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CEO co-hosts U.S. History and Civics professional development program

Commonwealth Education Organization

90 Beta Drive
Pittsburgh, PA 15238
Phone 412-967-9691
Fax 412-967-9694
E-mail
info@ceopa.org
Website
www.ceopa.org

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Editor: E. Perlman

PA Legislative Alert

The national debate over mental health screenings for children and pregnant women has come front and center in Pennsylvania with two bills which were recently introduced in the state Senate – SR 48 and SB 364.

Senate Resolution 48 mandates mental health screenings for all middle school and high school students in Pennsylvania. Citing national and World Health Organization statistics, **SR 48** asserts that mental illness and teen suicide are “a public health crisis” that needs immediate attention.

Some important questions must be asked before passing such a resolution:

1. What are the suicide facts?

According to 2004 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention statistics, 65 PA children (ages 0-18) committed suicide out of a total population of 3,004,741. That is a rate of 2.16 per 100,000 or .00216%. Although every child's life is precious, is it logical to screen millions of children?

2. What screening instrument will be used?

Although SR 48 leaves that open, many schools across the nation are using *Teen-Screen*, a controversial computer survey that asks students to answer personally invasive and leading questions that probe the symptoms of depression, suicide, and addiction.

3. Concerns about the screening include:

- How accurate is the screening?
- Who evaluates the screening?
- Who will have access to the results?
- What procedure will be followed when a child is flagged?
- Will parents have the right to give or to deny permission for the screening?
- Will parents be forced to act on the findings?
- Do pharmaceutical companies support these screenings so more young people will be prescribed expensive, dangerous medications?

4. How accurate is mental health screening?

Of 122,000 teens screened in 2005, 30-35% were flagged for potentially having a mental illness. After further evaluation, 24% of those identified were prescribed psychotropic

drugs that likely carry black box warnings that the drug can cause suicide and violence in children.¹ Thousands of students were erroneously flagged and may have experienced stress and been labeled for life.

5. Are other states ordering these screenings?

Yes, Pennsylvania is not alone. Parents and citizens in Illinois, Minnesota, Indiana, and several other states are fighting such intrusive legislation.

6. What can be done?

A coalition of non-profit groups across the state and country, including CEO, publicized SR 48 on the Internet. As a result, our state Senators received so many negative emails and phone calls that SR 48 was tabled. ***But the idea is not dead and the tabling may be temporary. Calls to educate elected officials must continue so the idea of mandatory mental health screenings is never revived.***

Senate Bill 364 extends mental health screenings to include all pregnant women and new mothers. While it can be valuable to educate women about post partum depression, SB 364 goes far beyond education by ordering required screenings. In fact, SB 364 empowers the PA Department of Health to write and enforce rules and regulations that mandate the screening of all pregnant women and new mothers. The same questions regarding school children apply to these women.

Both **SR 48** and **SB 364** invade the privacy of individual citizens at vulnerable times in the lives. State government officials believe that the aggressive recommendations made by the federal New Freedom Commission on Mental Health in 2004 are the only mandate they need to order and enforce mental health screenings. Be aware: The New Freedom Commission actually supports mental health screenings of ALL Americans.

As usual, everyday citizens must step forth to contact legislators and educate them about the dark side of government-mandated mental health screenings. Contact information is available on the CEO website – www.ceopa.org.

¹ Weibert, Sue. “The Genesis of President Bush’s NFC on Mental Health.” 2005. www.teenscreentruth.com.

The Nation's Report Card: "U" for Unacceptable

In February 2007, two federal Department of Education reports were released with significant conflicting findings.

- The first report reviewed high school student transcripts¹, showing that students were obtaining more credits, taking more challenging courses, and earning higher grade points averages than in the past.
- The second report, issued by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) aka "The Nation's Report Card,"² presented the most recent findings for high school seniors who graduated in 2005. These students performed at the lowest levels since 1992.

