

December 2002

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## Educating for this World—and Beyond

*To give children a good education in manners, arts, and science, is important; to give them a religious education is indispensable; and an immense responsibility rests on parents and guardians who neglect these duties.*  
--Noah Webster (Webster Dictionary, 1848)

Earlier this year, Dr. James Dobson stated that in his opinion, California public schools are no place for children. In a speech delivered to a convention of the National Religious Broadcasters in February, Dobson noted that the California legislature has mandated curricula on homosexuality in the state's public schools. "They're teaching them that bisexuality is normal and that homosexuality and heterosexuality are morally equivalent," Dobson said. During a radio broadcast a few days later, he added, "...if I had a child there, I wouldn't put the youngster in a public school."<sup>1</sup>

Although placing a positive spin on homosexuality in the eyes of children is the final nail in the coffin for Dr. Dobson, some argue that there are plenty of other reasons for parents to ransom their children from the clutches of public educators in California—and elsewhere. One of them is the growing suspicion that children are graduating from high school and college—less educated than their parents. Another reason concerns test scores that place young Americans perilously behind 17 other leading industrialized nations.

Also troubling, is an Associated Press story this week<sup>2</sup> that says (according to recently adopted federal guidelines) 97 percent of K-12 public schools in our state are failing. On the table is some \$800.00 million in federal aid to education. At the moment, the state's Academic Achievement and Accountability Commission is seeking permission from the Department of Education to change the way it tracks student achievement. If approved, the number of failing schools in our state will be reduced to a mere 50 percent.

But tougher federal guidelines are not the reason for school failures. In April 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education issued a stinging indictment against public schools in its report, *A Nation at Risk*. It said: "The educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and as a people." The Presidential Commission then added:

"If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war. As it stands, we have allowed this to happen to ourselves."<sup>3</sup>

Unfortunately, a decade after that report was issued, educational performance was even worse. By 1992, the Department of Education NAEP scores revealed that 40 percent of American children were reading below the basic level in the fourth grade.

Similarly, a 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey suggested that 21 percent of the adult population is functionally illiterate, and another 25 percent has a literacy repertoire which is somewhat better but still quite limited.

Translation? Nearly half the adult population in this country can be described as barely literate and likely experiencing considerable difficulty in performing tasks that require them to integrate or synthesize information from complex or lengthy texts.

Now, 20 years beyond the first shocking report on the state of American education, the news isn't any better—at least not at 97 percent of the public schools in our state.

But, perhaps the most baffling aspect of the decline and fall of public education is the continued patronage of the system by Christians. It is our observation that parents who call our office to complain about religious expressions at school, do so because they want our sympathy, not our advice. When asked if home school or Christian school has been considered, complainants frequently defend their local schools as, academically, “among the best in the state.”

We question though, the value of any education that wounds or is a vexation to a child's spirit.

A young mom recently faxed us a music program for the forthcoming “winter pageant” at Evergreen Elementary at Ft. Lewis. Her daughter is looking forward to participating in the pageant, but will be required to sing such notable holiday songs like: *Make a Rainbow, Hanukkah, African Noel, and Happy Kwanzaa*. (Kwanzaa is an “Afrocentric Celebration” involving ancestral worship. It was dreamed up about 25 years ago by Dr. Maulana Karenga, as an alternative to Christmas for Black families). But one faith group won't be represented in song at the “winter pageant.” Surprised?

Another exasperated mother called recently to inform us that her fourth-grader had been called to the office by the Principal of Boston Harbor Elementary in Olympia, and told not to witness to her friends on the playground during recess. When she and her husband visited the school, they were told that it had been suggested to their little girl that talking about Jesus on the playground was perhaps inappropriate for school.

And, father reported to us that he believes pantheism was promoted during a civics lesson at a Shelton area elementary school last week. In a unit on The Declaration of Independence, students were asked to explain the phrase; *We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal*. When his daughter responded that it meant God created all men, the teacher corrected her, saying, “There are many gods.”

Religion aside, Christians should be questioning why it is that up to half of the public school teachers in some communities have pulled their own children from the government system. It would seem that *...the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of the light*. (Luke 16:18)

Religion considered, we must quit pretending that we can train up children for a God-centered call upon their lives while sending them away to receive a child-centered education. The Word of God says: *Beware lest any man spoil you through vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ*. (Col 2:8)

To the Word, we add Amen. And to you, our best wishes for a joyous CHRISTMAS season and a prosperous New Year!

*Rick Forcier*

Executive Director

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<sup>1</sup> WorldNetDaily.com, March 30, 2002

<sup>2</sup> The Olympian, December 1, 2002

<sup>3</sup> Stormer, John A., None Dare Call It Education, 1999, Liberty Bell Press, Florissant, MO., pg.10