily. Levy told a news conference that he was drafting a bill that would have the state attorney general remove school board officials who did not set aside time for the practice, although students and staff would not be required to "join in." Levy added that as a last resort the state would withhold funding for what he called "renegade" districts.

In February, legislators targeted school board members in Madison, Wisconsin, after three members voted against schools using the Pledge as a way to fulfill a recently enacted state law requiring a daily "moment of patriotism." The board instead instructed schools to play an instrumental version of the national anthem. In a measure aimed squarely at the Madison School Board, state Rep. Sheryl Albers authored legislation that would require a public school that offers the national anthem each day to offer not just the tune but the sung verse, "O say, can you see?" The law would have directed the state superintendent of public instruction to withhold state aid from any school district that violated the pledge/anthem requirement. But she amended the bill to remove that punishment after the Madison School Board retracted its decision not to allow the Pledge of Allegiance as an alternative way of meeting the state's patriotism ritual requirement. "They've gotten the point," Albers said.

A Missouri bill would require public school students to recite the Pledge at least once a week and allow for objectors to be excused. It passed the state Senate 30-0 late last month. "It's a quick and easy way to start thinking about what it is to be an American," the bill's sponsor, Democratic Sen. Ted House said.

In Colorado, a recently defeated bill would have required public schools to teach patriotism. Sen. John Andrews said the bill was needed so that students would understand their duties, including voting and military service. "If public schools are about any-

thing, it's about teaching a love of country. Some of it is from the heart, but some of it is from the mind as well," he told the Senate Education Committee. Sen. Joan Fitzgerald questioned how teachers could grade patriotism. Last year a similar measure was passed by the Nebraska State Board of Education, requiring that teachers be checked to see if they believe in the U.S. system of governance and that

they are teaching the "evils of communism."

Many civil liberties groups as well as several legislators have questioned the wisdom of forcing patriotism. "Patriotism isn't something you have to put on the books," executive director of the Connecticut Civil Liberties Union, Teresa Younger said. "It's something that happens when your government is taking care of its people."

## Why the Push for "Patriotism" in the Schools?

*January 22, 2003*

With increasing talk by governments and the monopoly-controlled media about the "need" for "patriotism" in the schools, and the "controversy" surrounding this "issue," two things warrant attention.

First, it is important to take the stand that in a democratic society, it is imperative that when an oath is required in the public domain, it must be based on strictly objective criteria - such as when one pledges to tell the truth in court, or affixes one's signature swearing that what is written, to the best of one's knowledge, is a true statement of fact. When it comes to oaths of allegiance, a person must be able to in good conscience swear allegiance to anything that person wants to pledge allegiance to. Swearing allegiance is a matter of personal conscience and cannot be forced, through legislation or otherwise. Such measures must be vigorously opposed with the principled stand in defense of the right to conscience as the starting point.

The second theme warranting discussion is why there is an increasing push for pledges and mottos in the schools? The repeated justification for this attack on the right to conscience is that with the terrorist attacks of September 11 "patriotism" is needed to "pull this country together." However this claim does not wash, as it is well known that legislation seeking to enforce "patriotism" has been repeatedly proposed for years prior to September 11.

According to dictionary definitions, oaths of allegiance are sworn to express loyalty to homeland, governments or sovereigns. By their nature, this means swearing allegiance to the values they represent. But what are these values?

Michigan State Representative Stephen Ehardt's comment that the motto "In God We Trust" is "not a religious statement," tells us nothing about what it actually stands for. He simply asserts without any explanation that it is "something we should be proud of." In Connecticut last month, Rep. Phillip Prelli

said schools have gotten out of the practice of saying the Pledge. "It comes back to teaching what our country stands for," he said in advocating for a bill mandating the Pledge in public schools. In Missouri, Sen. Ted House justified his bill requiring the Pledge saying: "It's a quick and easy way to start thinking about what it is to be an American." So, what is an American, what are these "American Values"?

The fact is they have not been adopted or even discussed by Americans. While it is altogether wrong to demand that one compromise one's conscience by swearing allegiance to something one has not consciously agreed to, the key thing here is: what is it that people are increasingly being called on to swear allegiance to in order to "prove their loyalty"? What is behind the threats and sanctions for those who do not pledge allegiance, sing the national anthem, or adopt other behaviors officials deem to represent a sufficient "patriotic spirit"?

If there were indeed a ground swell of patriotism, it would make no sense to call for such laws. The fact is that more and more people are questioning the U.S. system of governance and the role the U.S. plays in the world, and this the ruling circles cannot tolerate.

Making schools pressure teachers and students to swear an oath of allegiance, "to the flag ... and the republic for which it stands" is a move toward introducing a system for checking loyalty. This comes as the U.S. imperialists are stepping up their program for fascism and war. The push for "patriotism" is coming up as the ruling circles are desperately trying to hold on to their moribund system, and block the society from renewal.

That the motto "In God We Trust" first emerged during the Civil War is noteworthy. At that time, the society was poised to make great advances, yet the ruling circles stepped in to block progress. At the end of World War II, the U.S. imperialists stepped in to block the progress that had been made in the

defeat of fascism and Nazism with their Cold War, and it was in this context that "In God We Trust" was adopted as the "national" motto. The current

push to check for loyalty in the schools is another attempt to threaten anyone who fights to open the door to the progress of the society.

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***WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE ON "CHARACTER AND COMMUNITY"***

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## Youth: Born to Society, Not to the Military

*October 4, 2002*

One June 19, a White House conference on "Character and Community" was hosted by Laura Bush, wife of the President. Both President Bush and Secretary of State Colin Powell spoke at the conference, as did Secretary of Education Rod Paige, youth and professors.

The main aim of the conference was to justify and elaborate the need for "character education" in U.S. schools, and to extend "service learning" programs throughout the country. Emphasis was given to military service and service as "citizen soldiers," which combines military and civilian forms of service.

Bush said character education was an effort to teach "the difference between right and wrong." Referring to what he called the "high" standard needed for improving education, he suggested schools provide the standard common to the 18th century, namely that of "every child learning to read and write and add and subtract." In his remarks, Rod Paige characterized the new federal legislation that punishes schools and youth that do not meet federal testing mandates as "helping young people understand that consequences matter. That making the right choices matter."

William Damon of Stanford University, who also works with the Hoover Institute, said that "charitable work" is one way to "introduce students to a larger purpose. Research has found that community service programs, especially when combined with reflection about the moral and personal significance of serving others, are powerful inducers [sic] of character development. The sort of community service programs that are promoted by the Freedom Corps are excellent examples of this, and the inspirational nature of this initiative sends exactly the right kind of message to young Americans."

### ***Remarks by George W. Bush***

In his remarks to the conference, Bush said that while "education should prepare children for jobs" it must also "prepare our children for life." "One goal of character education," he said, "should be to prepare

our children for community service."

Suggesting that a problem being addressed by the conference is the growing rejection by the youth of the U.S. economic and political system, Bush said: "Americans believe in character education because we want more for our children than apathy and cynicism."

"I think it's particularly important in a day and age when some question the value system of America that we teach people to serve a neighbor - people to love a neighbor like they'd like to be loved themselves. There's a question in our society as to whether or not we're so self-absorbed and materialistic that we won't fulfill our obligation as a nation.

"That's not the America I know, and the America I believe exists. I've seen an amazing America since September the 11th - people who recognize that serving something greater than yourself in life is an incredibly important part of life; that which - focus on the stock market is, I guess, okay, but there's something more in life than just profit in loss; that somebody can profit in life by caring for a neighbor."

But, he continues: "Perhaps the culture is changing, from one that has said, if it feels good, just go ahead and do it, and if you've got a problem, blame somebody else, to a culture in which each of us are responsible for the decisions we make in life - responsible for loving our children, responsible for loving our neighbors, responsible for serving a nation by helping somebody in need."

Elaborating on his vision for character education, Bush said that schools should "teach character by expecting character. They should be places where rules are set and, as importantly, where rules are enforced." "Universal values" such as "respect, tolerance, responsibility, honesty, self-restraint, family commitment, civic duty, fairness and compassion," must be taught. "There are schools in our country where children take pledges each morning to be respectful, responsible, and ready to learn," he said. He did not refer to any pledges by the government to provide all youth with the necessary conditions and resources for students to

learn and teachers to teach.

### **Remarks by Colin Powell**

In introducing Secretary of State Colin Powell, Laura Bush emphasized that the military personifies the character being sought. "Our next speaker personifies the concepts of duty, honor, and country. His record of service is marked by a deep commitment to the values we're talking about today. He spent 35 years of his life serving his country as a professional soldier in the Army, a career of distinction and success."

Further showing that "character education" is a means to impose the values of U.S. imperialism, Powell opened his remarks by describing the role "character education" plays in the State Department. He said that "even as Secretary of State, all of the members of my State Department team have a responsibility to now reach out internationally to young people in need and, through the discussion of character, through making character a central part of the philosophy of the department, it helps us take our value system of democracy and the free enterprise system and the individual rights of every boy and girl, man and women on the face of the earth and to take that value system to the rest of the world."

Powell gave America's Promise, a service organization aimed at youth that he helped found and run, as an example of "character education." "We said that what we were about in America's Promise was to build character and to build competence." He defined character as "nothing more than teaching youngsters ... to do the right thing when no one is looking, when you don't need to, when there is no reward for doing the right thing; knowing and acting, and acting on the simple difference, that is always inside your head, between right and wrong.... Character means having a conscience, a conscience that is always present, that is always acting, that is always guiding you. It's an internal moral compass that is always pointing in the true direction, always keeps you on track, gives you the strength to stay away from the temptations that come along."

"How do you do that? How do you put all that in a child?" Powell asked. "Teaching, learning character begins at home." Revealing Powell's vision for docile youth, he argues character is developed

"in simple ways, simple ways that we all know so well. Teach a child how to behave: yes, no. This will hurt you. Naughty, naughty. That's a good boy, that's a good girl. Still, still. Be quiet."

He adds that, as a child, "I didn't mind getting hit when I misbehaved. I didn't mind getting sent to my room. Just don't come in there and give me that 'You shamed the family' bit. Because that was devastating."