Student NAEP scores are grouped into three achievement levels: Basic, Proficient, and Advanced. The NAEP results show the marked decline:

Reading

- ⇒ 27% read below the *Basic* level compared to 20% in 1992
- ⇒ Only 35% read at or above the *Proficient* level, down from 40% in 1992

Math

- ⇒ 40% could not even meet the *Basic* level
- ⇒ Only 23% scored at the *Proficient* level

Why would scores decline when students report taking more challenging AP classes and receiving grades that were higher than ever? To explain this disconnect, let's take a look at the Class of 2005.

Most of these students began Kindergarten in 1993, ten years into the era of extensive education reforms spurred by the release of "A Nation at Risk," the scathing U.S. Department of Education report on public education. Yet little is being said about the correlation between the lower NAEP scores and the fact that these students were used as guinea pigs for a whole host of unproven education fads that came together under the umbrella of "Outcomes Based Education."

First and foremost, these students were victims of two of the worst elements of the educational fraud of the 1990's – Whole Language and Progressive or "Fuzzy" Math. It seems apparent that these children did not make appropriate academic progress in these two foundational subjects because they learned neither to read well nor do basic mathematics. Yet the rampant self-esteem movement ensured that students could enroll in watered down courses, receive inflated grades, and still feel good about themselves regardless of their level of actual academic learning.

Other problematic education fads from the 1990's that also continue to influence today's classrooms include:

- Heterogeneous grouping (no ability groups)

- Cooperative (group) learning
- "Developmentally appropriate" practices and discovery learning (teachers as facilitators rather than classroom leaders)
- "Authentic assessment" (performance-based, subjective evaluations with few right and wrong answers)
- Block scheduling (fewer, longer classes each day)

Clearly, *"the failure of schools to employ reasonable precautions in adopting research-based innovations has been directly responsible for much wasted time, money, and educational opportunity."*³

All of these fads have not only cost these students real academic success and the foundation for a productive future, but have also cost the taxpayers billions of dollars. *"According to the Digest of Education Statistics, spending for public education, in constant (inflation-adjusted) dollars, rose from \$6,256 a year per student before 'A Nation at Risk' to \$10,464 in the 2002-2003 school year. Taxpayers have thus raised their annual contribution to education by a full two-thirds in real dollars in a quarter century."*⁴ As the NAEP report reveals, it seems *"fairly obvious that taxpayers have mostly been financing severe outbreaks of 'grade inflation' and 'course inflation.'"*⁵

In addition to these unacceptable NAEP results, statistics released by many school districts across the country also mark the failure of students to learn to read and do math. What can be done?

- Under the *No Child Left Behind* education law, the federal government funds only phonics based reading programs, not whole language. Make sure your local schools are using explicit phonics.
- The ongoing comprehensive study by the National Math Panel will likely shed some light on the problems with fuzzy math and the need for proven traditional math.
- Common sense must dictate that the only way for students to learn how to work hard, study, and succeed is to end both grade and course inflation.

Educators at the local, state, and federal levels must move beyond education fads by implementing proven reforms that will correct the errors of the past twenty years. ?

1. "America's High School Graduates: Results from the 2005 NAEP High School Transcript Study." www.nces.ed.gov.
2. <http://nationsreportcard.gov>.
3. Stone, J.E. and Clements, A. "Research and innovation: Let the buyer beware. In Robert R. Spillane & Paul Reigner (Eds)" *The superintendent of the future*. Gaithersburg, MD: Aspen Publishers. 1998.
4. Buchanan, Patrick J. "Corruption in the schools." *World Net Daily*. 6 Mar 2007. www.worldnetdaily.com.
5. "Schools, money and results." *The Washington Times*. 3 Mar 2007.



Does National Teacher Certification Improve Education?

According to PA Senate Bill 254: *“Fully trained and certified teachers provide better instruction leading to high student achievement.”* Therefore SB 254 allocates \$25,000,000 for Pennsylvania teachers to be certified by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS). Will the expenditure of this taxpayer money improve student learning?

