The Blumenfeld Education Letter

"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." HOSEA 4:6

Vol. 5, No. 11 (Letter # 51) EDITOR: Samuel L. Blumenfeld November 1990

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 SAT Disaster of 1990

National Verbal Score Hits Bottom As the Dumbing Down of America Continues Apace

Seven years ago, in 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education issued its now famous report, "A Nation at Risk," in which it said that, "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." In that year the SAT average verbal score was 425, just one point above its lowest score of 424 reached in 1980. This year we are back to that bottom score of 424 — 19 points below the high of 463 achieved in 1969. The 1990 score is three points below last year's score of 427.

As for the average math score, it is now 476 — 17 points lower than its high of 493 in 1969, but 8 points higher than its 1983 low of 468. However, the present score of 476 was achieved in 1987 and has remained static since then. In other words, there's been no improvement in the last three years.

It should be noted that the SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test) is taken by the nation's high-school students who intend to go to college. They represent the best brains in America. The dropouts and those not intending to go to college are not tested. They just melt into society.

Atrophying the National Brain

But the continued poor showing of America's college-bound students is an alarming indication that the nation's brain power is being atrophied by an education system that no longer believes in the supremacy of intellectual power. It believes in developing emotional power through affective education. A nation that is governed more by its emotions than by its brains is headed for third-world status and wholesale victimization.

Already, there exists in every large American city and in many poor rural areas an underclass of Americans who lead third-world lives of ignorance, illiteracy, poverty, chronic unemployment, drug addiction, disease, and social victimization. Yet, all the

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members of this underclass attended public schools, and it is the public school that has robbed them of the brains they could have used to take advantage of the great opportunities America still offers those ready to work their way out of poverty. Immigrants, arriving in this country with only the clothes on their backs, manage to achieve middle-class status in one generation. So why can't Americans born here do the same?

The hallmark of the third-world predicament is entrapment by the degenerating forces of one's low economic and social situation, to be totally helpless and hopeless in the face of unrelenting adversity. And every year more and more Americans are being reduced to that level of despair. The public schools were supposed to save the poor from such a fate. Now it seems as if the public schools are as helpless and hopeless as the people they were supposed to save.

Will an America with reduced brain power be able to deal effectively with its growing social problems? The answer is obvious. Indeed, as we turn more and more to our emotions for solutions, and less and less to our brains, the problems will only become worse.

Declining Intelligence

The dumbing down of America is taking its toll even among our best and brightest. In 1972, 2,817 students achieved the highest verbal score of 750 to 800. In 1987, that number was down to 1,363. In 1990, it was down to 1,226. America is literally losing its brains. At this rate, there will be no Americans in the year 2000 capable of scoring 750 to 800 in the verbal test.

While the national average verbal score was 424, different ethnic groups fared differently. The score for whites was 442; for Asian Americans, 410; for American Indians, 388; for Mexican Americans, 380; for Puerto Ricans,359; and for Blacks, 352. Why do English-speaking blacks perform so poorly? With the improvement in civil rights, school integration, affirmative action, Head Start and Chapter One compensatory education programs, etc., why haven't black students been able to at least reach a par with Asian Americans or American Indians? Perhaps one reason is that blacks, as a group, are more wedded to public education than any other ethnic group. Many Mexican-American children attend Catholic parochial schools, but most Puerto Rican children attend public school.

While 82 percent of the students who took the SAT attended public schools, their average verbal score was 421 — 3 points below the national average. Students who attended parochial schools — 13 percent — achieved an average score of 436; and those who attended non-religious private schools — 5 percent — achieved a score of 467 — 45 points above the national average of 424. Obviously, the private schools are doing a better job teaching reading than the public schools.

As for math, the public schoolers achieved an average score of 475 — 1 point below the national average. Parochial schoolers scored 473 — 3 points below the national average. But the non-religious private schoolers scored 523 — 47 points above the national average of 476. Again, the private schoolers out performed the public schoolers.

And, in math, ethnic groups performed differently: Asian-Americans (8 per cent) achieved an average score of 528 — 52 points above the national average; whites (73 percent) followed suit with a score of 491; "others" (2 percent) scored 467; American Indians (1 percent) scored 437; Mexican-Americans (3 percent) scored 429; Puerto Ricans (1 percent) scored 405; and blacks (10 percent) scored 385 — 91 points below the national average of 476.

