

The Blumenfeld Education Letter

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

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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."

The Academic Disaster Worsens

It would seem incredible that three years after the publication of A Nation at Risk by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, the educators of America would find it impossible to improve the academic performance of American students, despite the great amount of attention focussed on the idea of "excellence," the increases in teacher salaries, and the passage of expensive education reform bills in virtually every state of the Union.

Indeed, when the 1986 SAT scores were published in September, former Secretary of Education Terrel H. Bell called them, "The worst news we've had in education in a long time" (Education Week, 10/8/86). Bell and his colleagues are now so alarmed that they are calling for "a Marshall Plan for education" to halt the growth in illiteracy in America (Boston Globe, 11/11/86). This was the gist of a report recently issued by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities. Again, the educators are telling us that money will solve the problem of illiteracy. But this was one of the arguments used to get Congress to pass the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 which gave us Title One compensatory education with its remedial reading programs.

Since 1965 approximately 45-billion federal dollars have been pumped into such reading programs. And what have been the results? In 1963 the SAT verbal mean score had reached a high of 478. In 1977 it was down to 429. In 1973, when the SAT verbal score had declined to 445, the New York Times reported that educators were "puzzled" by the drop. Apparently none of them had bothered to read Rudolf Flesch's 1955 book, Why Johnny Can't Read, despite the fact that it had been on the best-seller list for months and was one of the most talked about books in the history of education.

Flesch explained quite clearly why Johnny couldn't read. He wrote:

"The teaching of reading -- all over the United States, in all the schools, in all the textbooks -- is totally wrong and flies in the face of all logic and common sense."

He then explained how in the early 1930's the professors of education had changed the way children were taught to read in American schools. They threw out the time-tested alphabetic-phonics method, which is the proper way to teach children to read an alphabetic writing system, and put in a new whole-

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word, look-say, or sight method, that teaches children to read English as if it were Chinese, an ideographic writing system.

Flesch said that when you impose an ideographic teaching method on an alphabetic writing system you create reading problems.

Flesch's findings were then corroborated by Dr. Jeanne Chall of Harvard University, whose 1967 book, Learning to Read: The Great Debate, provided overwhelming evidence that phonics was superior to look-say in teaching children to read.

My own book, The New Illiterates, published in 1973, revealed that the look-say method had been invented in the 1830's by the Rev. Thomas H. Gallaudet, director of the Hartford Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb. Gallaudet thought that he could adapt for normal children a method used to teach the deaf to read. It was tried in the Boston schools and proved to be a terrible failure.

In 1981, Dr. Flesch wrote a new book, Why Johnny Still Can't Read. In it he said:

"Twenty-five years ago I studied American methods of teaching reading and warned against educational catastrophe. Now it has happened."

So it is no "puzzle" why Johnny can't read. The puzzle is why the educators won't learn! Here is a problem that has been with us at least since 1955, and in 1986 the educators will say or do anything but admit that Rudolf Flesch was right. Dr. Flesch died in October of this year, after having devoted 31 years to helping parents guard their children against educational malpractice. He will be greatly missed by his many friends.

The simple fact is that the educators have no excuse whatever for continuing this look-say or psycho-

linguistic nonsense which is turning millions of normal children into learning disabled cripples by the third grade.

This practice is nothing short of criminal, because we know how to teach reading! It's no big mystery. We are not looking for a cure for cancer. Marva Collins teaches the so-called "uneducables" to read in her West Side Preparatory School in Chicago. Her school is a veritable West Point of the mind. Hundreds of Christian schools and thousands of homeschooling parents are teaching children to read very well every day all over America.

The question is: why won't the public educators, and particularly their leaders in high places, advocate the necessary methodological changes to insure an improvement in the teaching of reading?

We wish that Dr. Bell and his colleagues would answer that question. And if they believe us to be wrong, why won't they put our assertions to the test and prove us to be wrong once and for all?

As the author of ALPHA-PHONICS, I'd be willing to prove to any superintendent, any principal, any director of reading in any primary school in America that intensive, systematic phonics will teach all of the children to read competently and thereby eliminate the reading problem at its source.

Are there any takers?

We do not need a Marshall Plan for education. What we need is a return to intensive, systematic, alphabetic phonics in the first grade.

"But we do teach phonics," reply the teachers of look-say and psycholinguistic reading programs. But they really don't. What they teach are "phonetic clues" as merely one of the skills used in word attack along with configuration, picture, and context clues.

