

The Blumenfeld Education Letter

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

Vol. IV, No. 5 (Letter # 33)

EDITOR: Samuel L. Blumenfeld

May 1989

The purpose of this newsletter is to provide knowledge for parents and educators who want to save the children of America from the destructive forces that endanger them. Our children in the public schools are at grave risk in 4 ways: academically, spiritually, morally, and physically — and only a well-informed public will be able to reduce those risks.

"Without vision, the people perish."

Why Education Reform Has Failed

On May 3, 1989, Secretary of Education Lauro Cavazos released the Education Department's sixth annual report card on U.S. schools. The news was grim:

The high-school dropout rate is going up again.

The education reform movement "has lost its momentum."

SAT and ACT scores have leveled off and are still far below their 1960s peak.

Education spending, adjusted for inflation, is up 26 percent since 1982. "We're spending more and getting less for our dollar," said Cavazos.

The dropout rate in Washington, D.C., Cavazos's own backyard, is the nation's highest: 44.5%.

We are still wallowing in a "tide of mediocrity."

"We're standing still," said Cavazos. "The situation scares me and I hope it scares you."

NEA president Mary Futrell put much of the blame on the government: "It's no mystery that after eight years of eroding federal support for education . . . we find little progress in the achievement of our students."

Yet, according to Secretary Cavazos, the U.S. will invest more than \$199-billion in precollegiate education this year. He said:

"We are already spending more money per student than our major foreign competitors, Japan and Germany. And yet our students consistently fall behind the competition in comparative testing. Looking at virtually every qualitative measure -- college entrance exams, graduation rates, the National Assessment of Educational Progress, and international assessments -- we see our students performing minimally, lacking the advanced skills needed to succeed. This deplorable fact further underscores my belief that money alone is not the answer to our education deficit. Since 1982, we've seen per pupil spending rise from \$3,165 to \$3,977, a 26 percent increase. And that is in real terms, adjusted for inflation."

Concerning dropouts, Cavazos said: "It is not acceptable to lose the 600,000 to 700,000 students who drop out each year. . . . This is a national tragedy."

"We must do better or perish as the nation we know today," he said.

The Blumenfeld Education Letter is published monthly. Sources of products and services described are not necessarily endorsed by this publication. They are intended to provide our readers with information on a rapidly expanding field of educational activity. Permission to quote is granted provided proper credit is given. Original material is copyrighted by Hosea Communications, Incorporated. Rate: 1 year \$36.00. Subscription Address: Post Office Box 45161, Boise, Idaho 83711, Phone (208) 322-4440.

Teacher Salaries Up

Despite the depressing news about student performance, the report shows that average teacher salaries rose to \$28,008 in 1988, up from \$19,274 in 1982. Also, the average pupil-teacher ratio continued its downward trend, from 17.8 pupils per teacher in 1987 to 17.6 in 1988.

While teachers fared better under Reagan than under any other President, Mrs. Futrell couldn't resist aiming her stiletto at her favorite target. "What we are seeing now," she said, looking through her left-tinted glasses, "is the direct result of the educational neglect supported by the Reagan Administration." (USA Today, 5/4/89; Educ. Wk. 5/10/89)

Comment:

When the Secretary of Education tells us that "we must do better or perish as the nation we know today," we ought to take him at his word. Unfortunately, the solutions offered by the Secretary are so general, diffuse, and off the mark that they are bound to have little real effect. "We must stir up the education waters in America," he said. But there was little in his proposals that would stir up anything. Besides, the education waters have turned to quicksand, and the Secretary may soon find himself struggling just to keep from sinking into oblivion.

And it was to be expected that the NEA's master of disinformation would blame the sorry state of U.S. education on the Reagan Administration during which the NEA achieved its greatest gains in membership, financial strength, and political power. In short, in the last eight years the NEA has become a political colossus, able to write its own ticket in 50 state legislatures and the U.S. Congress.

Never have the teachers of America had more financial and political clout.

Never have they been more militantly organized and trained. Their track record for winning elections is awesome. And never have they been more prosperous.

And yet, never has American education been as morally, spiritually, and academically bankrupt as it is today.

Who's to Blame?