The Black Predicament

If the very best of black students perform so far below the national averages in math and verbal skills (91 points below average in math; 72 points below average on the verbal test), what can be said for those blacks who have dropped out of school as functional illiterates? Our schools are "educating" them to go on welfare and stay there for the rest of their lives. That's what the underclass is all about — massive public miseducation!

The failure of "liberal" black leaders to face the scandal of public miseducation suggests that too many of them have been bought off by the liberal establishment. The fact that the NAACP in Milwaukee opposes the efforts of Rep. Polly Williams to get black children into private schools through a choice program, without even giving the program a a chance to work, indicates that established black leadership would rather do the bidding of the state educators than try something beyond establishment control.

The Failure of Reform

Obviously, the education"reform" movement of the last seven years has not brought us the improvements we were promised by the educators, despite massive infusions of money. The educators complain that we haven't given them enough. But here are the facts: In 1982 the average teacher salary was $19,274. This year it is $33,300. In 1982 the average per pupil expenditure was $2, 726. This year it is over $5, 600.

In 1984 the total expenditure for public education was $134.5 billion. This year it will be $231 billion, an increase of $97 billion in a mere 6 years — or an increase of $16 billion per year!

In other words, the decline in excellence has nothing to do with money. It has everything to do with the philosophy of education that governs the decision making of our educators. They prefer "whole language" to intensive, systematic phonics. They prefer teaching math concepts rather than drilling children in the arithmetic facts. They prefer "invented spelling" to teaching correct orthography. They prefer the inanities of social studies to the facts and knowledge of history and geography. They prefer dealing with values, emotions, death, sexuality and beliefs rather than developing sharp academic skills.

A Perverse Philosophy

That, in a nutshell, is the problem with American public education: its perverse, destructive, affective-oriented philosophy. No amount of money can produce academic excellence so long as the educators work deliberately against it. And not only do they work against it, but they fight tooth and nail against those who believe in academic excellence.

Even the teaching of reading has become the subject of intense warfare among educators, as confirmed in an article which appeared in the March 21, 1990 issue of *Education Week*. The headline reads: "From a 'Great Debate' to a Full-Scale War: Dispute Over Teaching Reading Heats Up." The reporter writes:

> In 1967, one of the most prominent researchers in reading instruction, Jeanne S. Chall, analyzed the controversy that was then raging in the field in an influential book called *The Great Debate*.
>
> Today, nearly a quarter of a century later, the Harvard University scholar says the "debate" not only persists, but has, in fact, escalated to a full-scale war.
>
> The battle lines are drawn between advocates of phonics, who stress the importance of teaching the relationships between letters and sounds, and those of whole-language methodology, who believe children should be taught reading by reading whole texts.
>
> And so fierce have their arguments become that

two recent attempts to find a common ground — a federally funded study and a proposal for the 1992 national assessment — have not only failed to quell the debate, but may have exacerbated it.

"It's always been, in reading, that there was restraint with all our fighting," Ms. Chall says. "Now it's as if all restraints are gone."

And so, a war rages among educators over how to teach reading — and the children are caught in the crossfire. It should be easy enough to determine once and for all how best to teach children to read. Why doesn't our Department of Education honestly try to find out? The federal government has spent well over $50 billion since 1965 on Title One compensatory education without determining which teaching methods work best. What irresponsibility! Meanwhile, reading scores decline and illiteracy grows.

Failure From Coast to Coast

The downward trend is visible from coast to coast. Since 1985, the verbal score in Wyoming has declined 37 points; in Arizona, Montana, Washington and South Dakota it's declined 28 points; in West Virginia, 25 points; in Utah and Oklahoma, 19 points; in Kentucky, 18 points; Colorado, 17 points; New York, 15 points; Michigan and Nebraska, 13 points; Mississippi and Kansas, 12 points; Alabama, Arkansas and Delaware, 11 points; Iowa, Ohio, Vermont and Virginia, 10 points; Maine, 9 points; Alaska, New Hampshire, North Dakota and Pennsylvania, 8 points; Connecticut, Indiana, Massachusetts, Nevada, New Jersey and Rhode Island, 7 points; Idaho, Tennessee and Texas, 6 points; California, Maryland and Oregon, 5 points; Minnesota and New Mexico, 4 points; Florida, Hawaii and Missouri, 3 points; Georgia and Illinois, 2 points; District of Columbia, 1 point.