Working to eliminate recognition that human beings are born to society, Powell equates human societies with those of other animals. "A family is a tribe. A family is a pack, a den, which passes on the accumulated knowledge, and the mores and the taboos and the standards of all the generations who have gone before," including "the expectations of all those previous generations." In speaking about how character is taught, he refers to a group of teenage male elephants, separated from their herd and placed in a game reserve, where they began killing rhinos. This "aberrant behavior" was said to be corrected by introducing adult male elephants into the reserve. Powell concludes, "And the adult male elephants, as you were taught by your aunts and uncles and parents and cousins, essentially communicated in their own direct way, with a swat of a trunk or a bellow."

He expressed concern that youth are "watching to see if those values of character that you talk to them about all the time work." Implying that anyone who is not happy or content or "successful" lacks the "right" values he says: "Do they see people who are happy? Do they see contentment? Do they see love? Do they see success? Do they see reward? Does it all work?"

Powell concluded by saying "we draw our national character" from family. Suggesting that to question the government is to "shame the family," Powell continues, saying character "flows from individuals, from families to communities, to schools, and ultimately becomes our national character, the sum of all our individual characters, because America, at the end of the day, is family.... And so character, at the end of the day, is the foundation block for our society.... And if we fail our children in teaching them and giving them examples from which to learn, then we are doing a disservice not only to those wonderful children, we are doing a disservice to our nation as well."

# "Character Education" — Attacking Rights, Serving the U.S. "War on Terrorism"

*September 3, 2002*

As part of the June 19 White House Conference on Character and Community hosted by Laura Bush, five academics were called upon to further elaborate the vision and components of the government's character education program.

A main preoccupation of these presentations was with how to foster "good character" and "moral development" among youth. Four of the researchers spoke to specific programs they had initiated, such as "violence prevention in schools," using "community to build character" and developing "moral expertise."

William Damon of Stanford University, also working with the Hoover Institute, presented on the "Roots of Character and the Role of Community." His presentation is significant because it elaborates the underlying principles that justify and guide the government's push for "character education."

Presenting what is "good character" as being self-evident, Damon begins by posing the question, how do "young people acquire good character?" Damon begins by asserting that every child is "born with [the] building blocks of character already present." The "moral sense" does not need to be "forced down a child's throat like unpleasant medicine — it is part of the human system," he said.

These "building blocks" which are said to define human beings are, according to Damon: empathy, fairness, self-control, and self-awareness. The content of these notions is given when Damon elaborates on what these "building blocks" should give rise to. Empathy, he says, must grow into "sustained concern for the well-being of others; fairness must grow into a real commitment to justice; self-control must grow into a strong sense of personal responsibility; and self-awareness must grow into a determination to be a good and honorable person, free from subjugation, and dedicated to noble purposes beyond the self." The character of human beings having rights by virtue of being human is completely absent from Damon's presentation.

Damon argues that "good character" emerges only when everyone holds the same values. "[A]dults from all spheres of life — family, school,

community — [must be] on 'the same page' with one another regarding the core moral values that they profess to the child." Children, he asserts, only "take values seriously only when they perceive at least a rough consensus on them among the adults whom they respect." Suggesting social problems are moral in nature and arise from differences in values and beliefs, Damon asserts: "Young people do far better in communities characterized by shared moral values than in communities where the young receive conflicting messages..." The source of the problem, according to Damon is with adults having "low standards for children" and not holding them to their responsibilities. In light of this he demands that "adults communicate high expectations and standards to children, urging children to fully maximize the tremendous potentials that all children are born with."

For character education to really work, Damon continues, it needs to "have a real-life side that engages students in activities, either within the school or in the broader community, that help them acquire regular habits of virtuous behavior. Active engagement not only ensures that young people will invest themselves in the program; it also nurtures the capacity to make moral choices freely, and the love of liberty, one of the defining virtues of citizenship in a democracy..... Character education ... must have a positive side, inspiring young people to dedicate themselves to higher purposes. In the long run, it is a sense of positive inspiration that sustains good character. A young person who is committed to truly noble purposes does not need external injunctions to walk the straight and narrow path: as they say in sports, a good offense is the best defense."

What are the noble purposes that are to inspire the youth? "Charitable work is one way to introduce students to a larger purpose.... The sort of community service programs that are promoted by the Freedom Corps are excellent examples of this, and the inspirational nature of this initiative sends exactly the right kind of message to young Americans."

Damon continues: "Work as a sense of calling, a means of contributing to the betterment of the world by using one's personal skills and talents, is another

character-inducing source of purpose for a youngster; as is the wish to establish and nurture a thriving family. Faith and spirituality, too, offers young people positive experiences with transcendent purposes."

Revealing how "character education" is being linked with "national service" at this time, Damon concluded: "Another transcendent purpose is love of country and a selfless dedication to it. In the case

of a country that stands as a beacon of democracy and freedom for the world, this is a noble sentiment. The age-old term for this spirit of dedication is *patriotism*, a term that in recent years has not always been promoted in our educational settings; yet now, when our society has been called upon to combat the evils of international terror, patriotism has assumed its rightful place as a source of inspiration for the young."

## Educators are Joining the Ranks of All Those Fighting for Peace and Progress!

— Call to Demonstrate in D.C. on January 18! Oppose War on Iraq! —

*January 10, 2003*

Against the will of the American people, and against the will of the world's peoples, the government is mobilizing for imminent war against Iraq. In going to war, the U.S. is seeking not only control of the region and its resources, but world domination. Teachers Forum is posting in this issue news items that reveal the growing opposition to U.S. war plans, the growing opposition to the targeting of youth by the military, and actions planned when war breaks out.

We are calling on all educators, students and parents to organize themselves to ensure their voice is represented at the National March Against War on Iraq in Washington on January 18. Let everyone know that educators from Western New York are not for war, but for peace! Let everyone know we reject our youth being targeted by military recruiters. Let everyone know we reject the notion that being sent as cannon fodder for imperialist war is an "opportunity" for the youth. We say: *Hands Off Our Schools! Hands Off Our Youth! Hands Off the World!*

Whether one can go to D.C. or not, everyone can play a role in ensuring the voice of educators is represented at the national march and create a space locally for educators, students and parents to more broadly oppose the U.S. war efforts and be prepared for the further attacks on rights that the government is planning.

War on Iraq is being increasingly opposed by

educators, parents, students and youth because it not only means stepping up the attacks on education and youth in particular, but because of what it means for human progress. Not only budgets for education and social programs being further cut, as more and more money is handed over to the U.S. war machine, but the very content and form of education is being militarized. More and more educators are being forced to turn over information to military recruiters; while at the same time educators are to be police for attacks rights, as the government dictates its "character" and "values." Arbitrary standards imposed by the federal government are pushing more students out of school, making them even more vulnerable to military recruiters. Under these initiatives students and teachers are to become robots accustomed to blindly following orders no matter how contrary they are to what is needed. Educators are saying, *No!*

Opposing war on Iraq is an important step in taking matters into our own hands, and a means by which educators can unite with all the fighting forces. The issue is not whether the government will stop its war because of the people's broad opposition. The issue is for the people to organize alternatives to the wrecking of education, of the norms and rights established in international rule of law through great struggle and shedding of blood by humanity. *All Out for January 18! Join Us!*

***ROCHESTER, NEW YORK***

# **Students, Parents and Educators Reject Military Demands**

*December 6, 2002*

Section 9528 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), also known as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), requires each school district that receives federal funds under the ESEA to provide, on request by a military recruiter or an institution of higher education, access to the names, addresses, and telephone listings for secondary students. Access to school grounds by military recruiters is also required. Consistent with this, the military has been sending letters to principals and superintendents nationwide, demanding the information. Schools that refuse to provide military recruiters access and information for every student face a cutoff of all federal funds. While federal law already requires men to register with the Selective Service within 30 days of turning 18, the new law enables the Pentagon to target students when they are 15 or 16.

According to the law, parents can request that the information for their child not be released without prior written parental consent. According to reports from parents, students and teachers, many school officials are simply turning over the names on request. The military is insisting that if parents do not submit letters to deny access, the information must be given to the military.

Superintendent of the Rochester-area Fairport schools, William Cala, reported recently that to defend the rights of their students, they implemented an "opt in" program. Over 1,700 letters were sent to parents asking them to decide whether or not they wanted their children's information released to the military. Consistent with usual school policy, where if parents do not give written consent it means they are not giving permission, only those returning letters are considered to have given permission to release information to the military. To date only 40 parents have done so.

As well, counter-recruitment information tables at East, Marshall, and Edison High Schools in the Rochester School District, New York, are being organized as outrage about this hidden provision of the new federal law expands, and military recruiters return to schools they were until recently barred

from entering.

These developments reflect the nationwide trend, where parents and educators are rejecting the military's demands for access and student information. The principal of Mount Anthony Union High School in Bennington, Vermont, Sharon Sheakeneally, for example, said she was shocked when she learned that military recruiters were demanding a list of all her students, including names, addresses, and phone numbers. "We don't give out a list of names of our kids to anybody," says Sheakeneally, "not to colleges, churches, employers - nobody," she was quoted as saying. "I was very surprised the requirement was attached to an education law," she added. Over 200 students at her school have already asked that their records be withheld.

In New York City, Daniel Alterman was taken aback when his 15-year-old son, a junior at Stuyvesant High, received a recruitment letter. "Parents are in the dark," Alterman said. "It freaked me out. I didn't sign up to support the military effort."

Given the massive funding cuts and desperation faced by school districts nationwide, the blackmail of withdrawing Federal funds for refusing to comply with government demands is having its impact. San Francisco, California and Portland, Oregon, with long-standing policies against allowing the military on school grounds, said that they will reluctantly grant recruiters access to their schools and to student information. They also plan to fully inform students and parents of the need for them to act to have their records withheld.

As an indication of the military's view on the matter, Major Johannes Paraan, head U.S. Army recruiter for Vermont and Northeastern New York said, "The only thing that will get us to stop contacting the family [even if they object] is if they call their congressman. Or maybe if the kid died, we'll take them off our list."