Mrs. Futrell blames the academic decline on the decrease in federal funding. Actually, there has been no decrease in appropriations but steady increases in virtually every program. The "decrease" is in the percentage of the total funding of education contributed by the federal government. With massive increases in expenditures made by state and local governments, the federal contribution has declined from 9.8% in 1980 to 6.4% in 1987.

What Mrs. Futrell doesn't tell America is that our academic decline began as a result of federal funding, beginning with the Elementary & Secondary Education Act of 1965. Since that time, over \$50-billion alone have been spent on the education of disadvantaged children (Chapter One), like those in Washington, D.C. The result in the District of Columbia is the highest dropout rate in the nation.

The simple truth is that it is the educators who are responsible for this sorry state of affairs. By educators we mean the professors of education in our colleges and graduate schools who train the teachers, develop the curricula, write the textbooks, devise the programs, and create the philosophical climate in which public education takes place.

We blame the leaders of the NEA who have diverted the teachers' preoccupations from academics to politics, from literacy to elections, from a sense of dedication to one of aggrandizement. The teachers in public schools no longer want to be public servants; they

want to be the public's master. And that is why the situation will not improve.

And we haven't even begun to discuss the role of the behavioral psychologists, counselors, change agents, humanists, new agers, values clarifiers, condom distributors, and death educators who have turned education into a nightmare after their own images.

The biggest mistake the Education President can make is to believe that public education can be reformed to produce the academic excellence we all want. It can't. If Secretary Cavazos really wanted to stir up the education waters he would have to start telling the educators and the American people what we have been telling our readers for the last three years.

Break Up the Monopoly

David Kearns, the Chairman of the Xerox Corporation, hinted at what must be done when he referred to public education as a "failed monopoly with a 50% defect rate." (USA Today, 10/27/87)

We thought that monopolies are illegal in the U.S. Don't we have anti-trust laws? That's why we broke up AT&T. Yet, in education we have a government monopoly controlled by a private union that is stifling education and dragging us down to the point where the Secretary has warned that unless we do better, we shall perish as the nation we know today.

Obviously, there is only one solution: break up the monopoly by getting the government out of the education business, and make education a private-sector activity.

There are already in America plenty of successful private schools that can serve as models of academic, moral and spiritual health. These schools are no

burden on the taxpayer and they do not try to impose their political will on our legislatures. What is the secret of their success? Their primary interest is education not politics, and they must deliver a product that works or go out of business. They have a responsibility toward the parents and students they serve.

Contrast the cost-conscious, consumer-oriented private sector with the inefficient government sector -- a fat, prosperous education establishment living off the taxpayer and turning out intellectual cripples by the million.

AT&T was not broken up because it was delivering poor service. It was broken up because it was a monopoly that thwarted competition.

Public education is not only a monopoly, but one that is destroying the nation's ability to compete. Its service is worse than poor; it threatens our future as a free and prosperous nation. How much longer must we tolerate it? And why is the Education President and his Secretary unable or unwilling to say what must be said? If the situation is as serious as they say it is, then they have no excuse.

We are waiting for David Kearns to call for the breakup of the government education monopoly. But that would be like expecting a Soviet leader to call for breaking up the political monopoly of the Communist Party. It is simply beyond the parameters of the possible in our present culture.

Yet, the private sector, particularly home schooling, continues to grow. The state monopoly is wary of this growing competition and will try to stop it. Meanwhile, the millions of children trapped in the public system must endure continued lobotomization of their brains, crippling of their intellects, corruption of their morals, subversion of their religious beliefs, and subtle spiritual rape.

Spending per pupil is up since 1982

Education spending, adjusted for inflation, is up 26 percent since 1982, leading some experts to complain that we're not getting our money's worth.

