



Education Advocate

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End it or mend it?

Will Congress end or mend NCLB?

Why do literacy rates continue to fall in America? Why do students lack a firm understanding of U.S. History?

Introducing four Women of Character

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Commonwealth Education Organization

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

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Editor: E. Perlman

Six years into the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 education reforms, what factors should be considered when deciding if the law should be ended or mended? This is the critical question when discussing reauthorization of NCLB. Since Congress is having a hard time answering this very question, the reauthorization process will likely extend into 2008, becoming more heated as the presidential election approaches.

Initially heralded by Democrats and Republicans alike as the plan that would finally "fix" education, the 1,000-page NCLB document has created an education nightmare instead. Yes, there are a few laudable elements. For example, *"By requiring schools to improve test scores each year for specific subgroups of students..., the law shines a spotlight on...inequalities that might once have been masked."*¹ Also, the mandate for research-based *phonics* reading instruction has broken the hold of unproven *whole language* instruction that has failed millions of American children whose reading proficiency has been stunted for life.

However, the list of significant NCLB problems is far more extensive. Dr. Eugene Hickok, former PA Secretary of Education and U.S. Deputy Secretary of Education, warns of an overall "race to the bottom" as states are required to increase student proficiency in math and reading to 100% by 2014. *"NCLB created a powerful perverse incentive for states to lower their academic standards, and that pressure to lower standards will grow stronger with each passing year."*² It is easier to hide failure than to fix it.

Dr. Hickok believes that states are lowering standards and skewing state assessment scores so enough students meet required annual benchmarks in math and reading. A comparison of proficiency scores between state tests and the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reveals that far more children are labeled "proficient" on state tests than on the NAEP.

One recent study indicates the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) scored 71% of 8th graders as "proficient" readers; the NAEP found only 36% of that same group of students to be proficient. That reveals a PSSA inflation factor of 1.96.³

Dr. Diane Ravitch,⁴ noted education expert, details additional fundamental flaws with NCLB:

- The goal of reaching 100% proficiency in reading and math by 2014 is "simply unattainable."
- NCLB "completely fractures the traditional limits of federal interference in the operation of local schools."
- Prescribed sanctions on low-performing schools are not validated by research.



Should NCLB be tweaked or terminated?

Decreasing or eliminating federal control of local education is part of the answer. Dr. Hickok and Dr. Ravitch agree that the federal government should "begin to restore citizen ownership of American education."² *"The states and school districts, being closer to the schools, teachers, and parents than the federal government, are more likely to be flexible and pragmatic about designing reforms to meet the needs of particular schools."*⁴

The final decision made by Congress and the President will determine the future of American education. Voice your opinion. You can help them make the right decision. ?

- 1 Viadero, Debra. "No Quick Fixes to 'Poverty Gap' Under NCLB." *Education Week*. 14 Nov 2007.
- 2 Hickok, Eugene & Ladner, Matthew. "Reauthorization of No Child Left Behind: Federal Management or Citizen Ownership of K-12 Education?" *Background*. The Heritage Foundation. 27 June 2007.
- 3 Anderson, Dr. Dave. Asora Education Enterprises Consulting. 27 Oct 2007. www.asoraeducation.com.
- 4 Ravitch, Diane. "Get Congress Out of the Classroom." *The New York Times*. 3 Oct 2007.

U.S. Students don't know much about literacy...or history

Two stunning reports once again indicate that American students are not becoming proficient readers and are not learning enough about U.S. History.

The results of a recent study by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) ¹ show continuing decline of reading ability and interest among teens and young adults.

Consider just some of the findings:

- Only 30% of 13-year-olds read almost every day.
- People ages 18-24 watch TV for 2.5 hours a day, but read only seven to ten minutes per day.
- Nearly half of 18-25 year-olds read no books for pleasure.
- Only one-third of high school seniors read proficiently – a 13% decline from 1992.
- Only 31% of college graduates are proficient readers.
- 72% of employers rated high school graduates deficient in writing, and 38% cited reading deficiency.

Dana Gioia, NEA chairman, explains the serious ramifications of these findings – that levels of reading for pleasure and reading proficiency correlate closely with a person's lifetime earning power, social life, voting, political activism, participation in culture and fine arts, volunteerism, charity work, and even regular exercise. ² Interestingly, a person's socio-economic level does not pre-determine literacy. *"The poorest Americans who read behave fundamentally differently from the richest people in the United States who don't read. [Reading] does seem to be a transformational behavior that changes your life's course."* ³

More abysmal news...

A sampling of college freshmen and seniors scored just over 50 percent, or an F, on a 60 multiple-choice question test about America's history, government, international relations, and market economy. Too many students did not know which wall President Reagan challenged Mr. Gorbachev to tear down. They did not know that the Battle of Yorktown ended the American Revolution.

"Here is the problem. The U.S. is unique in that our identity as a nation is the ideas which bind us together. Limited, constitutional government charged with protecting the rights of the governed, equality before the law, economic freedom and the rule of law have produced unprecedented prosperity and liberty. **But we are producing generations who don't know much about these foundational ideas.**

They can't possibly be counted on to protect and pass on a heritage of which they are largely ignorant and for which they have been taught a vague disrespect. Big questions like the future of Social Security are already being affected by leaders unaware of basic principles and history." ⁴

emphasis added

Factors that may contribute to this abject education failure include: too few U.S. History course requirements in high school and college; educators' disdain for facts and historical dates; and the distortion of historical facts and events to serve certain agendas. ⁵

This Intercollegiate Studies Institute report ⁶ warns that these survey results must be taken seriously at all levels of education otherwise they "portend a coming crisis in American citizenship." ⁵

Both studies reveal education deficits that are having "a profound negative effect on the nation's economic and civic future." ⁷ Educators and parents must make sound decisions that will enable students to become literate, knowledgeable United States citizens. ?