The military complained this year that up to 15 percent of the nation's high schools are 'problem schools' for recruiters. In 1999, the Pentagon says, recruiters were denied access to schools on 19,228 occasions.

***CRISIS OF U.S. IMPERIALISM INTENSIFYING***

# Despite Recent Efforts, Youth Rejecting Military Service

*September 3, 2002*

According to a report commissioned by the Department of Defense and released by the National Research Council on August 15, the military is having significant trouble recruiting youth.

Speaking to this reality in the context of promoting National service, Will Marshall, President of the Progressive Policy Institute (PPI), the “think tank” wing of the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC), and the author of the 1988 DLC proposal that included a “citizen soldier” track for national service, was quoted recently as saying: “The Armed Services Committee action [for a short-term enlistment option and increased access for military recruiters in the 2003 Defense Authorization bill] represents a real breakthrough in a defense community that in the past has been ambivalent about the need for a broader effort to attract well-educated and civic-minded young Americans to military service short of a career commitment — an effort that makes more sense than ever given the fight against terrorism, the upsurge in patriotic sentiment, and the ongoing struggle of the armed forces to meet their recruiting targets.

Echoing the same sentiment, Senator Evan Bayh (D-Ind.), chair of the Democratic Leadership Council and co-sponsor (with Senator John McCain (R-Ariz.)) of the *Call to Service Act*, was also recently quoted as saying, “Just as there is a great need for volunteers in communities across America, the war on terrorism has placed new demands on our Armed Forces... Expanding opportunities for military service is an integral part of our plan to broaden the scope of volunteerism in America. By enhancing incentives and providing greater flexibility for enlistment, we hope to attract America’s best and brightest to serve in the Armed Forces.”

Yet “Despite a threefold increase in advertising in recent years, efforts by the U.S. military to bolster its recruitment ranks are bearing little fruit,” reports the *Los Angeles Times*. Even with a faltering economy and the so-called upsurge in patriotism in the wake of 9-11, “there has been no corresponding up tick in military enlistment,” says the *Times*.

Moreover, while the military’s recruiting difficulties have intensified since 9-11, it has in fact been

experiencing recruiting problems for several years now. News sources report that, “While the Army has always accepted applicants without a high school diploma, until two years ago [1998] it limited their enlistment to 5 percent of the total number of recruits. In 1998, the Army and other branches of the military — amid concerns about meeting enlistment goals — raised the ceiling to 10 percent.” According to another news source, “For the first time since 1979, the Army and Air Force last year [1999] failed — by margins of 6,300 and 1,700, respectively — to meet their recruiting goals. And the Navy, which fell 7,000 recruits short in 1998, had to lower its standards, accepting holders of high school general equivalency diplomas, to meet its 1999 goal, according to the Pentagon.” (The draft ended in 1973)

Some facts:

- The number of Americans on active duty dwindled to 1.2 million in 2000, down from 1.7 million in 1990 and 2.3 million in 1964.
- Between 1980 and 1997, the average age of active-duty personnel increased from 25 to 27. And the percentage of high school males who said they will “definitely” join the military declined from 12% in the mid-1980s to 8%.
- The Army has met its goals of about 80,000 new recruits each of the last three years, but these targets are lower than in years past. Its 1983 goal was 145,000.
- An estimated 200,000 new recruits are needed each year to maintain the active force for all four branches of the military.

The military is struggling to boost enlistments with new recruiting programs such as ChalleNGe, a “youth at risk” program which targets “unemployed, drug-free, high school dropouts, 16-18 years of age,” according to the National Guard Bureau (NGB), and STARBASE, a Guard program targeting youth ages 6 through 18 through their schools.

And at a February 3, 2000, press conference Pentagon Officials along with retired General Colin Powell, now Secretary of State, and former Secretary of Education Richard Riley, introduced the “GED Plus” initiative to improve enlistment numbers among 18-24 year-olds. The program specifi-

cally targets dropouts.

"At a time when the high school dropout rate is still too high, particularly from individuals from minority communities ... this program ["GED Plus"] has the potential to bring tens of thousands of these individuals back into the world of learning, and into the world of success," said (former) Secretary of Education Riley. The dropout rate continues to increase, in large measure due to government imposed policies, such as new graduation requirements, "codes of conduct" which increase expulsions and massive cuts to education funding.

Recruits would earn high-school-equivalency diplomas during their time in the military. Once the

GED is attained, youth will be required to serve a minimum of two years in the military.

Also a part of this faltering effort, a provision of the newly re-authorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), also known as the No Child Left Behind Act 2001 (NCLB), requires school districts to disclose names, addresses, and telephone numbers of high school students upon request by military recruiters and institutions of higher learning, unless individual students or their parents request that the information not be released without prior written parental consent. The new requirements apply to all districts receiving assistance under the act, such as Title I funds for remedial instruction.

*STATE OF OUR SCHOOLS: FORUM ON EDUCATION*

## **“Failure,” Rights and the Need for New Arrangements**

**July 8, 2002**

Teachers Forum for Empowerment and Rights is pleased to participate in this conference on the state of public education. We commend all those who organized to have this space for educators and people generally to take up for solution the problems facing education.

With the end of the school year in everyone's recent memory, the so-called failure of students and teachers to meet the state's “standards” has come to the fore. In Buffalo, for example, nearly 400 students have been denied graduation this year, many on the basis of a single test, the Math A Regents.

But the question of who is failing whom must be posed.

When the issue is looked at objectively, it becomes clear that it is not students and teachers who are the failures, but instead it is governments at all levels which have failed to meet the needs of the youth for an education that prepares them to fully participate in all the affairs of the society.

At the heart of the issue of failure is the issue of rights. Most people understand that in order to perform your duties, your rights must be provided with a guarantee. People, and teachers and students in particular are rejecting being labeled failures by the government when it has so blatantly and shamelessly denied them the basic ingredients to acquire a high-level education. In the face of this situation they are raising high their banners: Education is a Right! Cancel the Debt! Stop Paying the Rich! Increasing Funding for Education Now!

These demands being put forward represent the people's desire for an alternative to the wrecking now taking place.

An important starting point for building the alternative is rejecting this whole notion that the problem is that of student and teacher “failure.” Labeling students and even teachers as failures serves to divert attention away from the source of the problem, which is the failure of the state to guarantee education as a right. Second, labeling students “failures” for not doing well on arbitrary tests, and even

labeling teachers in such a manner for not getting more students to pass the tests creates an anti-educational atmosphere that robs students and teachers of their inherent dignity and worth. Everyone, as human beings, has the right to be treated with the inherent dignity and worth befitting the human person. In this regard, no student under any circumstances is a “failure,” in so much as that word reflects an effort to humiliate and denigrate the human person. The state attacks on the right to education and labeling students and teachers as “failures” creates a situation where rather than leaving school ready to fully participate in the world, youth leave humiliated. The state is telling them they have no place in the world and the world has no place for them. With all its focus on student “failure” the state also succeeds in diverting from its own failure to prepare the youth for the future. The attacks on education are all evidence that the state is washing its hands of any responsibility to provide the education needed for the youth and society to advance.

This denial of students' and teachers' inherent dignity and worth blocks teachers from teaching and students from learning. Students abhor being tested not because they refuse to learn, but because they know the existing society imposes the notion that their worth and dignity is bound up with their performance—calls them failures based on test performance. Within the existing system, once the link between one's inherent value and their performance is broken, students will eagerly seek out teacher evaluation and teachers will freely give it without fear that they are blocking students from “future opportunities.” Irrespective of their ability in any academic domain, students must be treated with the inherent dignity and worth that must be afforded all human beings on the basis that such treatment is a basic human right.

By putting the issue of rights front and center, as a starting point, solutions to the problem can be found and an alternative to the increasingly hostile system can be built. What is needed is for teachers and students together to decide and set the standards for

the education needed for youth to fully participate in and contribute to the progress of society. Fighting for new arrangements, where the people themselves

are empowered to decide and where society is organized to guarantee the rights of all provides a way out of the current crisis.

## Federal Government Labels Schools and States “Enemies”

*November 1, 2002*

As school districts and States nationwide continue to try to cope with the arbitrary testing measures imposed by the federal government's education law, the No Child Left Behind Act 2001 (NCLB), federal officials are increasing their insistence that schools and states submit to the federal government or be punished. Already faced with massive state budget cuts, schools nationwide are scrambling to meet the federal mandates or also face the loss of federal funds.

The NCLB, for the first time, gives the federal government authority to take actions against schools that do not meet various testing mandates. The start of this school year marked the first time the new arbitrary measures took effect, with each state submitting a list of those schools that did not meet the mandates, based on state guidelines.

According to the *New York Times*, “after a month of meetings to discuss the law with some 40 state school chiefs, Education Secretary Rod Paige appeared to be drawing battle lines.” In the latest in a series of letters to school districts nationwide, invoking the language of the “war on terrorism,” Education Secretary Rod Paige wrote: “Those who play semantic games or try to tinker with state numbers to lock out parents and the public stand in the way of progress and reform. They are the enemies of equal justice and equal opportunity. They are apologists for failure. And they will not succeed.”

Among the NCLB’s main provisions are arbitrary mandates for what is called “adequate yearly progress.” The “progress” is determined by each state on the basis of standardized tests. When schools do not meet the mandates, the federal government has authority to step in and dictate a series of “corrective actions,” including the withholding and redirecting of federal funds, chiefly Title I funds. Title I provides funds to schools based on the number of students living in poverty, specifically the number that qualify for the free and reduced lunch programs.

The arbitrary nature of the testing mandates and threats to cut federal funding are already causing

chaos nationwide. According to the Associated Press, many state education officials are pointing out that the new law punishes states with “high standards,” forcing them to offer school transfers and expensive tutoring using federal funds that would otherwise go to classrooms. For example, AP points out, “In Texas, which has 4.1 million students, state officials there have identified only 46 under performing schools. But Michigan, with only 1.7 million students and higher standards, has 1,513 under performing schools.” The arbitrary grading of schools was underscored recently when USA Today reported that at least 19 schools deemed by the federal government the best in the nation under its “Blue Ribbon” program were also labeled as not meeting the mandates under NCLB.

