

# The Blumenfeld Education Letter



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

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EDITOR: Samuel L. Blumenfeld

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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 these risks.

"Without vision, the people perish."

## The SAT Disaster of 1991 National Verbal Score Hits New Low And the Dumbing Down Goes On

We are now eight years into the education reform movement started by the "A Nation At Risk" report in 1983. And what have the educators given us? A new low of 422 in the national SAT verbal score. The previous low of 424 was reached in 1980. Eleven years and billions of dollars later we are lower still. The ability of young Americans to use language — the tool of thought and the primary measure of intelligence — is in serious decline. How much longer can the educators fool America?

The College Board's National Report was quite blunt: "The mean verbal score has declined for the fifth consecutive year to a new all-time low, two points below its previous low in 1980, 1981, and 1990."

How was this permitted to happen? To unravel the mystery, one must go back to the source of the new progressive curriculum formulated by John Dewey and his colleagues at the turn of the century. Indeed, it was John Dewey who first advocated a drastic de-emphasis on the study of language in primary education. He wrote in 1898 in an essay, "The Primary-Education Fetish":

There is . . . a false educational god whose idolaters are legion, and whose cult influences the entire educational system. This is language study — the study not of foreign language, but of English; not in higher, but in primary education. It is almost an unquestioned assumption, of educational theory and practice both, that the first three years of a child's school life shall be mainly taken up with learning to read and write his own language. If we add to this the learning of a certain amount of numerical combinations, we have the pivot about which primary education swings. . . .

It does not follow, however, that because this course was once wise it is so any longer. . . . My proposition is, that conditions — social, industrial, and intellectual — have undergone such a radical change, that the time has come for a thoroughgoing examination of the emphasis put upon linguistic work in elementary instruction. . . .

The plea for the predominance of learning to read in early school life because of the great importance attaching to literature seems to me a perversion.

Dewey then argued how important it was for the child to experience life through classroom activities, projects, and social interaction before learning to read about them. And the reading materials themselves had to be relevant to the child's needs. He wrote:

Every respectable authority insists that the

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period of childhood, lying between the years of four and eight or nine, is the plastic period in sense and emotional life. What are we doing to shape these capacities? What are we doing to feed this hunger? If one compared the powers and needs of the child in these directions with what is actually supplied in the regimen of the three R's, the contrast is pitiful and tragic. . . . No one can clearly set before himself the vivacity and persistency of the child's motor instincts at this period, and then call to mind the continued grind of reading and writing, without feeling that the justification of our present curriculum is psychologically impossible. It is simply superstition: it is a remnant of an outgrown period of history.

Finally, Dewey set forth what must be done:

Change must come gradually. To force it unduly would compromise its final success by favoring a violent reaction. What is needed in the first place, is that there should be a full and frank statement of conviction with regard to the matter from physiologists and psychologists and from those school administrators who are conscious of the evils of the present regime. . . . There are already in existence a considerable number of "experimental stations," which represent the outposts of educational progress. If these schools can be adequately supported for a number of years they will perform a great vicarious service. After such schools have worked out carefully and definitely the subject-matter of a new curriculum, — finding the right place for language-studies and placing them in their right perspective, — the problem of the more general educational reform will be immensely simplified and facilitated.

All of Dewey's plans were, indeed, carried out and implemented. In 1908 a book was published with the authoritative title, *The Psychology and Pedagogy of Reading*, which argued that it was better to teach children to read by the look-say method than by the traditional alphabetic-phonics method. The author was Edmund Burke Huey, a student of G. Stanley Hall's at Clark University. The book was immediately adopted by the progressives as the authoritative work on the subject despite the fact that it was written by an obscure doctoral student of psychology who had had no experience whatever in the teaching of reading, who wrote nothing further on the subject, and about whom vir-

tually nothing is known. Yet, to this day, Huey is cited by whole-language advocates as the authority on reading instruction.