Alphabetic phonics consists of teaching a pupil to read by a three-step process: first, the pupil is taught to recognize the letters of the alphabet; second, the pupil is drilled intensively and systematically in the sounds the letters stand for so as to develop an automatic association between letter and sound; and in the third step the pupil learns to read whole words by sounding them out. In alphabetic phonics learning the letter sounds precedes reading whole words composed of those letters.

In look-say or psycholinguistics the pupil goes from step one directly to step three, omitting step two entirely. The pupil is taught to memorize a "sight vocabulary" before he or she learns the sounds the letters stand for. The pupil is taught to rely more on configuration, pictures and context clues than on phonetic clues which are taught slowly, laboriously, in a piecemeal fashion right up to the sixth grade.

The reason why so many children fail to learn to read this way is because they must rely on sheer memory to master an ever increasing sight vocabulary. Instead of learning to read, they wind up word-guessing.

Dr. Kenneth Goodman, America's leading professor of reading, calls reading "a psycholinguistic guessing game." And he means it! He also wrote in the October 1981 Reading Teacher (p. 89): "One conclusion which could be drawn from this research (Gleitman & Rozin, RRQ, Summer 1973) is that kids could learn without any connection being built between oral English and written English, treating each English written word as if it were an ideograph for the meaning."

Is it any wonder that we have a reading problem in America? And is it any wonder that the problem has become insoluble?

Dr. Flesch's Dismal Dozen

One of the great services Rudolf Flesch performed for the parents of America was to list in Why Johnny Still Can't Read the dozen most widely used look-say basal reading programs in America. Flesch called them the "dismal dozen." They are, in alphabetical order:

1. Allyn & Bacon
2. American Book Company
3. Ginn & Company
4. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich
5. Harper & Row
6. Holt, Rinehart & Winston
7. Houghton Mifflin
8. Laidlaw Brothers
9. Macmillan, Inc.
10. Macmillan, Inc.
(Bank Street Readers)
11. Rand McNally & Co.
12. Scott, Foresman & Co.

Reading Failure in Wichita

During our recent lecture tour in the Midwest, we had a chance to examine the Houghton Mifflin reading program which had been adopted by the schools of Grand Island, Nebraska, and Wichita, Kansas. We were appalled by the needless complexity, confusion and illogic of this reading program.

The schools of Wichita have been using Houghton Mifflin for years, and the result has been widespread functional illiteracy in that city. According to the Wichita Eagle-Beacon (9/3/86):

"Leaders of a local literacy task force are saying that 70,000 adults in the Wichita area -- about one in four -- are functionally illiterate. They can't read or write with sufficient skill to function fully in a complex society. . . .

"Lorry Shoniber, volunteer coordinator for adult education programs in Wichita's public schools, said the task force estimate of 70,000 functionally illiterate adults in the Wichita area

come from a widely used 1978 Kansas State University study. . . .

"Nationwide, Shoniber said, 20 percent of adults are functionally illiterate. A 1983 study by the U.S. Department of Education found that 9 percent of Kansans were functionally illiterate."

Why do the schools of Wichita insist on using look-say, which guarantees failure? We decided to find out.

The director of reading in the Wichita public schools is Dr. James Howell. We interviewed him briefly in his office on November 3, 1986. He told us that the cause of reading failure in the schools of Wichita was probably socio-economic, but he wasn't entirely sure. On the subject of phonics, he told us that the Houghton Mifflin program teaches phonics. We didn't ask him if he knew the difference between intensive, systematic phonics and incidental phonics taught over five or six years as phonetic clues. We assumed he did. After all he has a Ph.D. in his field.

Dr. Howell told us that he had gotten his training in reading instruction from Dr. Paul McKee, the original editor of the Houghton Mifflin program and that he had received his Ph.D. at the University of Chicago, where Dick & Jane were born. Apparently Dr. Howell is committed to the methodology that Rudolf Flesch identified as being the cause of our reading problem. Naturally, he disagrees with Dr. Flesch.

Next year, the Wichita Textbook Selection Committee will decide which reading program to use for the next decade. It will be interesting to see which one they choose.

Reading Failure in Boston

Undoubtedly the situation in Wichita is typical of the situation in virtually every other city in America.

In Boston, for example, the public schools report a citywide decline in math and reading scores. According to the Boston Globe of 10/4/86: "In reading, the median scores of Boston students who took the Metropolitan Achievement Test last May are below national norms for 10 grades out of 12. . . . In addition, the results indicate a staggering decline in reading scores for Boston first graders."