In an attempt to meet the arbitrary and unworkable federal mandates, some states have attempted to alter their testing requirements. It was these states in particular that Paige was targeting. Brenda Welburn, executive director of the National Association of State Boards of Education, pointed out, “These are states, like Michigan, that don’t see that they can comply with” the new law. “They are certainly terrified that they’re going to lose federal dollars if they can’t fully comply with the law.” Michigan’s superintendent of schools, Thomas Watkins, Jr., said that he wants to maintain the State’s “tougher standards,” but they would be unworkable when penalties kicked in for 1,513 schools.

Among the “corrective actions” that NCLB mandates are its requirements for school districts with schools that did not meet the “adequate yearly progress” mandate. These actions require that the districts: provide students in the designated schools with the option of enrolling in another public school; continue to provide “supplemental educational services”; or prepare a plan and make necessary arrangements for “alternative governance.” This last action could include: re-opening the school as a public charter school, replacing all or most of the school staff, or turning over control of the school to a private management company like Edison or the State

government. Meanwhile, Title I funds (up to 20 percent of them), are to be channeled from schools to parents, to obtain "supplemental educational services" like tutoring. This may go to private companies or religious-affiliated providers. In those schools where this is already being implemented, the funds provided are not nearly sufficient for tutoring needs. As well, for the most part, they are funds going from

the public schools into the hands of private tutoring agencies. As for the option of enrolling in another school, many districts nationwide are reporting that there simply is no place for these students to go, no room in other schools in their districts. Educators and school administrators nationwide continue to show that the NCLB is solving no problems while creating many more.

#### PENNSYLVANIA

## School District Lawsuit Challenges Wrecking of the *No Child Left Behind Act*

February 1, 2004

Recently the Reading School District in Pennsylvania became the first district in the country to file a lawsuit against the wrecking caused by the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB). The district filed the lawsuit "to protect its schools from what the district believes are unfair sanctions," reports the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*.

The two-year-old Act serves to impose federal intervention in the schools on the basis of arbitrary testing requirements. It is part of the effort to brand the public school system as "failing," so as to justify wrecking and eliminating it. One part of the law imposes an escalating series of punitive sanctions on schools that do not meet the arbitrary requirements. Already, 26,000 schools nationwide fall into this category.

Echoing the nationwide sentiment and experience of most in the field, Reading Superintendent Melissa Jamula was quoted as saying, "There are things contained in the law that just aren't right and are clearly unfair and clearly inconsistent. We felt an obligation to our students and our schools to file the petition on their behalf."

Reading filed an appeal after the state claimed that 13 of its 19 elementary, middle, and high schools did not meet the state's arbitrary testing requirements. More punishment from the state is in store if the schools continue to not meet the requirements, including a state takeover of schools. 16,000 students attend school in the Reading district.

The lawsuit argues three major points:

1. The state did not offer the required tests in Spanish, which meant the Reading students who speak little English were judged on the basis of math and reading tests given in English.

Eleven percent of the district's students have limited English proficiency; 64 percent of the district is Hispanic. The state is not expected to have tests written in Spanish until 2005.

2. The district is questioning how the state determines "subgroups" - such as those who are low-income or have limited English skills. They all must show "adequate improvement" or the school is branded as not meeting requirements. Pennsylvania requires schools to have at least 40 students in a subgroup for it to count. Reading officials argue that the state has failed to justify that number.

3. The district says the state has not provided adequate technical and financial assistance for it to comply with the Act, even though the federal law states that the mandates are not supposed to be unfunded.

The state has conducted regional seminars to tell districts how to make school improvement plans. But funding for some other help, such as tutoring, has been held up in the state budget debate, said department spokesman Brian Christopher.

Many other districts across the country are closely watching Reading's actions and considering following suit. People at all levels, superintendents, school board members, teachers and parents, increasingly oppose the NCLB as serving to further lower the level of education and directly interrupting teaching by imposing unending testing requirements. Many districts and states are challenging and resisting the law and its wrecking in other ways, with more schools and states joining the opposition each month. The nation's largest teacher union, the National Education Association (NEA), also recently filed a lawsuit against the federal law and the wrecking caused by it.

**CONTRADICTIONS INTENSIFYING**

# Congressional Leaders Call for Strengthening *No Child Left Behind Act*

February 1, 2004

In a detailed six-page letter sent to U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige on the two-year anniversary of the signing of the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB), ten congressional Democrats criticized the federal Education Department for failing to properly implement the Act. In particular they are demanding that the federal government become even more involved in what has in the U.S. historically been a state responsibility.

Opposition to the NCLB has been growing rapidly over the past two years. The letter's media attention appears in part to be directed at rendering that opposition as stemming from poor implementation, not an outright objection to the wrecking of public education that is the essence of the law. "The potential of the act has yet to be realized in large numbers of communities because of the failure to properly implement and fund the law," the ten lawmakers wrote January 8. "As a result, misinformation and speculation are rife in local school districts and are contributing to their reluctance to implement the act's provisions," they wrote.

Only a month prior, a district in Pennsylvania filed a lawsuit directed against the very provisions of NCLB the Congressmen want implemented such as "adequate yearly progress" and the "composition and size of subgroups under the law." The letter also appears to "echo concerns expressed in a letter the Washington-based Council of Chief State School Officers sent Dec. 30 to the White House," according to *Education Week*.

All nine Democrats on the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee signed the letter, as did Rep. George Miller of California, the top Democrat on the House Education and the Workforce Committee. The main Republican sponsors of the Act, Rep. John Boehner and Sen. Judd Gregg, did not sign the letter.

While appearing to represent the widespread frustration educators, parents and students have with the arbitrariness of NCLB, the letter renders the problems as ones of implementation. For example, emphasis is given to the Education Department's lack of "technical assistance" and "confusing messages" and delays in the release of regulations and guidance for states and districts. In response to this, the authors are calling for more federal "assistance" by having, for example, federally approved "templates" for "states struggling to put in place a strong and responsible plan."

Finally, the letter exemplifies efforts by the ruling class to limit discussion of the law to funding, which in fact represents a struggle between factions of the ruling class. This is taking the form of "debates" over whether NCLB is "underfunded," with editorials, such as a recent one in the *New York Times*, demanding that the problem with the law is that it is not yet "fully funded." The battle here is over who gets the public funds. The call for better implementation of the law is an effort to hide the fact that the law directly serves the wrecking of public education and that what is required is increased funding to meet the needs of teachers and students.

**LOWERING THE LEVEL OF EDUCATION**

## New Florida Law: High School Diploma in Three Years

July 28, 2003

A recently passed law in Florida that calls for receiving a high school diploma in three years took effect as of July 1, 2003, according to the *St. Petersburg Times*. Under the law, students are to be awarded a high school diploma with only 18 credits, as opposed to the long-standing standard of 24 credits. Superintendents

received guidance from the state Department of Education six days after the law took effect. Administrators in Hernando County, for example, report little if any interest in the 18-credit option.

The *Times* claims the new "graduation choices aim to help both college-bound and career-path students." Yet, the law sets the minimum: the "college

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## **STANDARDS, TESTING AND THE WRECKING OF EDUCATION**

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preparatory 18-credit option mandates the minimum standards for admission into the state university system, while the career 18-credit option focuses on the standard to enter a community or technical college." Educational administrators note that these 18 credits may not enable them to attend a college or university outside Florida.

All graduates still must have a grade-point average of 2.0 or better, and must pass the arbitrary 10th grade Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). Those who do not maintain an adequate grade-point average or fail to pass the FCAT during their 18-credit program would be required to complete the 24-credit standard program, reports the *Times*.

Lawmakers also reduced university entry requirements to 18 credits from 19, and three electives from four, to match the new graduation options. Each new option concentrates the student credit load on academics, and limits electives.

Yet, in the name of concentrating on academics, standards are actually being lowered. For example, "the requirement to earn credits in American history, world history, economics and American government is replaced by a generic requirement for three credits in social sciences," according to the *Times*. There are no requirements to earn a credit in practical or performing arts or physical education, for example. And students who choose the three-year graduation option would not be allowed to remain in school for a fourth year of athletics. Reducing electives and non-academic coursework, according to some experts, will have the effect of pushing more students out of school, increasing the drop out rate.

While the mandate now includes rules that students earn two credits in the same foreign language, Hernando County Central High principal Dennis McGeehan said that lawmakers were talking about

changing that rule.

According to some district officials only a handful of this year's juniors, and probably no seniors, would be able to meet the new graduation option requirements. The Department of Education recommends that families make an initial graduation choice during a student's eighth-grade year.

Freshmen and sophomores will be encouraged to start planning for the option, according to Jim Knight, student services director for the Hernando County School Board. To this effect, districts are designing forms for parents to select one of two accelerated choices or the standard graduation. The 24-credit option will be the automatic default for families that do not complete the form.

Yet, Florida districts are having difficulty revising their curricula to implement the three-year program, all with only a month before the 2003-04 school year. For example, students still will have to complete four credits in English, but some districts have a policy that does not allow anyone but seniors to take English 4. As well, students are not typically allowed to take more than one English class at the same time, because one is a prerequisite of the other; this long-standing practice will be changed under the new scheme.

Despite claims that the law is in part a means by which to reduce class size, districts have raised concerns that under the new law, space will become more of an issue.

Depending on how many students sign up for three-year graduation, district officials suggest they might need to rely on online classes, and dual enrollment programs with community colleges. Some are considering a broader summer school program to meet implement the program in the context of limited classroom space, according to the *Times*.

*STOP PAYING THE RICH! CANCEL THE DEBT!  
INCREASE FUNDING FOR SCHOOLS NOW!*

## Now is the Time to Go Broadly with the People's Alternative!

*October 18, 2002*

Whether it is the attack on the right to education with massive funding cuts, arbitrary standards, or the attack on the right to conscience and self-determination of a people, the situation is demanding that the people themselves take immediate action to build alternatives. Fighting for rights - the collective rights of minorities, the collective rights of women, the collective rights of youth - is key to building alternatives.