Yet, even in 1908, it was already known that the whole-word, look-say method produced inaccurate readers. But Huey turned a negative into a positive, defending inaccuracy as a virtue, as do so many advocates of whole language today. Huey wrote:

Even if the child substitutes words of his own for some that are on the page, provided that those express the meaning, it is an encouraging sign that the reading has been real, and recognition of details will come as it is needed. The shock that such a statement will give to many a practical teacher of reading is but an accurate measure of the hold that a false ideal has taken of us, viz., that to read is to say just what is upon the page, instead of to think, each in his own way, the meaning that the page suggests.

One can find Huey's concepts of reading reiterated by today's whole-language teachers. In an article entitled "Reading Method Lets Pupils Guess," in the *Washington Post* of Nov. 26, 1986, the reporter writes:

The most controversial aspect of whole language is the de-emphasis on accuracy. . . . American Reading Council President Julia Palmer, an advocate of the approach, said it is acceptable if a young child reads the word house for home, or substitutes the word pony for horse. "It's not very serious because she understands the meaning," said Palmer. "Accuracy is not the name of the game."

## The Virtues of Illiteracy

Was the dumbing down of America deliberately planned by the progressives? After the publication of Huey's book, G. Stanley Hall, Huey's mentor and Dewey's teacher of psychology at Johns Hopkins University, went so far as to extol the virtues of illiteracy. He wrote:

Very many men have lived and died and been great, even leaders of their age, without any acquaintance with letters. The knowledge which illiterates acquire is probably on the whole more personal, direct, environmental and probably a much larger

proportion of it practical. Moreover, they escape much eyestrain and mental excitement, and, other things being equal, are probably more active and less sedentary. It is possible, despite the stigma our bepedagogued age puts upon this disability, for those who are under it not only to lead a useful, happy, virtuous life, but to be really well educated in many other ways. Illiterates escape certain temptations, such as vacuous and vicious reading. Perhaps we are prone to put too high a value both upon the ability required to attain this art and the discipline involved in doing so, as well as the culture value that comes to the citizen with his average of only six grades of schooling by the acquisition of this art.

Commenting further on Huey's book, Hall, a prime-mover in the progressive education movement, wrote:

The best pedagogues are now drifting surely, if slowly, toward the conclusion that instead of taking half the time of the first year or two of school to teach reading, little attention should be paid to it before the beginning of the third year, that nature study, language work, and other things should take the great time and energy now given to this subject. . . . Primary reading should no longer be made a fetish. This should always be secondary and should have a purpose — that is, there should be no reading for the sake of reading, for this is never an end, but should always be a means of gratifying an interest.

Don Holdaway, the Australian who is considered by some educators as the father of the whole-language movement, writes in his book, *The Foundations of Literacy* (1979):

In his remarkable work of 1908, *The Psychology and Pedagogy of Reading*, E. B. Huey had already analysed the true issues of the 'great debate' and exposed the errors of a perception-oriented approach to reading. After seventy years we still face essentially the same debate. It is clear that the sources of unreasonable deep in the assumptions about learning and teaching which our culture of schooling cherishes.

Now that we've had seventy years of look-say, whole-word pedagogy crammed down our throats we can certainly look at the results. The SAT verbal scores are the best indicators we have. What do they show? They show us that in 1972, 116,630 students scored between 600 and 800, the highest possible score, on the verbal test, while 71,084

scored between 200 and 299 at the bottom of the scale. The total number of students who took the test in 1972 was 1,022,820. In 1991, the situation is exactly the reverse. The number of students achieving the highest score (600-800) had dropped precipitously to 74,836, and the number achieving the lowest score (200-299) had increased to 134,666. The number of students who took the test in 1991 was 1,032,685. The dumbing down has indeed taken place, and the figures are there to prove it.

The solution? Unless reading instruction in the primary grades reverts back to intensive, systematic phonics, and unless renewed emphasis is given to the mastery of the English language, we can expect a continuation of the decline in literacy among Americans for the foreseeable future.