Rank	Spent per pupil		Rank	Spent per pupil	
	1987	1986/rank		1987	1986/rank
1 Alaska	8,010	8,304/1	26 Hawaii	3,787	3,807/21
2 N.Y.	6,497	6,011/2	27 W.Va.	3,784	3,528/28
3 N.J.	5,953	5,570/3	28 Va.	3,780	3,520/30
4 D.C.	5,742	5,337/4	29 Neb.	3,756	3,634/23
5 Conn.	5,435	4,743/6	30 Calif.	3,728	3,543/25
6 Wyo.	5,201	5,114/5	31 Ohio	3,671	3,527/29
7 Mass.	5,145	4,562/9	32 Nev.	3,573	3,440/33
8 R.I.	4,985	4,667/7	33 N.M.	3,558	3,195/37
9 Del.	4,825	4,610/8	34 Ind.	3,556	3,275/36
10 Md.	4,777	4,447/10	35 Ariz.	3,544	3,336/34
11 Pa.	4,616	4,325/11	36 Mo.	3,472	3,189/38
12 Wis.	4,523	4,168/13	37 N.D.	3,437	3,483/31
13 Vt.	4,399	4,031/16	38 Texas	3,409	3,298/35
14 Mich.	4,353	4,176/12	39 Ga.	3,374	2,966/43
15 Ore.	4,337	4,141/14	40 S.C.	3,237	3,058/41
16 Mont.	4,194	4,091/15	41 N.C.	3,129	2,948/44
17 Minn.	4,180	3,941/18	42 Okla.	3,099	3,146/40
18 Colo.	4,147	3,975/17	43 S.D.	3,097	3,051/42
19 Ill.	4,106	3,781/22	44 La.	3,069	3,187/39
20 Wash.	3,964	3,881/19	45 Tenn.	2,827	2,612/46
21 Kan.	3,933	3,829/20	46 Ark.	2,733	2,658/45
* N.H.	3,933	3,542/26	* Ky.	2,733	2,486/48
23 Maine	3,850	3,472/32	48 Idaho	2,585	2,484/49
24 Iowa	3,808	3,619/24	49 Ala.	2,573	2,565/47
25 Fla.	3,794	3,529/27	50 Utah	2,415	2,390/50
			51 Miss.	2,350	2,362/51

Test scores decline

College entrance test scores dropped in 25 states, rose in 14, remained unchanged in 11. In 21 states and D.C., most students take the SAT; in 28 states, the ACT is more popular. Washington state uses a local test.

Rank	ACT scores	
	1988	1987/rank
1 Iowa	20.3	20.3/2
2 Wis.	20.2	20.4/1
3 Minn.	19.9	20.2/3
* Mont.	19.9	19.9/4
5 Neb.	19.8	19.8/7
* S.D.	19.8	19.6/8
7 Colo.	19.7	19.9/4
8 Wyo.	19.5	19.9/4
9 Ariz.	19.3	19.3/9
* Idaho	19.3	19.0/14
* Ohio	19.3	19.3/9
12 Kan.	19.1	19.3/9
* Mo.	19.1	19.2/12
14 Nev.	19.0	19.1/13
15 Ill.	18.9	18.9/15
* Utah	18.9	18.9/15
17 Mich.	18.8	18.8/17
18 N.D.	18.7	18.8/17
19 Alaska*	18.4	18.7/19
20 Ky.	18.2	18.3/20
21 Ala.	18.1	18.0/21
22 N.M.	18.0	18.0/21
* Okla.	18.0	17.7/25
* Tenn.	18.0	18.0/21
25 Ark.	17.9	17.8/24
26 W.Va.	17.6	17.6/26
27 La.	17.1	16.9/27
28 Miss.	16.2	16.3/28

Rank	SAT scores	
	1988	1987/rank
1 N.H.	933	938/1
2 Ore.	923	928/2
3 Vt.	909	914/3
4 Calif.	908	906/9
* Conn.	908	912/5
* Md.	908	914/3
7 Mass.	906	909/7
8 Va.	902	907/8
9 R.I.	900	898/11
10 Del.	899	910/6
11 Maine	896	899/10
12 N.J.	893	892/14
13 Fla.	890	893/13
14 N.Y.	889	894/12
15 Hawaii	888	881/16
16 Pa.	886	891/15
17 Texas	879	875/17
18 Ind.	870	874/18
19 Ga.	848	840/20
20 N.C.	841	836/21
21 D.C.	839	842/19
22 S.C.	838	832/22

Alaska had a higher percentage of test-takers for SAT than for ACT in 1987 and 1988. But it is reported as an ACT state to allow comparison with previous years.

High school dropout rates are on the rise

Dropout rates in the nation's high schools continue to edge up. Wednesday's report shows rates are up in 31 states, down in 19, and the same in one. The District of Columbia has had the highest rate for several years.