The slogan Stop Paying the Rich! Cancel The Debt! Increase Funding For Schools Now! provides an alternative to the current funding crisis. The root cause of the crisis is government abdication of its responsibility to fund education at a level commensurate with the needs of the youth and level of development of the society. Instead of being accountable to the needs of youth, students and the people as a whole, the government is organized to serve the narrow interests of the rich. There is an Alternative!

The slogan Stop Paying the Rich! is a bold declaration that the aim of society is to meet the needs of its members, and not be enslaved to a few elite whose actions against education stand contrary to the interests of all humanity for enlightenment.

When one examines how much debt exists, and how much the government spends on debt servicing, it becomes clear that it is not lack of money that

is the problem - the problem is that the society is now organized to be at the disposal of the monopolies in order to be "competitive in the global economy." This means accepting that all the natural and human resources of the society are to be put at the disposal of the rich. This includes looting the state treasury. Just in New York, billions annually are turned over to the rich in the form of debt servicing. While parents, students and teachers are to accept as normal the insecurity of not knowing what will be cut next, payments to the rich are never to be questioned and in fact increased.

The central issue in the fight to increase funding for schools is then not "who should get more money, and who should get less." This orientation serves to embroil the people in a fight over crumbs in a land of plenty. The ruling class is quite happy to have people divided.

It is the working class and people worldwide who produce the wealth and run the society; and it is they who must be invested in, not the stock market.

The starting point for funding has to be based on actual needs. By targeting the rich and their system as the source of the problem, the slogan opens up a space for all to unite and all to claim their rights by demanding that funding for education be immediately increased as a first step in guaranteeing the right to education.

## Report Says \$50 Billion Needed to Modernize Schools in New York State

*October 18, 2002*

Ten months ago, the National Education Association, the nation's largest teacher union, issued a piece called "School Modernization Facts." The article provides the following basic facts about education in New York State: 90 percent of schools report a need to upgrade or repair buildings to good overall condition; 67 percent of schools report at least one inadequate building feature (e.g. roof,

plumbing, electrical, windows, HVAC); 76 percent of schools report at least one unsatisfactory environmental factor (e.g. air quality, ventilation, acoustics, heating, lighting); an average of 16 students per computer.

Current estimates, according to the report, indicate that New York faces a \$50.7 billion cost for school modernization, including \$47.7 billion for infrastructure and \$3 billion for technology needs. Earlier, the

State Education Department estimated that \$15 billion alone is needed simply to bring school buildings in New York up to minimal building code.

According to the report, there are 4,172 schools in New York State, with a total enrollment of 2,936,000.

State Funding for K-12 facilities (based on 1993-94 figures) was \$451,000,000, or an average of \$167 per student.

Key to modernizing schools is organizing them on the basis that education is a right.

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*FOR YOUR INFORMATION*

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## Facts on Government Debt

On January 16, New York State Comptroller H. Carl McCall released a report on the State's debt burden. ER is providing below facts from that report.

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In 2001, New York's "state-supported" debt stood at \$38.9 billion. This debt represents only one part of the estimated \$100 billion in outstanding state-related debt held by the state government and its various public authorities. The facts below address only this \$38.9 billion in "state-supported" debt.

According to Wall Street's Moody's Investors Service, New York State has more outstanding "state-supported" debt than any other state - 33 percent more than second-ranked California and six times the national average of \$6.1 billion. This type of State debt has almost tripled since 1985. The report states that New York's Capital Program and Financing plan, updated in November 2001, calls for \$9.5 billion in new "state-supported debt" through 2006.

Using only this type of debt, New York State debt per capita stands at almost \$2,000 for every man, woman and child in the state. This has increased at

a rate of 4.7 percent per year over the past six years, far more than the 2.6 percent inflation rate.

In 2000, New York State paid \$3.9 billion in debt servicing toward both principal and interest on the "state-supported" debt. The Comptroller's report points out that the State also used \$550 million from the Debt Reduction Reserve Fund for debt servicing in fiscal 2000-01, bringing the total debt servicing to \$4.4 billion. This debt servicing as a percentage of State revenues now stands at 7.1 percent, up from 6.5 percent in 1995.

The Comptroller's report states that "Article VII of the State Constitution mandates that voters approve State debt." Prior to the mid-1960s, the report said, "all State-supported debt was approved by the voters through ballot measures (referred to as General Obligation debt)." Since then "the State has greatly increased its use of public authorities, [like the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority (NFTA)] to issue debt that does not carry voter approval (back-door borrowing)." Non-voter approved debt currently makes up more than 88 percent of total State-supported debt.

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*INTENSIFYING THE ANTI-SOCIAL OFFENSIVE*

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## Court Says State Has No Obligation to Provide High School Education

*July 8, 2002*

On January 10, 2001, in a landmark decision, State Supreme Court Justice of Manhattan, Leland DeGrasse, ruled New York State's education funding system unconstitutional. The Court gave New York State until September 15, 2001 to implement a new education funding system that would increase funding for education, particularly for New York City schools as well as many other exceptionally poor districts around the State. Governor Pataki, who all along has held that the education funding system is "a dinosaur," appealed this historic decision to the Appel-

late Division of Supreme Court on January 16, 2001.

The Appellate Division, First Department of the State Supreme Court, in a 4-1 vote, overturned DeGrasse's decision on June 25, 2002. Implying that funding for education does not need to be increased, "Justice Alfred D. Lerner, who wrote the majority opinion, said Albany is required only to 'provide a minimally adequate educational opportunity', not 'some higher, largely unspecified level of education, as laudable as that goal might be,'" reports Newsday. Lerner added that the lower court (the DeGrasse decision) "went too far in stating that a sound basic

education must prepare students for employment somewhere between low-service jobs and the most lucrative careers.. Society needs workers in all levels of jobs, the majority of which may very well be low level." The State is "obliged to provide no more than a middle-school-level education, and to prepare students for nothing more than the lowest-level jobs." "Even if students were not properly educated, the majority found, that did not mean that the state had failed its obligations," adds the New York Times. The Appellate Court held: "The proper standard is that the state must offer all children the opportunity of a sound basic education, not ensure they actually receive it."

The Campaign for Fiscal Equity (CFE), a coalition of parents, teachers and advocacy groups that brought the original suit, vowed to appeal the recent decision. "We are outraged on behalf of hundreds of thousands of New York State students who struggle in overcrowded classrooms with underpaid teachers and empty libraries," said Michael Rebell, executive director of the CFE. "The rights at stake

here are so strong," Rebell said.

Justice David B. Saxe filed the dissenting opinion in the Appellate Division's decision, saying that the majority decision means that the State "has no meaningful obligation to provide any high school education at all." He said that the lower court's findings "can only be reversed by ignoring either much of the evidence or the factual circumstances of the city's student population." In a June 25 statement, New York State United Teachers (NYSUT) called the ruling "a tragedy for students in school districts that have traditionally been short-changed by Albany." The statement also said, "The appeals court has applied an 18th Century definition of 'sound, basic education' to students who will fill the high-tech jobs created by our 21st Century economy." "Judge DeGrasse's ruling should have been allowed to stand," concludes the statement.

At a time when society demands a level of education on a par with arming the youth to fully participate in and contribute to society, New York State is reducing education to the lowest levels.

#### *ON THE ROLE OF EDUCATION*

## **Education Is Not a Service**

*August 23, 2001*

The neo-liberal antisocial offensive of the IMF and World Bank is blocking education from taking place by making it a private matter with the imposition of user fees and the outright privatization of public institutions. The withdrawing of public funds for expenditures on education is in part justified with the notion that education is a "service" that "consumers choose".

But education is not a service. Education exists as part of the responsibility of human beings to pass on accumulated knowledge to the younger generation. Even animals engage in this activity. At each stage of human development, time and resources have been set aside to educate the youth in order that life may proceed at the same level and not regress. If the youth are not educated to the level of the existing generation, for whatever reason, humans soon lose the accumulated knowledge as something that is useful and workable on a day to day basis.

Time and resources must be set aside to educate the people. Up to now, the decision as to how much time and resources should be utilized on education has been dictated by the existing economic base

,capitalism, without overall planning or a conscious decision by the society. Our modern world demands a change in this situation. The pursuit of maximum profit is coming into contradiction with all the requirements of modern society.

Education consumes already produced value and does not produce anything in return, but without it the society would not be able to produce at the level it does. Mass public education is an absolute necessity of modern production for without educated people the level of the productive forces will deteriorate. In addition, education is part of being modern, cultured and humane. It is an area of life which must be attended to or the society will regress.

The issue of education cannot be converted into the private affair of the student, the individual "responsibility" or "choice" of the student. To reduce modern education to an individual decision is to render the entire issue so banal as to make it ridiculous. Such a situation is not possible given the expense, social nature, complexity and role of modern education.

Elementary, secondary and higher education, if carried out strictly on the basis of a service commodity would be prohibitive for even the wealthiest.

Suppose the State University of New York is privatized. All the equity of the university is sold on the open market. The taxpayers would be in their right to withhold their share of taxes which go towards higher education. Why should taxpayers finance private corporations? Whether a person wants to receive an education or not would be left to a personal decision. Is there any guarantee that higher education will survive? The cost of such a service would be so prohibitive that no student would be able to afford it.

By withdrawing public education, by privatizing it, governments will be withdrawing the *raison d'être* of their own existence. If the governments are not going to provide public education, if they are

not going to provide public health, if they are not going to provide social programs, if everything is to be based on user fees, such as toll roads, libraries, recreation, etc., then why should these governments exist at all? This is the question people will ask. If the governments are not going to provide education, health and social programs, why give them any tax money?

The blunder of the notion of education as a "service" is that it does not begin with the way things are at this time. Governments currently finance education to the tune of billions of dollars. If these monies are withdrawn, it will become impossible for any students, including those coming from the richest families, to pay for education on their own.

## Charter Schools in the United States: Facts, Background, Evaluation

*October 13, 2003*

Given the rapid rise in the number of charter schools around the country and the effects they are generating, as well as the fact that Buffalo is now the nation's main testing ground for a first-of-its-kind district-wide charter school system, Teachers Forum is providing our readers with basic facts, information, and background on charter schools nationally and in New York State.