In other words, neither Boston, Wichita, Grand Island nor hundreds of other cities have begun to address the illiteracy problem at its source: the primary school. As long as look-say pedagogy dominates primary reading instruction in American public schools, this nation will continue to experience an unprecedented decline in academics and literacy.

Megatrends

John Naisbitt, in his 1982 best-seller, Megatrends, outlined the major trends affecting our society. He had this to say about the literacy crisis:

"Most Americans are moving toward virtual scientific and technological illiteracy. . . . The SAT scores of the best and the brightest are beginning to slide downhill as well. . . . For the first time in American history the generation moving into adulthood is less skilled than its parents. . . . As we move into a more and more literacy-intensive society, our schools are giving us an increasingly inferior product. . . . And without basic skills, computer illiteracy is a foregone conclusion. . . . Yet, the most formidable challenge will be to train people to work in the information society. Jobs will become available, but who will possess the high-tech skills to fill them? Not today's graduates who cannot manage simple arithmetic or write basic English. And certainly not the unskilled, unemployed dropouts who cannot even find work in the old sunset industries."

1986 SAT® Scores Show No Improvement

On 9/23/86 The College Board released the SAT scores for 1986. The national medians showed no improvement over 1985. In fact, 23 states indicated disturbing declines in verbal scores. Alabama, Arizona, Colorado, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Montana, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Utah, West Virginia and Wyoming reported declines of 5 or more points. Only 19 states reported higher verbal scores than last year. Of these, only Florida and New Mexico scored a 5-point improvement. Nine reported a 1-point improvement, 3 a 2-point improvement, 3 a 3-point improvement, and 2 a 4-point improvement. Eight states showed no improvement at all.

The number of college-bound seniors who took the test totaled 1,000,748 -- or 2.3 percent more students than in 1985. The 1986 national averages were the same as 1985: 431 verbal and 475 math. The highest national median scores were achieved in 1963: verbal 478; math 502. It's been downhill ever since. The lowest median scores were reached in 1981: verbal 424; math 466. The small improvements made since then have been heralded by the education establishment as proof that academic standards are rising. But are they?

The test-takers include students from both public and private schools and The College Board does not provide separate data for the two groups. In other words, the increase in private schools may have helped raise the overall scores, while the continued decline in public school academics may be pulling the scores downward.

For example, in Mississippi only 3 percent of the graduates took the SAT test, scoring 485 verbal and 516 math. That's 54 points above the national verbal median and 101 points above the national math median. Did most of those test-takers come out of the private academies of which there are many in Mississippi?

On the other hand, in North Carolina, where 47 percent of the graduates took the test, the scores were 399 verbal and 436 math, 32 points below the national verbal median and 37 points below the national math median. No doubt the scores of the public schoolers pulled down the state's averages. In general, the states with the smallest percentage of graduates taking the test registered the highest scores. South Dakota, which had the highest scores of all the states (531 verbal and 567 math) reported only 3 percent of its graduates taking the test. But even those scores represented a 3-point verbal and 8-point math decline from 1985.

The question is how much better are the private schoolers doing than the public schoolers? The SAT scores alone do not supply us the answer. But it certainly would be helpful if The College Board started collecting such data.

SAT® Score Averages 1963-1986

	Verbal	Mathematics
1963	478	502
1964	475	498
1965	473	496
1966	471	496
1967	466	492
1968	466	492
1969	463	493
1970	460	488
1971	455	488
1972	453	484
1973	445	481
1974	444	480
1975	434	472
1976	431	472
1977	429	470
1978	429	468
1979	427	467
1980	424	466
1981	424	466
1982	426	467
1983	425	468
1984	426	471
1985	431	475
1986	431	475