Only three states showed a modest gain: Louisiana (3 points), North Carolina (3 points), and South Carolina (6 points up from its 1985 low of 391, the lowest score in the nation). And what is sad and disturbing in all of this is that we see no indication on the horizon that things are going to get better. In fact, the situation is going to get much worse, and the nation will be persuaded to accept widespread illiteracy as just another of America's insoluble social problems — like teenage pregnancy, drug addiction and AIDS. Since the educators are adamantly against those teaching methods that can quickly improve academic skills, we can expect the educators to continue to manufacture all sorts of social and psychological reasons for student failure and recommend costly remedial measures to deal with the problems. We have no doubt that the educators — with the help of a supine press, timid ministers, ignorant politicians, gullible corporate executives, and an army of volunteer "do-gooders" anxious to help the poor, overworked educators "do their job" — will be able to deceive most of the American people for a long time to come.

College-Bound Seniors : SAT Score Averages, 1969-1990

	Verbal			Mathematical		
Year	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
1969	459	466	463	513	470	493
1970	459	461	460	509	465	488
1971	454	457	455	507	466	488
1972	454	452	453	505	461	484
1973	446	443	445	502	460	481
1974	447	442	444	501	459	480
1975	437	431	434	495	449	472
1976	433	430	431	497	446	472
1977	431	427	429	497	445	470
1978	433	425	429	494	444	468
1979	431	423	427	493	443	467
1980	428	420	424	491	443	466
1981	430	418	424	492	443	466
1982	431	421	426	493	443	467
1983	430	420	425	493	445	468
1984	433	420	426	495	449	471
1985	437	425	431	499	452	475
1966	437	426	431	501	451	475
1987	435	425	430	500	453	476
1988	435	422	428	498	455	476
1989	434	421	427	500	454	476
1990	429	419	424	499	455	476

The averages for 1969 through 1971 are estimates. College-Bound Seniors reports were not prepared in those years.

Average SAT® Scores by State, 1980, 1985–1990

State	1980		1985		1986		1987		1988		1989		1990		% Graduates Taking SAT*
	V	M	V	M	V	M	V	M	V	M	V	M	V	M	
Alabama	448	482	481	513	476	514	478	515	480	520	482	520	470	514	8
Alaska	450	482	446	477	445	479	445	479	441	475	443	480	438	476	42
Arizona	475	516	473	512	466	509	463	505	455	500	452	500	445	497	25
Arkansas	480	514	481	517	482	519	480	521	479	516	471	515	470	511	6
California	424	472	424	480	423	481	424	482	424	484	422	484	419	484	45
Colorado	468	515	473	521	466	514	466	514	460	511	458	508	456	513	28
Connecticut	431	466	440	475	440	474	439	473	436	472	435	473	430	471	74
Delaware	431	469	444	474	442	475	440	470	433	466	435	468	433	470	58
District of Columbia	377	403	410	434	413	439	407	435	405	434	407	439	409	441	68
Florida	424	464	421	463	426	469	423	470	422	468	420	467	418	466	44
Georgia	389	425	399	438	402	440	400	440	404	444	402	445	401	443	57
Hawaii	396	472	401	476	403	477	404	477	408	480	406	482	404	481	52
Idaho	482	518	472	510	475	512	473	502	467	501	465	500	466	502	17
Illinois	459	507	468	522	466	519	463	521	464	520	462	520	466	528	16
Indiana	407	450	415	460	415	459	415	459	412	458	412	459	408	459	54
Iowa	508	554	521	576	519	576	515	574	513	577	512	572	511	577	5
Kansas	497	538	504	550	498	544	498	547	494	541	495	545	492	548	10
Kentucky	471	507	491	529	483	519	479	519	475	515	477	519	473	521	10
Louisiana	462	499	473	503	474	507	473	509	476	513	473	513	476	517	9
Maine	427	467	432	466	434	466	433	466	430	466	431	466	423	463	60
Maryland	422	463	435	475	436	475	437	477	433	475	434	480	430	478	59
Massachusetts	423	464	434	472	436	473	435	474	432	474	432	473	427	473	72
Michigan	452	505	467	517	462	514	459	513	457	513	458	514	454	514	12
Minnesota	491	544	481	537	482	540	472	531	470	531	474	532	477	542	14
Mississippi	481	508	489	528	485	516	487	521	482	519	472	516	477	519	4
Missouri	458	508	475	518	476	519	474	518	471	519	471	518	473	522	12
Montana	488	544	492	547	485	541	479	530	471	529	469	523	464	523	20
National	*424*	*466*	*431*	*475*	*431*	*475*	*430*	*476*	*428*	*476*	*427*	*476*	*424*	*476*	*40*

*Based on number of high school graduates in 1990 as projected by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, and number of students in the Class of 1990 who took the SAT.