- 1 "To Read or Not To Read: A Question of National Consequence." National Endowment for the Arts. Research Report #47. Nov 2007. http://www.arts.gov/research/ResearchReports_chrono.html.
- 2 Mehegan, David. "Young people reading a lot less." The Boston Globe. 19 Nov 2007. <http://www.boston.com/bostonglobe/>
- 3 Williams, Sarah T. "Reading's new chapter?" The Star Tribune. 19 Nov 2007. www.startribune.com.
- 4 Patterson, Thomas C. "Don't Know Much About History." Center for Educational Opportunity. 13 Nov 2007. www.goldwaterinstitute.org.
- 5 Peterman, Larry. "Failing Civics." The Claremont Institute. 5 Oct 2006.
- 6 "Failing Our Students, Failing America: Holding Colleges Accountable for Teaching America's History and Institutions." Intercollegiate Studies Institute. 18 Sept 2007. www.isi.org.
- 7 Thompson, Bob. "A Troubling Case of Readers' Block." The Washington Post. 19 Nov 2007. www.washingtonpost.com.

Sample Questions from ISI Survey

- 1 The Bill of Rights explicitly prohibits:
 - A. Prayer in public school
 - B. Discrimination based on race, sex, or religion
 - C. The ownership of guns by private individuals
 - D. Establishing an official religion for the United States
 - E. The President from vetoing a line item in a spending bill
2. Which of the following was an alliance to resist Soviet expansion?
 - A. United Nations
 - B. League of Nations
 - C. North Atlantic Treaty Organization
 - D. Warsaw Pact
 - E. Asian Tigers

Answers:
1. D—Answered correctly by only 46% of college freshmen and 48% of college seniors.
2. C—Answered correctly by only 39% of college freshmen and 42% of college seniors.
(College freshmen scores reflect high school-level learning.)

Women of Character

CEO's first annual *Women of Character Conference* held on October 23rd was an overwhelming success. Over 200 women of all ages (and a few men) heard Wendy Shalit's life affirming presentation about rejecting the negative effects of our hypersexualized society and creating a culture based on modesty and self-respect.

A highlight of the evening was the presentation of four *Woman of Character* awards. The recipients were selected from a group of highly qualified women who were nominated because they possess the characteristics of a *Woman of Character*: a respected mind, a nurturing heart, a serving hand, and a faithful spirit.

Rev. Barbara Gunn, pastor of the Mt. Carmel Baptist Church in North Versailles, PA, was the first woman to be called to minister to an established Baptist church in the Pittsburgh area. She holds a master's degree in theological studies from the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Pittsburgh and was also trained through the American Baptist Theological Seminary and Geneva College Center for Urban Ministry. An evangelist and missionary who has preached in Haiti, the West Indies, Israel and Russia, Rev. Gunn is currently helping with the transition of Duquesne City High School students into the East Allegheny School District.

Mary Catherine Scanlon's award honors her quiet and determined work behind the scenes to protect the most vulnerable among us - the unborn, the elderly, and the handicapped. She also served for several years as a community representative on the Text Book and Curriculum Committee of her local high school. Mary Catherine is a woman who lives out her commitment to her faith, her family, and her community.

Amy Scheuring was recognized for her life's work promoting abstinence. She has influenced thousands of teens and parents by advocating healthy choices when answering tough questions about sex. The founding Director of the North Pittsburgh Pregnancy Care Center, Amy currently serves as the Executive Director of the Pregnancy Care Centers of Pittsburgh. She is also the author of [Sex: More than a Plumbing Lesson](#).

Rosalie Smith was recognized for her caring outreach to people - whether a neighbor, a friend, or a group of homeless people seeking comfort as they gather each Monday evening in the city of Pittsburgh. She helps clothe and feed the homeless and opens her door to family, friends and anyone in need of a nurturing boost. With her optimistic nature, Rosalie encourages people to have hope in the future.

It was a privilege for CEO to present Wendy Shalit and to honor these four exceptional women. Plans are underway for the 2008 Women of Character Conference.



E-Alerts

Do you want to receive timely e-mails about education legislation and issues?
To be included in CEO's E-Alert system that will be created in 2008,
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90 Beta Drive
Pittsburgh, PA 15238

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CEO in 2007

CEO has provided many services this year. The following is just a sampling:

- Initiating the *Women of Character Conference*
- Providing U.S. History professional development programs for public and private school educators
- Hosting Dr. Leonard Sax for a parent forum and for professional development at Pine-Richland and Mars Area School Districts
- Speaking to various local groups
- Being interviewed by radio and print reporters
- Maintaining the www.ceopa.org website which receives 11,000 hits a month
- Continuing the bimonthly newsletter, *Education Advocate*

Thank you to all our benefactors who make our work possible!

And *thank you* for all end-of-the-year contributions!