Today there are approximately 3,000 charter schools in the U.S., enrolling approximately 685,000 students, an estimated 15 percent increase from last year. The top five states in terms of charter schools in operation are Arizona (464), California (428), Florida (227), Texas (221), and Michigan (196).

In 1991, Minnesota passed the first charter school law, with California following suit in 1992. By 1995, 19 states had signed laws allowing for the creation of charter schools, and by 2003 that number increased to 40 states, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia.

Since 1994, the U.S. Department of Education has provided grants to support states' charter school efforts, starting with \$6 million in fiscal year 1995. In 2002, President Bush called for providing an extra \$200 million to fund charter schools. His proposed budget called for another \$100 million for a new Credit Enhancement for Charter Schools Facilities Program.

Last year, Bush proclaimed April 27 through May 3 as National Charter Schools Week. The U.S. Department of Education is hosting a conference this summer

in Florida to push charter schools even further.

The notorious *No Child Left Behind Act* mandates that schools that do not adhere to the law's arbitrary requirements must be "restructured," with conversion to charter schools being one of the available forms of restructuring.

### **Performance contracts**

A "charter" is a contract, and a charter school, legally speaking, is a nonsectarian public school. The "charter" establishing each such school is a performance contract — a business and educational plan — detailing the school's mission, programs, students to be served, and methods of assessment and accountability.

The length of time for which charters are granted varies, but most are granted for 3-5 years. At the end of the term, the entity granting the charter may renew the school's contract.

The government body authorizing charter schools varies from state to state, depending on the state's charter law. In California, for example, there are three types of authorizers: the governing board of the school districts, county boards of education, or the state board of education. In Pennsylvania, individuals or groups seeking to establish a charter public school must apply to the local school board of the district in which the school will be located.

Generally there are four types of entities allowed to authorize charter schools: the local school board, state universities, community colleges, and the state board

of education. State universities and the state board of education are the most common forms in New York.

A handful of districts, including Los Angeles and Chicago, have chartered their own schools. Buffalo is slated to become the first district-wide, district-sponsored charter school system in the country. Precisely what this will mean, particularly in terms of school governance and role of Buffalo's Control Board has not yet been revealed.

As public schools, charters are not allowed to charge tuition, and they are funded according to enrollment. As students leave one school to attend another, per-pupil government funding follows them. In some states, such as Alaska, Colorado, Minnesota, and New Jersey, charters receive less than 100 percent of the funds allocated to their traditional counterparts for the operation of public schools. In other states, like California, additional funds or loans are made available to them.

In most states, charters do not receive capital funds for facilities, so securing a building is one of the more difficult jobs, especially for schools initiated by parents and teachers. Charter schools are entitled to federal categorical funding for which their students are eligible, such as Title I and Special Education monies. Federal legislation provides grants to help charters with start-up costs.

### ***Background and Evaluation***

Charter schools were first put forward by educator Ray Budde as early as the 1970s and popularized in the early 1990s by the late Albert Shanker, then president of the American Federation of Teachers. As presented by Shanker, the idea is that some agency, such as a state or school district, would grant a particular school a "charter" to free it from state and district rules and regulations, circumventing teacher unions and the wages, benefits and work rules elaborated in contracts. Many charters can hire a certain percentage of teachers with no teaching certification.

In return for these "freedoms," the charter school promises to raise achievement, commonly judged by standardized tests. This arrangement aims to introduce market competition into public education, where schools are to compete for "customers" and the per-pupil funds attached to them. This competition, it is argued, will force schools to improve their quality of education, raise test scores, and in this way be accountable to parents.

When test scores are taken as the measure of academic success, there is little evidence to indicate that

charter schools have led to improved test scores. Evaluations in California and Michigan, two of the most charter-active states in the country, have failed to find evidence that charters produce higher test scores. It is also the case that teachers nationwide are rejecting government testing as a measure of anything, particularly the quality of education.

Claims that charter schools allow for more parent involvement or teacher empowerment are also unsupported by existing research. One evaluator concluded that "the claim of greater school-level accountability for student outcomes via charter school reform has not yet truly come to pass in California." Several reports suggest that charters run by for-profit management firms have substituted a private bureaucracy with the same characteristics of public ones, except there is no public accountability at all.

New York State law raises serious concerns about charter school accountability when it stipulates that "no civil liability shall attach to any charter entity, the board of regents, or to any of their members or employees, individually or collectively, for any acts or omissions of the charter school. Neither the local school district, the charter entity nor the state shall be liable for the debts or financial obligations of a charter school or any person or corporate entity who operates a charter school."

Charter schools are increasingly being run by what are known as for-profit Education Management Organizations (EMOs). In the year 2000, the Center for Education Research, Analysis, and Innovation (CERA) had identified a total of 21 major companies managing 285 schools across the nation. Of those 285 schools, 213 are identified as charter schools operated under contracts with public school districts.

Jeffrey M. Silber, a senior vice president and research analyst for Gerard Klauer Mattison in New York, estimated that for-profit companies managed 15 percent to 20 percent of the nation's charter schools in 2001. In one state, Michigan, with an extensive charter school program, for-profit companies operated or held contracts with 72 percent of charter schools in 2000. Evaluators estimate that the for-profit schools account for 80 percent of charter school enrollment in the state. In a widely circulated 1999 forecast, Wall Street's Merrill Lynch predicted that across the U.S., for-profit companies may control as much as 10 percent of public funds used for Kindergarten through 12th-grade education within 10 to 15 years.

One of the main themes of charter schools is that they will promote "innovation and diversity," yet

this is not the case. Michigan evaluators report many of the so-called Mom and Pop charter schools that had greater parental involvement could not survive and were forced to turn the schools over to for-profit EMOs, such as Mosaica Education, based in San Rafael, Calif.

Mosaica and other such companies like Edison commonly create “franchise schools” that resemble each other in cookie-cutter fashion, including daily scripts for teachers. At one Edison school in San Francisco, for example, more than half of the teachers did not return for the 2000-2001 school year. Teachers felt demeaned by the hyper-rigid curriculum. “They literally give you a script with what you’re supposed to say,” said one. Revealing the myth of teacher empowerment, teachers’ concerns were met with this response from the New York headquarters of Edison Schools Inc.: “Maybe our design is not for you.”

In terms of diversity, a study in Arizona turned up evidence that the charter schools there were much more segregated than were nearby public schools.

A Michigan evaluation also revealed evidence for such segregation. And while a recent survey of charters in 23 states suggested results were inconclusive because of the limitations of the available data, the report acknowledged that charters may indeed “exacerbate racial isolation, or create more isolation by social class among students.”

While there are some charter schools that serve special needs children, the majority have a smaller number of special education students than the public schools. In addition, the special education students that charters do serve is generally limited to children with mild disabilities.

The charters that are market-oriented — those managed by EMOs — have fewer special needs students than charters that are not market-oriented. Researchers and journalists have documented that one reason for the lower number of students with disabilities is their *de facto* exclusion from charter schools, what some have called “counseling out” students with special needs.

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***CONCENTRATION OF POWER & ELIMINATION OF ELECTED GOVERNANCE***

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## **More State and City Takeovers of Schools Underway**

*October 13, 2003*

One of the most significant and concrete expressions of the new arrangements in education today is the takeover by states, cities, and mayors of schools and districts. The *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, for example, officially and openly sanctions and promotes the concentration of power into fewer hands and the elimination of elected bodies for school governance. These measures are a means to further wreck public schools under the banner of “saving” them.

Governor Mitt Romney of Massachusetts, for example, is currently threatening the takeover of “troubled school systems” in his state, such as the North Adams and Holyoke districts, reports the *Boston Globe*. Such takeovers usually mean eliminating elected officials, often violating the 1965 Voting Rights Act; firing school staff, administrators, and teachers; re-writing the curriculum; and more.

The state is justifying the concentration of power and elimination of elected governance by imposing arbitrary standards under a punitive testing regime that blame the schools and teachers for the failure of the state to fund education at the level needed.

Reflecting that the real drive is to consolidate power in the name of managing schools, an aide to the governor said, “It’s time that we moved into the next stage of education reform, which is the management challenge of fixing broken schools.”

The situation in Massachusetts is also significant as it indicates that a main basis for imposing the high stakes testing regimes is to provide additional justification for state takeovers. According to the *Globe*, if “Romney follows through on his threat, North Adams would be the first district in Massachusetts to come under state control because of academic problems. Only districts with financial crises or mismanagement have faced state involvement in the past.” It is also noteworthy that these are not large urban districts, typically the object of state takeovers.

Officials across the state suggest this means the governor will act to take control over many more local schools. School and municipal officials in both districts have vowed to fight any state takeover. Holyoke Superintendent Eduardo B. Carballo said, “I feel like the president of the United States felt on Dec. 7, 1941: you [the state] send emissaries down

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## **STANDARDS, TESTING AND THE WRECKING OF EDUCATION**

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here to negotiate with me, when all the time you're planning to attack."

Mayor Anthony A. Williams of Washington D.C. is also currently seeking to intensify the attacks on education through a mayoral takeover of the D.C. schools. He is "preparing a proposal to strip the Board of Education of most of its power" so as to take direct control of the city's 67,000-student public system, according to the *Washington Post*.

"The schools ought to be under the mayor and the council. I'm ultimately accountable for what happens to the students," said Williams in a recent interview. Like the recent mayoral takeover of city school systems such as Chicago and New York City, the D.C. takeover would vastly concentrate authority over the schools in the executive office of the mayor. Among other things, control over spending and appointments would fall under executive control. Williams is also a strong advocate of vouchers.

In related news, Louisiana recently passed several changes to its constitution. Chief among them is a provision to "legalize" these arbitrary takeovers, designed to ensure even less funding is provided to the schools. The amendment on the ballot read: "No. 4 would allow the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education to take over any public school determined to be failing."