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Average SAT® Scores by State, 1980, 1985–1990

State	1980		1985		1986		1987		1988		1989		1990		% Graduates Taking SAT*
	V	M	V	M	V	M	V	M	V	M	V	M	V	M	
Nebraska	484	539	497	549	493	549	488	545	487	545	487	543	484	546	10
Nevada	445	485	441	480	445	485	439	484	440	486	439	487	434	487	24
New Hampshire	441	485	450	489	450	485	450	488	446	487	447	485	442	486	67
New Jersey	415	452	425	464	424	465	425	467	424	469	423	471	418	473	69
New Mexico	482	524	484	521	489	527	484	525	478	524	483	532	480	527	12
New York	424	465	427	473	427	471	425	469	420	469	419	471	412	470	70
North Carolina	393	429	398	435	399	436	400	438	401	440	397	439	401	440	55
North Dakota	499	549	513	568	508	556	509	558	498	555	500	567	505	564	6
Ohio	455	499	460	504	460	503	455	499	452	499	451	497	450	499	22
Oklahoma	478	518	497	531	487	521	486	520	483	522	479	522	478	523	9
Oregon	428	465	444	484	444	486	444	484	441	482	443	484	439	484	49
Pennsylvania	423	463	428	465	429	465	428	463	424	462	423	463	420	463	64
Rhode Island	417	458	429	466	432	466	433	465	431	469	429	466	422	461	62
South Carolina	375	409	391	424	395	431	397	435	400	438	399	439	397	437	54
South Dakota	500	551	534	575	531	567	513	563	511	559	498	543	506	555	5
Tennessee	480	513	489	521	486	521	487	524	485	524	486	523	483	525	12
Texas	416	455	419	459	419	458	416	459	417	462	415	462	413	461	42
Utah	515	546	511	543	506	541	503	540	498	536	499	537	492	539	5
Vermont	432	468	441	478	442	474	440	474	437	472	435	470	431	466	62
Virginia	423	460	435	473	435	473	434	473	430	472	430	472	425	470	58
Washington	476	521	465	508	461	502	455	496	448	494	448	491	437	486	44
West Virginia	462	499	468	507	462	502	458	496	451	496	448	491	443	490	15
Wisconsin	472	533	477	534	478	536	475	534	473	534	477	536	476	543	11
Wyoming	484	525	495	539	484	534	483	533	474	527	462	516	458	519	13
National	*424*	*466*	*431*	*475*	*431*	*475*	*430*	*476*	*428*	*476*	*427*	*476*	*424*	*476*	*40*

* Based on number of high school graduates in 1990 as projected by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, and number of students in the Class of 1990 who took the SAT.

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SAT® Averages by Ethnic Group, 1976, 1980–1990

SAT Verbal

	1976	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986*	1987	1988	1989	1990	Change Since '76
American Indian	388	390	391	388	388	390	392	NA	393	393	384	388	0
Asian American	414	396	397	398	395	398	404	NA	405	408	409	410	- 4
Black	332	330	332	341	339	342	346	NA	351	353	351	352	+20
Mexican American	371	372	373	377	375	376	382	NA	379	382	381	380	+ 9
Puerto Rican	364	350	353	360	358	358	388	NA	360	355	360	359	- 5
Other Hispanic	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	387	387	389	383	NA
White	451	442	442	444	443	445	449	NA	447	445	446	442	- 9
Other	410	394	388	392	386	388	391	NA	405	410	414	410	0
All Students	431	424	424	426	425	426	431	431	430	428	427	424	- 7
All Men	433	428	430	431	430	433	437	437	435	435	434	429	- 4
All Women	430	420	418	421	420	420	425	426	425	422	421	419	-11