Rank	1987	1986/rank	Rank	1987	1986/rank
1 D.C.	44.5	43.2/1	* Ind.	26.3	24.8/22
2 Fla.	41.4	38.0/2	27 Va.	26.0	26.1/26
3 La.	39.9	38.2/3	28 Mo.	25.6	24.4/30
4 Mich.	37.6	32.2/15	29 Md.	25.5	23.4/33
5 Ga.	37.5	37.3/3	30 Ill.	24.3	24.2/31
6 N.Y.	37.1	35.8/7	31 W.Va.	23.8	24.8/28
7 Ariz.	35.6	37.0/5	32 Mass.	23.5	23.3/34
8 Miss.	35.2	36.7/6	33 N.J.	22.8	22.4/35
9 Texas	34.9	35.7/8	34 Ark.	22.5	22.0/37
10 Calif.	33.9	33.3/11	35 Wash.	22.2	24.8/28
11 Alaska	33.3	31.7/16	36 Vt.	22.0	22.4/35
12 S.C.	33.1	35.5/9	37 Pa.	21.3	21.5/38
13 Ky.	32.6	31.4/17	38 Idaho	21.2	21.0/39
14 N.C.	32.2	30/14	39 Maine	20.7	23.5/32
* Tenn.	32.2	32.6/13	40 S.D.	20.3	18.5/43
16 R.I.	30.6	32.7/12	41 Conn.	19.5	10.2/50
17 Del.	29.9	29.3/19	42 Utah	19.4	19.7/40
18 Ala.	29.8	32.7/12	43 Kan.	17.9	18.5/43
19 Hawaii	29.2	29.2/20	44 Ohio	17.2	19.6/41
20 N.M.	28.3	27.7/23	45 Wis.	15.6	13.7/45
21 Nev.	27.9	26.9/23	46 Iowa	13.6	12.5/47
22 Okla.	27.4	28.4/21	47 Mont.	13.8	12.8/46
23 N.H.	27.3	26.7/25	48 Neb.	13.3	11.9/48
24 Ore.	27.2	25.9/27	49 N.D.	11.6	10.3/49
25 Colo.	26.3	26.9/24	50 Wyo.	10.7	18.8/42
			51 Minn.	9.4	8.6/51

Japanese Math Program A Success in Alabama School

The Sumiton Elementary School, in Sumiton, Alabama, has adopted the Kumon Method, a Japanese instructional system in math that lets children progress at their own pace through repeated drill and practice.

The method runs counter to the recommendations of a host of U.S. mathematics groups studying curricular revisions.

Founded by Toru Kumon in Japan in 1958 to help his sons prepare for college-entrance exams, the Kumon Institute of Education has provided instruction in after-school centers to more than 1.5 million children in eight countries.

The firm opened offices in the U.S. in 1983 to serve the children of Japanese businessmen living in the U.S.

The program caught the eye of Ilene B. Black, vice principal of the Sumiton Elementary School, when she saw a feature story about it on a local television station. After several telephone calls, she tracked down the firm at its Houston office and asked if she could implement its program in her school.

"We had to do something," she says. "Our achievement-test scores in math were next to the bottom in the country. Students did not know their basic facts well enough to complete problems correctly. Even the smarter students, who know how to work problems, didn't finish them on time."

Although Kumon officials consider the program to be supplemental to classroom work, they agreed last October to make Sumiton a test site for an in-school Kumon program. The program was first placed in grades K-4. In April it was introduced to 4-year-olds in the school's Head Start program.

Great Success

Since the program began at Sumiton, students' achievement in math -- and their attitudes toward it -- have shown substantial improvement. The program has also boosted the children's self-confidence and sharpened their work habits.

So successful has the experiment been that this rural school in a coal-mining hamlet 30 miles north of Birmingham is fast becoming a national showcase. Hundreds of teachers and administrators have flocked here to see if they, too, could implement the program in their schools.

How It Works

Under the Kumon Method, students take a diagnostic test to determine their level of ability. Then, beginning at that level, they work each day at their desks solving problems on worksheets that get progressively more difficult.