Twenty-four states currently permit takeovers of school systems. The takeovers generally target poor, urban, minority school systems. Baltimore, Newark and Philadelphia are notable examples, but smaller and rural systems also have been targeted. The Education Commission of the States points out that more states are assuming control of school systems for not meeting arbitrary standards. The main results of these takeovers is to attack the wages and working conditions of the teachers, increase criminalization of the youth opposing attacks and lower the level of education.

## Oppose the Disinformation of “Violence Prevention” and “School Safety”

Paper presented by an activist with Teachers Forum to the Halifax International Symposium on Media and Disinformation, held June 30-July 4, 2004 in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

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One of the biggest forms of disinformation today is in regards to the theme of violence and the problems facing the youth. One can in fact learn a great deal about a society by the way in which it treats its youth. It is said that youth are the future. While often minimized as a cliché, this sentiment reflects a basic standard of social development, a marker of social progress: the degree to which the youth are flourishing is the degree to which the society is advancing. A society that attacks its youth has no future.

In broad terms, the situation facing the youth is very desperate. In the United States, there are unprecedented attacks to education, with massive cuts to funding and a general lowering of the level of education. In addition to this, there have been massive cuts to social services in general. Unemployment among the youth, including college graduates, continues to rise as does the student loan burden. Comitant to these developments are massive increases in police presence and repression in schools. Schools are filled with spy cameras, with some districts having cameras in every classroom; many schools now have metal detectors and armed guards. Police raids of schools, where youth are attacked — shoved to the floor and handcuffed, threatened with weapons — are becoming increasingly common. In the most recent cases, mere suspicion that a crime might be committed is justification for school officials to bring the police raids on.

In order to explore the role of disinformation in bringing about this situation, and in order to prepare us to be able to counter disinformation and propose alternatives to attacks on rights, it is useful to review several new programs being used to attack the youth. These programs are said to be aimed at “preventing violence” and “making schools safe.”

Whether one examines anti-bullying measures, so-called school security initiatives, or violence prevention programs, one finds that the main theme given

is the need to “stop the problem before it starts.” The numerous laws, measures and programs imposed on the people are based on the notion of prevention, which is defined as something that is “used or devised to stop something from happening, or to stop people from doing a particular thing.”

Measures that take as their starting point the need to “prevent violence in schools” necessarily target the students as the source of the problem and, commonly, police, with teachers as their agents, as the solution. Police and psychologists repeat over and over again that students and youth generally are “potentially violent” and must be “identified” and “managed.” This targeting of youth with government violence is contrasted with the people’s notion of safety, where they are protected from the arbitrary use of force by the government.

Three examples standout for analysis, namely the Secret Service’s “Safe Schools Initiative,” anti-bullying measures and laws that are being implemented across the United States, and so-called character education programs. The first two examples reveal the role of the state in criminalizing the youth, and efforts to bring about new arrangements where the existing rule of law is eliminated. The third case emphasizes attempts by the ruling class to embroil teachers in carrying out these fascist arrangements under the guise of assisting the youth.

***The Secret Service’s “Safe Schools Initiative”***  
Ostensibly in response to the disturbing number of school shootings, beginning in 1999, the Secret Service, in a joint effort with the U.S. Department of Education, carried out what it calls its “Safe Schools Initiative.” Over the course of four years, the Secret Service published three reports on what it calls “targeted school violence.” Summaries of these reports have been widely disseminated in newspapers, on websites for educators, and in professional and scholarly journals. Dissemination has emphasized the notion of identifying and stopping “potentially violent” youth.

The Initiative “examined school shootings in the United States as far back as 1974, through the end of the school year in 2000, analyzing a total of 37

incidents involving 41 student attackers." Thus such incidents, while widely publicized and presented as common, are rare. This is particularly true when one considers that every year there are over 50 million students attending K-12 schools in the United States and 41 involved in such shootings over 30 years.

The Secret Service notes that almost all those convicted in school shootings have said they felt alienated, that nobody cared about them or listened to them. Most experienced severe depression, with many (although exactly how many is not known for sure) being treated with psychiatric drugs. At the time of the shooting these youth were experiencing a sense of great loss or personal failure.<sup>1</sup>

A key component of the Initiative is the application to youth of the Secret Service's "threat assessment model." Taking into account the broad opposition to profiling, the Secret Service claims profiling is no longer the preferred method for evaluating "risk," then provides a system to do exactly that, with the difference being that youth as a collective are profiled, instead of specific sectors, like African American youth. The Initiative adds, "Until recently, most law enforcement investigations of violent crime have been conducted *after the offense has occurred*" [emphasis in original]. This has now been changed to investigating on the basis of the government's assessment of intent. In popularizing this notion of "prevention" when no crime has been committed, the monopoly media is working to normalize the arrangement where police function not as law enforcers, but as a force to arbitrarily interfere with the human person in the name of prevention.

This so-called threat assessment is described as a "set of investigations and operational activities designed to identify, assess, and manage persons who may pose a threat of violence to identifiable targets." The main task of threat assessment is to look at "pathways of ideas and behaviors that may lead to violent action." The Secret Service says that "the question in threat assessment is not 'What does the subject look like?' but 'has the subject engaged in recent

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1) Interestingly enough, the Secret Service refuses to explore the role of psychiatric medications in bringing about the shootings. They in fact claim to be defending the rights, saying that medical records are a private matter and to obtain them would interfere with the rights of these individuals. There is however a strong sentiment that environmental toxins and psychiatric drugs play an important role in precipitating violence.

behavior that suggests that he/she is moving on a path toward violence directed toward a particular target(s)?" The Secret Service also says to "watch out" for youth interested or involved in "extremist" groups without offering any examples or guidelines for identifying such groups.

The monopoly media fails to point out that the whole approach challenges existing U.S. law, where only an act can be judged, not intent: the notion of "potentially violent" is arbitrary and illegal. Any one, particularly police and school officials can brand a student's behavior as "on a path toward violence" and thus call for their quarantine. For example, an honor roll high school student in Kansas was suspended for writing a poem entitled "Who Killed My Dog." A kindergartner in New Jersey was suspended from school for saying "I'm going to shoot you" on the playground while playing cops and robbers with his classmates. A sixth-grader in Texas was put in juvenile detention for writing a Halloween, class-project essay about a student who kills fellow students and a teacher. Also in Texas, school officials disciplined students for wearing black armbands to mourn the victims of Columbine and to protest overly restrictive school policies.

This claim to be "on a path to violence" also is used to criminalize dissent. On April 23, 2004, U.S. Secret Service agents were in Prosser, Washington to interrogate a 15-year-old art student about political drawings he had turned in to his high school teacher as part of a class assignment. The student was interrogated by the Secret Service and branded as being a threat, but then not arrested. The school district did discipline him, but district officials refused to say what the punishment was, nor on what grounds. Youth at the school said the student was expressing his views against the war in his art, which is his right.

The student turned in several sketches opposing the war on Iraq and the war on terrorism. One drawing showed a man "in Middle-Eastern-style clothing" with an AK-47 rifle and was deemed "most controversial" by school officials. The man was holding a stick with the oversized head of President Bush on it. The student said the head was enlarged as an effigy. The caption called for an end to the war in Iraq. School officials did not comment, nor did monopoly media ask, whether students would be punished for drawing "American-looking" men with AK-47s. Another sketch showed Bush dressed as a devil and launching a missile. The caption read, "End the war — on terrorism." Another drawing urged

votes for presidential candidate Ralph Nader.

Revealing that school personnel are increasingly being drawn into profiling and attacking youth who stand with the Iraqi people against the U.S. occupation forces, the teacher reportedly turned the drawings over to school administrators. The administrators called in the police, who brought in the Secret Service, all with no crime committed, no violence and no threats of any kind made.

School officials and police justified arbitrarily silencing the youth by simply asserting that the student's drawings were not "political cartoons." Instead, Superintendent Tolcacher insisted "it was not a freedom of speech issue, but a concern over the depiction of violence." Trying to normalize police profiling of youth based on their views and what police claim to be their intent, Wallace Shields, special agent in charge of the district explained: "If we get what someone reports to be a threat against any person or place we protect, we investigate it." "The drawing in itself is not the threat," he said, emphasizing that it is "the intent behind it and the capability of the person to act upon it." The Secret Service, police and school administrators provided no explanation as to how the student's intent was determined.

Monopoly media simply repeated this assertion without any challenge or further investigation. Further, these media refused to pose the obvious question of what right the Secret Service has in schools period, especially when no crime has been committed. By what logic are they of all police agencies being involved? It is important to note that the Secret Service is known as the President's personal police force, an organization whose first director — a vigilante famous for attacking immigrants — had inscribed on his badge, "Death to All Traitors."

Thus the monopoly media are playing their role in legitimating the targeting of youth and teachers opposing the war as "violent." The Secret Service is the same federal agency conducting live exercises in mass pre-emptive arrests and confining protesters to "protest pens." Invoking the "war on terrorism," the Secret Service district office in Washington State said its actions in Prosser were not out of the ordinary. "This is not something unique to Washington, and this is not something unique to the times that we live in," said Shields.

#### **States Make Bullying a Crime**

The second example concerns so-called anti-bullying measures. With these developments, social

problems, like bullying and its causes, are made into "law and order" issues. The actual problems and solving them are ignored and youth criminalized, with police and other state agencies used against them. In addition to specifically criminalizing behavior rooted in social problems, so-called anti-bullying laws and school security initiatives render youth as criminals on the basis of intent in much the same way that the *USA PATRIOT Act* defines terrorism based on intent.

Under the guise of preventing school violence, many states across the U.S. have or are considering adopting or modifying laws making bullying in public schools a crime. At least 18 states now make bullying a crime, according to news sources.

In Georgia earlier this year, the House passed a "tougher law on bullying," according to the *Atlanta Journal Constitution*. The measure would expand the current law to cover elementary schools as well as middle and high schools. As with many recently passed or proposed laws making bullying a crime, it calls on parents and students to make anonymous tips to their local schools and would require that all reports of bullying be investigated. The news sources do not report who is responsible for carrying out the investigations.