Mean SAT® Scores by State, 1980-1986% Grad-
uates
Taking
SAT*

	1980		1981		1982		1983		1984		1985		1986		
	V	M	V	M	V	M	V	M	V	M	V	M	V	M	
AL	448	482	457	488	463	501	466	508	467	503	481	513	476	514	6
AK	450	482	449	486	446	477	437	468	443	471	446	477	445	479	30
AZ	475	516	476	514	470	511	465	505	469	509	473	512	466	509	11
AR	480	514	477	510	480	519	482	518	482	521	481	517	482	519	4
CA	424	472	426	475	425	474	421	474	421	476	424	480	423	481	38
CO	468	515	467	513	468	515	469	520	468	514	473	521	466	514	17
CT	431	466	430	463	432	464	433	465	436	468	440	475	440	474	69
DE	431	469	429	470	432	465	433	467	433	469	444	474	442	475	50
FL	424	464	424	463	426	463	423	464	423	467	421	463	426	469	38
GA	389	425	390	426	394	429	390	428	392	430	399	438	402	440	49
HI	396	472	390	464	392	465	393	471	395	474	401	476	403	477	47
ID	482	518	486	523	482	513	479	513	480	512	472	510	475	512	7
IL	459	507	459	508	462	515	462	517	463	518	468	522	466	519	14
IN	407	450	406	451	407	453	410	454	410	454	415	460	415	459	47
IA	508	554	515	566	516	572	520	573	519	570	521	576	519	576	3
KS	497	538	502	542	500	545	498	540	502	549	504	550	498	544	5
KY	471	507	474	509	475	510	475	513	479	518	491	529	483	519	6
LA	462	499	461	494	470	505	469	502	472	508	473	503	474	507	5
ME	427	467	426	465	427	463	427	464	429	463	432	466	434	466	46
MD	422	463	423	461	425	464	427	466	429	468	435	475	436	475	50
MA	423	464	422	462	425	463	427	463	429	467	434	472	436	473	66
MI	452	505	456	508	459	514	458	511	461	515	467	517	462	514	11
MN	491	544	486	539	485	543	482	538	481	539	481	537	482	540	7
MS	481	508	473	502	479	509	474	507	480	512	489	528	485	516	3
MO	458	508	462	504	465	510	466	510	469	512	475	518	476	519	11
MT	488	544	485	539	487	546	480	535	490	544	492	547	485	541	9
NE	484	539	489	537	493	552	494	546	493	548	497	549	493	549	6
NV	445	485	445	487	436	481	441	480	442	489	441	480	445	485	17
NH	441	485	439	479	443	482	444	481	448	483	450	489	450	485	57
NJ	415	452	414	450	416	453	418	455	418	458	425	464	424	465	65
NM	482	524	474	510	480	517	484	519	487	527	484	521	489	527	8
NY	424	465	427	471	429	467	422	466	424	470	427	473	427	471	62
NC	393	429	391	427	396	431	394	431	395	432	398	435	399	436	47
ND	499	549	494	544	505	563	505	560	500	554	513	568	508	556	3
OH	455	499	457	500	456	502	458	504	460	508	460	504	460	503	16
OK	478	518	485	526	483	518	489	521	484	525	497	531	487	521	5
OR	428	465	431	469	435	473	432	469	435	472	444	484	444	486	42
PA	423	463	421	459	424	461	425	461	425	462	428	465	429	465	52
RI	417	458	415	452	420	457	422	459	424	461	429	466	432	466	61
SC	375	409	374	406	378	412	383	415	384	419	391	424	395	431	49
SD	500	551	519	561	522	553	517	560	520	566	534	575	531	567	3
TN	480	513	475	514	480	519	483	519	486	523	489	521	486	521	8
TX	416	455	415	455	415	453	412	453	413	453	419	459	419	458	32
UT	515	546	511	548	494	528	508	545	503	542	511	543	506	541	4
VT	432	468	427	467	433	471	434	472	437	470	441	478	442	474	54
VA	423	460	424	461	426	462	427	463	428	466	435	473	435	473	51
WA	476	521	472	517	468	514	463	510	463	505	465	508	461	502	19
WV	462	499	458	495	462	506	466	512	466	510	468	507	462	502	7
WI	472	533	477	533	476	535	473	533	475	532	477	534	478	536	10
WY	484	525	478	528	484	533	492	530	489	545	495	539	484	534	5

*Based on number of high school graduates in 1982 and number of seniors who took SAT in 1982, the most recent year for which graduation statistics are available.

What Is "Functional Illiteracy"?

Many people are confused by the term "functional illiteracy" as opposed to simple illiteracy. A simple illiterate is someone who never went to school and never learned to read. In a society where school attendance is compulsory, simple illiteracy is practically nonexistent. A functional illiterate, however, is someone who has spent from as many as eight to ten to twelve years in school and has emerged at the end of the process with reading skills so abysmally poor that they might as well be considered illiterate.