The instruction is self-paced. The children only tackle the more difficult problems when they have mastered the prerequisite problems in the time allotted. Unlike the American curricular model, which introduces concepts and then illustrates them with problems, the Kumon Method aims at doing the reverse: building a conceptual understanding through the successful completion of problems.

The element of the program that most reduces students' math anxiety, however, may be its elimination of "failure" as a grade. All incorrect problems are reworked until each worksheet has a perfect score.

When her school's 4th graders took the diagnostic test, Miss Black recalls, "not one placed above the 1st-grade level."

"Today," she notes, "you see 4th graders dividing and multiplying three-digit numbers. It will blow your mind. It's amazing."

The program's effect on attitudes, however, is even more striking. "Our kids did not like math," Miss Black recounts. "It was not their favorite subject. Now they enjoy it. They ask to do it. They want it instead of physical education. They want to come in on Saturdays."

Quiet Classrooms

Observers in a Sumiton classroom, in fact, are struck by the lack of noise or commotion during a typical math period. Even the most restless pupils, teachers insist, remain at their desks and work diligently on their worksheets, able to ignore the steady stream of inquisitive visitors the school has attracted.

Miss Black views the unusual atmosphere as a consequence of a program that allows students to begin at a level they feel comfortable at and "see success from the very beginning."

The "Experts" Object

Naturally, the math experts don't like the Kumon Method. They contend that the program represents a step backward in an age when calculators and computers can perform the kind of "shopkeeper" tasks the Japanese method stresses. The emphasis, they say, should be on the development of logic and problem-solving skills.

The National Academy of Sciences, in its recent report on math education, notes that students "need to learn not only how to estimate and calculate, but also how to decide whether to estimate or calculate."

Leaders of national math organizations question the program's emphasis on computational drills, a practice they have insisted should give way in American schools to a greater stress on methods that enable students to solve more complex problems.

But Benny Rowe, Sumiton's principal, argues that Kumon's emphasis on computational drill forms the "building blocks" that will help students gain more complex skills.

Miss Black adds that the "hundreds and hundreds" of inquiries she has received demonstrate many teachers agreement that students lack necessary computational skills. And she has worked with Kumon officials to help spread the program throughout the state. In March, an Alabama private school joined Sumiton as a pilot, and several others are expected to incorporate the program next year. "I want to see this in every school system in Alabama," Miss Black says.

For its pilot program, the Sumiton school has paid \$18 per pupil for the Kumon worksheets and tests this year; when it becomes a regular instruction program, the cost will rise to \$45 per pupil.

But Miss Williams, the 4th grade teacher, insists that the community

would rally to support the program. "I'd sell some donuts if that's what it took to use it again," she says. (Educ. Wk. 5/17/89)

Comment:

The reason why the Kumon Method works so well is because it is in harmony with how the human brain works. The sheer pleasure and quietness with which the children do their work is an indication of this. Our "experts" may have lofty concepts about how the child should learn, but what they blithely ignore is how a child does learn. With American education so completely held captive by our psychologists, is it not amazing that they can't devise methods of instruction that agree with the average human brain? Is it that they don't know how or don't want to?

Frankly, we believe that the whole anti-mind progressive education movement was started by men "who didn't want to," but is now carried on by men "who don't know how."

Again, the Japanese will become rich by supplying Americans with goods and services they need but which our experts refuse to produce.

U.S. Math Experts Plan New "New Math"

A group of leading mathematics organizations, warning that American students are dangerously unprepared in math, have outlined an ambitious plan to revamp math education.

The plan calls for less rote learning and a stronger emphasis on problem solving and fundamental concepts and more use of calculators and computers.

It incorporates a number of ideas proposed by math educators in recent years, but it's the first coordinated effort to lay out a specific blueprint for implementing them.

The organizations, working under the auspices of the National Research Council, said they would establish teaching standards for every grade, rewrite curricula and reconsider the current division of the subject into arithmetic, algebra, geometry and other distinct courses.

Instead, the revised curricula may be structured around basic mathematical concepts -- shape, chance, change, dimension and quantity, for example -- that run through every level of math education, first grade to college.

A major objective would be to help students understand and apply math skills to practical problems.