The NBPTS website asserts that after “certifying” 50,000 teachers nationwide, *“accomplished teaching is now richly embedded in the fabric of American education and is widely recognized as a critical catalyst in improving student achievement.”* Furthermore, certification makes, *“a significant measurable impact on teacher performance as well as student learning, engagement, and achievement.”*

Although the NBPTS has done a good job of selling the notion that their certification brings marked improvement in student learning, research findings indicate the opposite:

- In a 2005 study of more than 35,000 student records and more than 800 teachers in North Carolina, William Sanders found that NBPTS-certified teachers *“are for the most part no more effective in producing student academic progress than teachers without the special status.”*¹
- In another study, Dr. J.E. Stone found that pupil test scores did not improve with certified teachers. In fact, *“The National Board certification is a very weak predictor of teacher effectiveness.”*²
- A major study of 52,000 New York City teachers indicates that *“districts should use performance on the job rather than...certification status to improve teacher effectiveness.”*³

Some background

The federal *No Child Left Behind* education law has zeroed in on the importance of teacher quality by requiring every classroom to have a “highly qualified teacher” who has: 1) a bachelor’s degree, 2) full state certification or licensure, and 3) proof that they know their subject matter.

NBPTS wants teachers to go one step further by seeking “national certification.” To do this, teachers (or their schools) must pay fees of over \$3,000, submit four portfolios of their work, and pass a computer-based assessment. The process may take up to three years.⁴

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Why would teachers go through this grueling process? Some seek the prestige or feeling of accomplishment, or believe their teaching will improve. For others, “It’s all about the money,” says a Virginia teacher.⁵ Financial incentives for “certified” teachers include hefty bonuses of as much as \$7,500, and substantial raises.⁶

Teachers aren’t the only ones making money. Since its creation in 1987, NBPTS has received roughly \$20 million federal dollars annually.⁷ Add to that the fees for the 50,000+ teachers who have gained certification, plus the inflow of money for conferences and even NBPTS t-shirts and mugs.

Elected officials and local school administrators need to hear these facts from their constituents so more money will not be wasted on this unproven certification program. ?

- 1 Keller, Bess. “Study for NBPTS Raises Questions About Credential.” *Education Week*. 17 May 2006. www.edweek.org.
- 2 Education Consumers – posted 27 Dec 2004.
- 3 “Excellent teaching trumps licensing.” *The Boston Herald*. 25 Nov 2006.
- 4 www.nbpts.org
- 5 Chandler, Michael Alison. “Teachers Tackle Their Own Extra Credit.” *The Washington Post*. 22 Jan 2007. www.washingtonpost.com.
- 6 “The impact of certified teachers.” GoMemphis. 20 Dec 2002. www.gomemphis.com.
- 7 Podgursky, Michael. “Should States Subsidize National Certification?” *Education Week*. 11 April 2001. www.edweek.org.

Civics Education and America’s future

“It is imperative if we are going to survive as a nation that our schools teach civics.”¹

Former Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O’Connor made this strong statement that highlights the fact that American children are not learning civics when she addressed the American Association of School Administrators National Conference on Education last month.

Civics education is often overlooked in today’s classrooms. Educators now must focus on math and reading to meet the demands of No Child Left Behind. Math and science also take precedence as business leaders insist that students be prepared for global competition.

Judge O’Connor therefore encourages schools to redouble their efforts in teaching civics – *“Knowledge and understanding about our system of government is not something that’s handed down in a genetic pool. You have to learn it.”*¹

CEO joins the effort to encourage the civic education of students so that they understand America’s unique government by offering an academic professional development program for educators, homeschoolers, and interested citizens. Please see the back page for more information.

- 1 Murray, Corey. “Former High Court justice: Teach civics.” *ESchool News*. 12 Mar 2007. www.eschoolnews.com.

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Once again, the Center for Teacher Excellence (CTE) of Hillsdale College is partnering with CEO and the Pittsburgh Catholic Diocese Schools to present a high-caliber in-service program for middle school and high school civics, social studies, and U.S. History teachers as well as homeschoolers.

For details, call CEO at 412.967.9691 or e-mail at info@ceopa.org.