It is estimated (by the dropout rate and other data) that about one third of the students who enter public schools become functionally illiterate. The process usually begins in kindergarten or the first grade where the child is introduced to look-say reading pedagogy. The child begins experiencing reading difficulties by the end of the first grade. By the third grade he or she is usually labeled "learning disabled."

Public schools now provide federally funded "special education" for the "learning disabled." The latter are now considered to be handicapped and thus eligible for these programs. The single largest group now serviced by special education are the learning disabled, or the LDs, as they are called. The more LDs a school has the more money it gets. And once a child is labeled LD, it sticks with him forever.

The number of LDs in special ed has grown tremendously in the last few years. In 1976-77 there were 796,000 LD children in special ed; in 1983-84 there were 1,806,000. It is easily the biggest growth industry in public education today.

Illiteracy In Spokane

According to the Spokesman Review of 4/13/86, 30,000 adult illiterates live in the Spokane area. The population of Spokane is 171,300; Spokane county, 325,000.

Chicago Public Schools Produce Massive Reading Failure

According to the Chicago Tribune of 5/4/86, the chances for success, or even mediocrity, are slim for the majority of Chicago's 431,000 public school students. At the end of first grade, the median Chicago pupil lagged 3 months behind the typical American youngster in 1985 reading and vocabulary test scores. Third graders trailed a full year.

"This is the lowest fourth grade class," one teacher volunteered. "My biggest challenge is to teach these kids how to write in cursive instead of printing."

So why teach them printing in the first place? Why not start with cursive in the first grade? That's the way it was done before the 1940s.

What's A Parent To Do?

How do you protect your child from educational malpractice in the public school? You can't. The public education curriculum is riddled with educational malpractice from top to bottom, and there is very little that parents can do about it. Significant reform will not come from within the educational establishment. Thirty-one years after Why Johnny Can't Read was published, the educators still insist on using methods proven beyond a doubt to cause reading failure.

The only solution for parents is to remove their children from the public schools and to place them in private, church or home schools. Parents must also look into the curricula of the private and church schools to make sure that the schools are using the proper teaching methods. Too many teachers in the private sector received their training in state teachers colleges.

Homeschooling offers parents the best opportunity to use the proper methods and obtain the best materials. We recommend that parents interested in homeschooling contact a local homeschooling association or write to Blumenfeld Education Letter for a list of contacts. Also, two books by Samuel Blumenfeld, HOW TO TUTOR and ALPHA-PHONICS provide parents with the necessary tools to teach their children to read at home. They can also be used to teach adult functional illiterates to read.

Vital Quotes:

"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears;

"And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." (2 Timothy 4:3-4, King James Version)

Lack of space in the last issue of The Blumenfeld Education Letter on the subject of AIDS prevented including the following information most Americans are not aware of:

In the Phi Delta Kappan article mentioned (March 1986) it was noted that two teachers in Montgomery County, Maryland, have died of AIDS. It also stated two school employees in Prince George's County, Maryland, have died of AIDS. How many more adults in our schools have died of AIDS throughout the country if four have died in just two counties in Maryland?

Correction: In our November issue the name of Dr. John Seale was incorrectly spelled "Searle."

Author Critical of Surgeon General's Report on AIDS

Mr. Gene Antonio, author of The AIDS Cover-Up?, (reviewed in November issue) has issued an incisive critique of Surgeon General Koop's just released Report on AIDS. Antonio is particularly critical of Dr. Koop's recommendation on sex education. The following is an exclusive summary statement about his critique he gave to The Blumenfeld Education Letter:

In order to fight AIDS, the report (of the Surgeon General) propounds indoctrinating little children and teenagers with the sordid details of homosexual perversion. Normal heterosexual coitus and homosexual sodomy would have to be taught as amoral equivalents. Parents would then have the dubious privilege of attempting to instill their own moral views regarding the practices taught. Most parents will consider this a defacto seduction into homosexual experimentation.

Dr. Koop nowhere mentions closing homosexual bars, "clubs," and bath-houses, which have been the most flagrant, teeming sources of AIDS contagion. He rejects using the most basic means of fighting sexually transmitted diseases: contact tracing. The reporting of infectious carriers, he contends, would compel high risk group members to go underground because of the stigmatizing involved.

Joseph Sobran has rightly asserted "The powers that be are clearly defining acceptable risks to public health not according to measurable or potential danger, but according to an ideology that exempts the main vehicle of AIDS for responsibility from it."

For a copy of both the Surgeon General's Report and Antonio's critique see enclosed Education Materials sheet and order card.