

Dumb and Dumber?

by Gary L. Bauer

School's back. The bumper stickers on buses remind us to be careful of the youngsters. Time was when accidents going to and from school were the main worry of parents. No more. Today, we have concerns about violence and drugs in schools. Many parents are troubled by efforts in school to undermine the values and beliefs the kids are taught at home. And, of course, there's OBE. Outcome-based Education is the latest in a long line of educational fads that have dumbed down American classrooms.

"Re-structuring" SATs

Now, it seems, even the SATs have been affected. The Scholastic Aptitude Tests have been an important measure of how well our young people are doing. I remember during my service as President Reagan's Undersecretary of Education how we pointed to the 85-point skid in SAT scores (1960-80) as indisputable proof of educational decline. We even prodded a sluggish education establishment to cough up the extensive data we published as "the Wall Chart." That chart demonstrated that many of the states which spent the least per pupil nonetheless produced students with the highest scholastic aptitude. Was I unpopular with the bureaucrats!

Despite a 93 percent spending hike in the 1980s, the education establishment continued to crank out under-prepared graduates. So the SATs have been subjected to steady criticism from liberals. Finally, the College Board has responded. With great fanfare, education leaders announced that this year's scores were—UP! That *would* be great news except for some inconvenient truths. First,

this is a new and improved SAT test. They call it SAT I, but its real name should be *SAT-lite*. It has fewer questions, but it allows students 30 minutes more to finish. The designers of SAT-lite have thrown overboard the more challenging antonyms section, making it easier to score high on the verbal portion of the exam. Oh, and it's now OK to use a calculator. No more unfair advantages to those grinds who memorized their times tables!

Test-makers say they have changed the SATs in order to keep up "with what and how students are learning today." What and how students learn today is increasingly determined by President Bill Clinton and Education Secretary Dick Riley under their ill-conceived "Goals 2000" legislation. Of course, the College Board disclaims any attempt to dumb down the SATs. But they are funded by the U.S. Department of Education. We could hardly expect them to bite the hand that feeds them. With these new SAT-lite test results, the Clinton administration will be able to reassure concerned parents: "See, our reforms are working!" But this is the same team that called the State of Ohio on the carpet last year for requiring high school graduates to pass an eighth grade-level test. The Clinton administration said those tests might be racially discriminatory.

SAT-LITE TASTES LIKE NEW COKE: YANK IT!

Excellence the Goal

Make no mistake: pro-family Americans don't want kids to fail in school. We believe that a stress on solid academic basics, giving special needs children the extra help they may require, is the best way to progress. We believe in competition and a commitment to excellence. We know that parents are the key to real education progress. And we think parents should be able to choose the safe and challenging school that meets their children's needs. We don't believe it helps anyone artificially to try to build up a child's self-esteem by lowering the standards. Minority children, as well as special needs kids and rural kids, can achieve. The pursuit of excellence helps everyone.

ON THE HORIZON

- **Charitable Giving.** Congress to consider several promising tax measures to **expand capacity of private sector** to meet welfare needs by encouraging charitable giving. FRC backs both an above-the-line deduction for non-itemizing taxpayers who donate to charity *and* a tax credit for contributions to charities that focus on poverty-fighting efforts. Private charitable efforts rescue far more individuals than government social programs. It is time to **revise federal tax policy** to empower communities and individuals, not bureaucrats.

- **Responsible Parenthood Pressed.** Since 1970, Planned Parenthood and other so-called family planning outfits have received more than \$3 billion from the Federal **Title X** (ten) program. Agency efforts **targeted at teens** and other unmarrieds. Pattern of funding increases in program over the years coincides with *increases* in out-of-wedlock pregnancies, abortions and sexually-transmitted diseases. **Sen. Dan Coats** (R-Ind.), responding to alarming trend, **sponsors comprehensive reform** legislation. Coats' "Responsible Parenthood Act" would return authority to state governments, parents. Areas vital to society's need to **strengthen families and reduce out-of-wedlock pregnancies.** Bill redirects limited government resources, pushes positive programs like abstinence and adoption. Coats' measure respects the rights of *taxpaying parents*—a group ignored far too long.

FRC On the Web

Internet cruisers can now find FRC at www.frc.org. Part of Town Hall, the conservative mall founded by Heritage Foundation and *National Review*, FRC's site will offer by October access to *Washington Watch*, Gary Bauer's daily commentaries, congressional testimony and FRC policy papers. Plans for November include introduction of a search engine to aid users. The site is designed primarily for FRC policy research; users will learn FRC's mission and meet staffers. Hits will be monitored to tailor site to user needs.

Watch future issues of this newsletter for updates on the legislative items listed here. Keep this list as a record of the pro-family achievements of the 104th Congress.