**SAT Averages for All College-Bound Seniors  
1969-1991**

Year	Verbal			Mathematical		
	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
1986	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
1991	426	418	422	497	453	474

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

# **Average SAT® Scores by State, 1981, 1986–1991**

State	1981		1986		1987		1988		1989		1990		1991		% Graduates Taking SAT*
	V	M	V	M	V	M	V	M	V	M	V	M	V	M	
Alabama	457	488	476	514	478	515	480	520	482	520	470	514	476	515	8
Alaska	449	486	445	479	445	479	441	475	443	480	438	476	439	481	41
Arizona	476	514	466	509	463	505	455	500	452	500	445	497	442	490	26
Arkansas	477	510	482	519	480	521	479	516	471	515	470	511	482	523	6
California	426	475	423	481	424	482	424	484	422	484	419	484	415	482	47
Colorado	467	513	466	514	466	514	460	511	458	508	456	513	453	506	29
Connecticut	430	463	440	474	439	473	436	472	435	473	430	471	429	468	81
Delaware	429	470	442	475	440	470	433	466	435	468	433	470	428	464	61
District of Columbia	382	411	413	439	407	435	405	434	407	439	409	441	405	435	71
Florida	424	463	426	469	423	470	422	468	420	467	418	466	416	466	48
Georgia	390	426	402	440	400	440	404	444	402	445	401	443	400	444	62
Hawaii	390	464	403	477	404	477	408	480	406	482	404	481	405	478	55
Idaho	486	523	475	512	473	502	467	501	465	500	466	502	463	505	18
Illinois	459	508	466	519	463	521	464	520	462	520	466	528	471	535	16
Indiana	406	451	415	459	415	459	412	456	412	459	408	459	408	457	57
Iowa	515	566	519	576	515	574	513	577	512	572	511	577	515	578	5
Kansas	502	542	498	544	498	547	494	541	495	545	492	548	493	546	10
Kentucky	474	509	483	519	479	519	475	515	477	519	473	521	473	520	11
Louisiana	461	494	474	507	473	509	476	513	473	513	476	517	476	518	9
Maine	428	465	434	466	433	466	430	466	431	466	423	463	421	458	64
Maryland	423	461	436	475	437	477	433	475	434	480	430	478	429	475	64
Massachusetts	422	462	436	473	435	474	432	474	432	473	427	473	428	470	79
Michigan	456	508	462	514	459	513	457	513	458	514	454	514	461	519	11
Minnesota	486	539	482	540	472	531	470	531	474	532	477	542	480	543	12
Mississippi	473	502	485	516	487	521	482	519	472	516	477	519	477	520	4
Missouri	462	504	476	519	474	518	471	519	471	518	473	522	476	526	12
Montana	485	539	485	541	479	530	471	529	469	523	464	523	464	518	22
National	424	466	431	475	430	476	428	476	427	476	424	476	422	474	42

\* Based on number of high school graduates in 1991 as projected by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, and number of students in the Class of 1991 who took the SAT.