Significantly, the new law would change the definition of bullying, which is now defined as a student's "willful attempt or threat to inflict injury," or an "intentional display of force" to provoke fear. Under the new definition, bullying would be defined as "any pattern of written or verbal expression or any physical act or gesture that is *intended* [emphasis added] to ridicule, humiliate, intimidate, or cause measurable physical or emotional distress upon one or more students in the school, on school grounds, in school vehicles, at designated school bus stops, or at school activities or sanctioned events."

In Indiana early this year, Superintendent of Public Instruction Suellen Reed actively backed a bill that would "require Indiana's 293 school districts to adopt rules prohibiting bullying," reports the *Indianapolis Star*. The bill "would provide a better legal definition of bullying." Senate Bill 231 defines bullying as "overt, repeated acts *designed* [emphasis added] to harass, ridicule, intimidate or humiliate another student." Indiana Legislatures are promoting the bill as their "alternative" to increasing funding for education, especially full-day kindergarten.

In New York State, proposed changes would present an exceedingly broad and subjective

definition of bullying. Section 2803(D) of the proposed Senate Bill defines bullying as “threatening, stalking or *seeking* to coerce or compel a person to do something; engaging in verbal or physical conduct” [emphasis added].

The laws generally require that any “tip” be investigated by state authorities, thus immediately bringing state authorities into the picture even if no problem, let alone a crime, exists. They also make determination of “bullying” a completely subjective matter of whether an administrator or teacher or parent thinks an individual intended to be bullying.

#### **“School-Wide Academic and Behavioral Competencies (ABC) Program”**

In yet another example of the wrecking power of the notorious federal *No Child Left Behind Act*, earlier this year Buffalo City School District teachers in New York learned that the “School-Wide Academic and Behavioral Competencies (ABC) Program” would be imposed on 10 of their elementary schools, as part of meeting requirements of the new law.

It is euphemistically referred to as the ABC program, suggesting an attempt to make it appear educational in nature, when in reality it is a “character education” program aimed at repressing the youth. Monopoly media completely failed to report on this program in any way, shape or form.

This four-year multimillion-dollar program is being administered by the University at Buffalo’s Center for Children and Families (CCF), based on a joint grant from the U.S. Department of Education (UDE), the Institute of Educational Sciences (IES) and the Center for Disease Control (CDC). The CDC is part of the Department of Health and Human Services and also an integral part of the Department of Homeland Security’s state terrorism related activities.

The University at Buffalo’s CCF was one of seven public or private agencies or corporations to be awarded a Social and Character Development Research Program grant. Each grantee will have an estimated \$450,000 yearly budget.

According to the grant description — which was not provided to teachers or the public — the “core set of evaluation data … will include assessments of children’s social and emotional competence, prosocial attitudes and behaviors, and negative attitudes and behaviors; family characteristics; and school climate.” This adopts the starting point that the youth are the problem, that their emotions, behavior, attitude, and character are the source of the problems in the society,

and not the social relations.

The program hyper-monitors and target’s student behavior, employing methods commonly reserved for dog training on children and youth. Praise and punishment are to be used as mechanisms to gain compliance. The task of assessing actual work by students and affirming a job well done is eliminated.

Teachers will be asked to play a key role in reporting students’ attitudes and behaviors, including filling out daily standardized forms reporting student “rule following behaviors” to parents and others including the “national evaluation contractor.” This is done with the stated aim of using praise and the withholding of praise to “increase compliance” of students to the existing set-up. For example, in order to participate in “Fun Fridays” students must receive a specified number of “Daily Positive Notes” or else be restricted to “participate in [the] regular school day.” In addition, the grant mandates that there be a “Behavioral Honor Roll” based on these “notes.”

In outlining the general approach now taken by the Institute for Educational Sciences in a recent presentation, mandated by the grant for the program, director Grover Whitehurst said that the federal government will not tolerate researchers who act as advocates or who take a stand against oppression or discrimination. There is no room for “philosophy, or theory, or advocacy, or opinions from educational researchers,” he said. He directly ridiculed researchers who had designated the main provisions of the *No Child Left Behind Act* the “Axis of Evil.” Reflecting the all out attack on science, he indicated that being scientific means carrying out research which confirms the conclusions the federal government wants.

The character of the grant and method of imposing it on the schools also illustrate these attacks on science and rights. The program is being imposed on the schools involved with teachers called on to vote with no information or discussion. In Buffalo, a brief presentation by the grant’s principal investigator, William Pelham, was made. Teachers were not allowed to ask any questions about the program, its impact on the school, teachers and students, or the granting agencies. A vote is simply called and only after approval are questions permitted. The meetings are all arranged at the end of the day in a situation where conditions for teaching are extremely oppressive.

The false character of the vote as an expression of

making an informed decision can also be seen in the fact that, in order to be awarded a grant, according to documents obtained from the IES website, those applying had to be able to guarantee cooperation of 10 elementary schools. The grant mandates that these “voting” procedures be used to give the appearance of consensus for decisions made without the informed consent of teachers or other school staff. This process also sets up the conditions that once opposition grows to the program, teachers will be blamed for “supporting it,” and efforts will be made to split parents and teachers.

In a unique arrangement, the granting agencies are not providing grants for the development of new programs or initiatives. The aim is the collection of data, for a national data set, that supports already existing “violence-prevention” and “character-building” initiatives.

Particularly unique is the arrangement whereby each agency awarded a grant will not be allowed to collect the overall data from the national project, and any data it does wish to collect must not interfere with or take precedence over data it contributes to the national database. This massive national database is overseen by what is referred to by the granting agencies as a “national evaluation contractor,” likely similar to private data-mining companies now notorious for violating citizens’ privacy rights and contributing to the rigging of elections.

### **Discussion**

It is important to recognize that the notion of safety being promoted is a “police” notion, where the issue is given as the need for *safe schools*. The question is of course safe from what? The obvious answer is, according to this view, that it is the students that make the school un-safe rather than the police and society which deny them their rights.

These notions of safety actually come up to protect the state. As an agency of the state, schools are protecting the state and the class it serves and not the youth. This can be seen in actions by a national organization of school resource (police) officers, which recently swore its allegiance to the President and declared support for the “war on terrorism.” It is also the case that this police notion of safety is contrasted to the notion of violence, which serves to block people from recognizing that the key fight is not between violence and safety, but rather for the affirmation of rights. The existing violence and insecurity are rooted in the denial of rights.

By targeting students as the source of the problem, people are blocked from realizing or even discussing that problems such as bullying, depression and social isolation of students are social in nature, and *thus require social solutions*. They do not exist as individual problems, i.e., they do not originate in individuals, but in the social relations that characterize the society. Thus, this “prevention” approach actually blocks parents, students and teachers from uniting and working out together real solutions to the intensifying problems the youth and society face. Instead, students’ behavior is criminalized, as all are labeled “potential” threats, and everyone is to be afraid of everyone else. Teachers are to become informants and enforcers for the police. This is a recipe for disaster, not a solution!

Equally important is this: the notion of prevention justifies attacking student rights and the basic democratic premises of innocent until proven guilty, due process and *habeas corpus*. How so? If prevention means “stopping people from committing acts of violence,” logic holds that one must be able to identify the person who will in the future commit a violent act. On this basis, the arbitrary notion of “potentially violent,” the notion that youth have a “propensity to commit violent acts” is popularized, normalized and justified. Unless one believes in clairvoyance, determining those who will commit violent crimes in the future is impossible, and inherently arbitrary. In U.S. society it will also necessarily be racist.

Just as important, the notion of “potentially violent” serves as a justification for using force against students who have committed no crime, violated no school rule. This of course violates all three of the basic democratic premises listed above. The claim to be able to “identify potentially violent youth” is in fact a justification for impunity, where school officials can suspend and expel students at will under the guise of solving the problem of violence. Now, similar actions are to be done in the name of “school security” and “preventing terrorism.”

Youth are not the source of violence in society, and criminalizing behavior on the basis of so-called intent will only make matters worse and be used to unleash more attacks on the youth. The hypocrisy of the ruling circles is revealed by examples like former President Clinton, after the Columbine tragedy in Colorado, calling on the youth to solve problems with words not violence at the same time that the U.S. military was wantonly bombing

Yugoslavia and Iraq.

As the attacks on youth indicate, the U.S. system is in contempt of itself, freely violating its own laws and constitutional protections, such as those for due process, and can offer no solution to the problems facing society except more violence. In order to turn things around, students, parents and teachers must reject the notion of "violence prevention" and instead put forward the defense of their rights and the rights of all as the basis for solving the problems in society.

Today the ruling elite and their state apparatus criminalize the youth as a collective. No longer are attacks limited to national minorities in particular, or specific groups of youth. Increasingly, attacks are leveled against the youth as a whole where all are profiled as potential criminals, as having behavior problems, as lacking in the proper character, as in need of quarantine and constant surveillance. In addition to this, teachers are pitted against parents,

where both are blamed for problems that emanate from larger society.

The monopoly media has played a key role in allowing for this condition to develop, and in blocking the progress of the society by blocking the future of the youth through an ideological offensive under the rubric of "violence prevention" and "school safety." Through use of disinformation, the media work to ideologically disarm the youth and divide the people generally. This disinformation sets up the youth as the problem, rather than a vibrant force in providing solutions. The starting point of "violence prevention," frames the whole discussion so as to prevent the targeting of society and the government's violence, including denial of rights. It is meant to isolate the youth, justify their punishment and incarceration while blocking youth from uniting with all those working to solve problems in society. Such disinformation is a violent crime in itself.

## VISIT OUR WEBSITE: [www.geocities.com/teachersforum](http://www.geocities.com/teachersforum)

Teachers Forum for Empowerment and Rights organizes educators, parents, youth and students to solve the problems in society.

This means fighting for the people to be the decision-makers so as to guarantee the rights of all. Working out how to empower the people is a key problem to solve, and we have an important role to play in bringing about this new arrangement. A concrete step is to build our group, where we are the decision-makers. Together we acquire the knowledge and consciousness needed to fight for our interests and the interests of society.

*Education Is A Right!* is being developed to serve this aim. Teachers Forum encourages readers to take up this very important work by sending in reports, views and articles, and sharing this bulletin with colleagues and friends. We are based in Western New York.