SAT Mathematical

	1976	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1988	1987	1988	1989	1990	Change Since '76
American Indian	420	426	425	424	425	427	428	NA	432	435	428	437	+17
Asian American	518	509	513	513	514	519	518	NA	521	522	525	528	+10
Black	354	360	362	366	369	373	376	NA	377	384	386	385	+31
Mexican American	410	413	415	416	417	420	426	NA	424	428	430	429	+19
Puerto Rican	401	394	398	403	403	405	409	NA	400	402	406	405	+ 4
Other Hispanic	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	432	433	436	434	NA
White	493	482	483	483	484	487	490	NA	489	490	491	491	- 2
Other	458	449	447	449	446	450	448	NA	455	460	467	467	+ 9
All Students	472	466	466	467	468	471	475	475	476	476	476	476	+ 4
All Men	497	491	492	493	493	495	499	501	500	498	500	499	+ 2
All Women	446	443	443	443	445	449	452	451	453	455	454	455	+ 9

Math Teachers Plan New New Math

Math teachers have proposed new math-teaching standards to make the United States competitive with other countries.

The new standards will rely heavily on calculators, even in the earliest grades, to do the drudgery while students apply their energies to solving problems.

The new standards will foster group efforts in problem solving, instead of students working alone, to teach the importance of cooperation. And the new plan calls for every student to have access to a computer.

"Math is power and it's a power this nation cannot afford to be without," said former astronaut Sally Ride, now a Stanford University physicist, at a news conference announcing the standards. "Applied math puts astronauts on the moon," she said, "and put me in space."

The emphasis of the new standards is on problem solving, less on "skill and drill," says Shirley Frye of Scottsdale, Arizona, president of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics.

"We have to remove the belief that math is nothing but paper and pencil numbers," she says.

The calculator is a "fast pencil," Frye says, that should be available to every student, "but we have to convince parents that the calculator is a valuable tool and not a crutch."

The math teachers developed the standards in response to several surveys showing U.S. students at the bottom of the global heap in ability to use math. (Idaho Statesman, 3/22/89)

Comment:

If the parents of America expect the

"new" new math to be any better than the old new math, they will be sorely disappointed. The idea that you can master arithmetic — our counting system — without "skill and drill" is like telling a future typist that he can master the keyboard without practice or telling a future pianist that she can master the piano without "skill and drill." The simple fact is that our place-value arithmetic system, which uses only ten symbols for all of its calculations, is a memory system. And the reason why memorization is so important is because the learner becomes aware of the intricate patterns in our numbering and counting system, and this becomes an integral part of the learner's understanding of reality.

Memorization of the arithmetic facts can be made as enjoyable as the mastery of any skill that produces proficiency. In fact, memorization reduces drudgery. It makes arithmetic easy.

Teachers Who Can't Teach

The problem today is that most math teachers don't even know how to teach the arithmetic functions properly. Just as the teaching of reading has been made needlessly complicated and boring by the educators, so has the teaching of arithmetic — which, incidentally, is no longer called arithmetic. Arithmetic is a counting system that uses abstract symbols instead of concretes. It relies entirely on rote memorization for its efficient use.

Algebra, geometry, trigonometry and calculus use arithmetic but are apart from it. They deal with relationships. But to think that you can bypass learning arithmetic by the use of calculators and computers and still become good at higher math is the usual kind of wishful thinking our educators are famous for.

The problem with most math teachers is that they don't like arithmetic, are not good at it, and don't know how to teach it. If they did, they would not call learning it drudgery. They would admire its incredible versatility and the ease with which it can be mastered. Our arithmetic system is an intellectual gem, one of the greatest achievements of the human mind. To send a child to school where he will not be taught to master arithmetic is like sending him to a piano teacher who will tell the child to stare at the piano while listening to a recording of someone else playing it. It's out and out fraud.

Shortchanging the Children

Because our teachers don't know how to teach arithmetic, their solution is to replace it with calculators and computers. But if the arithmetic facts are not memorized, how will the individual know when a mistake has been made? Fingers do slip. And if you're working alone, without your "group," who will tell you when you're wrong?

Also, people do not generally carry calculators and computers everywhere they go. They often have to use pencil and paper. They often have to make quick calculations in their heads. In addition, most people will not be using algebra or trigonometry once they get out of school. But they will be using arithmetic for the rest of their lives: shopping, keeping checking accounts, doing taxes, calculating interest and dividends, figuring out mortgage payments, measuring curtains, counting calories. We have a magnificent tool, called arithmetic, which permits us to do all of these things with ease and efficiency. But because our educators don't know how to teach it, our children will not be permitted to learn it.