While the "new math" and other past attempts to reform the way math is taught have been failures, sponsors of this effort believe there is a consensus that change is necessary and that there is wide backing from teachers and school administrators.

Underlying the blueprint is the belief that many of today's students see math as a series of meaningless, repetitive steps and, as a result, are bored. (Idaho Statesman, 1/27/89)

Comment:

Apparently the "experts" never learn. Why? Because they conceive their half-baked plans in graduate schools and think tanks and not in classrooms with real children. These men probably never teach anyone anything anywhere. They just talk about it. But Toru Kumon conceived his math program by actually teaching his own sons. Naturally, the experts oppose the Kumon Method, even though it works -- especially because it works!

They admit that the "new math" was a failure. Yes, it did cripple millions of children, but that's the price you must pay for educational progress.

Signs of the Times

Charlotte, NC: Students Against Violence meets this week to calm tempers after Friday fatal shooting of West Charlotte High football star at off-campus party and the arrest of a student from rival West Mecklenburg High. Retaliation is feared. (USA Today, 5/3/89)

Reno, NV: Delegates to the annual meeting of the 7,800-member Nevada State Teachers Association approved a \$2 monthly contribution to political action committee. Recipients of the PAC will be candidates backed by the teachers union. (USA Today, 5/2/89)

Philadelphia, PA: City bathhouses, adult bookstores, and adult movie theaters will be allowed to stay open as long as they provide patrons with free condoms and AIDS prevention information. City officials fear that closing bathhouses will cause more unprotected sex. (USA Today, 5/8/89)

Palisades Park, NJ: Palisades Park High principal Nicholas Rotonda said he'll demand reinstatement after he was suspended for allowing movie with nudity to be filmed at school in '87. Rotonda said school board OK'd filming. Senior Week was filmed at night, on Saturdays. (USA Today, 4/6/89)

PURE Convention & Book Fair

Plans are afoot to make the 2nd annual convention of Parents for Unalienable Rights in Education (PURE) an exciting event. Speakers will include Sam Blumenfeld, Sharon and Ed Pangelinan, Karl Reed, and others. There will be workshops as well as a Home Education Book Fair. All of this will happen on July 14-15, 1989, at Shady Grove Church, 1829 W. Shady Grove, Grand Prairie, Texas 75050. For information call Jack Dolph at (214) 642-1075 (home) or (214) 742-5390 (office). Grand Prairie is a suburb of Dallas.

How Gov. Dukakis Fights Illiteracy in Massachusetts

The Boston Globe

May 3, 1989

A question of standards

When Michael Dukakis first sought political power in the 1970s, he stood for civic honor and rectitude, a refreshing contrast to the pelf and patronage on Beacon Hill and the arrogance of power that made state government a bastion of entrenched privilege.

The governor shunned limousines to ride the T to work. He held his appointees to high standards.

Today, Dukakis himself has not changed. Alas, his standards have.

The governor's integrity has weathered well, but his director of personnel is under federal investigation. Dukakis still rides the T, but his chief of staff has been chauffeured from his Back Bay home, a few blocks away.

Now, a sadly symptomatic scandal shows how Dukakis has surrendered principle to political expediency.

Gerard D'Amico, a former state senator from Worcester, was rewarded for a political chore for the governor with a job of dubious merit but high pay - a \$61,000-a-year post as head of the Commonwealth Literacy Cam-

paign. D'Amico may have done little for literacy, but he has done plenty for D'Amico.

First, he obtained a state car that he did not need; then he wangled a "confidential" license plate - usually assigned to police for investigative work. Since literacy has been an undercover assignment in D'Amico's regime, he showed further contempt for the public by racking up \$900 in parking ticket fees throughout the commonwealth, which he has not bothered to pay.

The most telling of these violations occurred when D'Amico parked his car outside the office of a political consultant (who had also advised Dukakis). Perhaps D'Amico's superior skills at literacy enabled him to see a sign allowing the intellectually or morally handicapped to park there. D'Amico did so - illegally - seven times during working hours.

D'Amico, a symbol of the subtle corruption and abuse of power that Michael Dukakis once campaigned against, is scheduled to leave office June 1. If the governor still values his own reputation, he will fire D'Amico today.



Literacy chief Gerard D'Amico runs up \$900 in parking tickets on a state car