## Average SAT® Scores by State, 1981, 1986–1991

State	1981		1986		1987		1988		1989		1990		1991		% Graduates Taking SAT*
	V	M	V	M	V	M	V	M	V	M	V	M	V	M	
Nebraska	489	537	493	549	488	545	487	545	487	543	484	546	481	543	10
Nevada	445	487	445	485	439	484	440	486	439	487	434	487	435	484	25
New Hampshire	439	479	450	485	450	488	446	487	447	485	442	486	440	481	75
New Jersey	414	450	424	465	425	467	424	469	423	471	418	473	417	469	74
New Mexico	474	510	489	527	484	525	478	524	483	532	480	527	474	522	12
New York	427	471	427	471	425	469	420	469	419	471	412	470	413	468	75
North Carolina	391	427	399	436	400	438	401	440	397	439	401	440	400	444	57
North Dakota	494	544	508	556	509	558	498	555	500	567	505	564	502	571	6
Ohio	457	500	460	503	455	499	452	499	451	497	450	499	450	496	22
Oklahoma	485	526	487	521	486	520	483	522	479	522	478	523	476	521	9
Oregon	431	469	444	486	444	484	441	482	443	484	439	484	439	483	54
Pennsylvania	421	459	429	465	428	463	424	462	423	463	420	463	417	459	67
Rhode Island	415	452	432	466	433	465	431	469	429	466	422	461	421	459	67
South Carolina	374	406	395	431	397	435	400	438	399	439	397	437	395	437	58
South Dakota	519	561	531	567	513	563	511	559	498	543	506	555	496	551	5
Tennessee	475	514	486	521	487	524	485	524	486	523	483	525	487	528	12
Texas	415	455	419	458	416	459	417	462	415	462	413	461	411	463	44
Utah	511	548	506	541	503	540	498	536	499	537	492	539	494	537	5
Vermont	427	467	442	474	440	474	437	472	435	470	431	466	424	466	66
Virginia	424	461	435	473	434	473	430	472	430	472	425	470	424	466	60
Washington	472	517	461	502	455	496	448	494	448	491	437	486	433	480	49
West Virginia	458	495	462	502	458	496	451	496	448	491	443	490	441	485	17
Wisconsin	477	533	478	536	475	534	473	534	477	536	476	543	481	542	11
Wyoming	478	528	484	534	483	533	474	527	462	516	458	519	466	514	13
National	424	466	431	475	430	476	428	476	427	476	424	476	422	474	42

\*Based on number of high school graduates in 1991 as projected by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, and number of students in the Class of 1991 who took the SAT.

**SAT® Averages by Ethnic Group, 1976, 1985-1991**

**SAT Verbal**

	1976	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	Change Since 1976
American Indian	388	392	NA	393	393	384	388	393	+5
Asian American	414	404	NA	405	408	409	410	411	-3
Black	332	346	NA	351	353	351	352	351	+19
Mexican American	371	382	NA	379	382	381	380	377	+6
Puerto Rican	364	368	NA	360	355	360	359	361	-3
Other Hispanic	NA	NA	NA	387	387	389	383	382	NA
White	451	449	NA	447	445	446	442	441	-10
Other	410	391	NA	405	410	414	410	411	+1
All Students	431	431	431	430	428	427	424	422	-9
All Men	433	437	437	435	435	434	429	426	-7
All Women	430	425	426	425	422	421	419	418	-12

**SAT Mathematical**

	1976	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	Change Since 1976
American Indian	420	428	NA	432	435	428	437	437	+17
Asian American	518	518	NA	521	522	525	528	530	+12
Black	354	376	NA	377	384	386	385	385	+31
Mexican American	410	426	NA	424	428	430	429	427	+17
Puerto Rican	401	409	NA	400	402	406	405	406	+5
Other Hispanic	NA	NA	NA	432	433	436	434	431	NA
White	493	490	NA	489	490	491	491	489	-4
Other	458	448	NA	455	460	467	467	466	+8
All Students	472	475	475	476	476	476	476	474	+2
All Men	497	499	501	500	498	500	499	497	0
All Women	446	452	451	453	455	454	455	453	+7

## School Funding Higher Than Ever Verbal Scores Lower Than Ever

With the SAT national verbal score at its lowest level in history, the U.S. Department of Education reported in September that the nation will spend a record \$413.8 billion on education this year. About \$248.6 billion of that total will be going to public primary and secondary education, making an average per-pupil investment of just under \$6,000.

The Education Department's annual "Back to School" forecast shows that per-pupil spending in the public schools has increased nearly \$3,000 in the last ten years.

Despite this increased spending, the national verbal SAT score fell to its all-time low of 422, 44 points below its 1967 high of 466, and in math the score was 474, 18 points below its 1967 high of 492.

Diane Ravitch, assistant secretary for the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, said that achievement is declining while spending is soaring because people aren't doing what research shows needs to be done to improve learning. She pointed to studies which indicate that a typical eighth-grader watches 21.4 hours of television each week, compared to only 5.6 hours on homework and only two hours reading. She also said that pre-schoolers are not being read to nor prepared for reading before they start school.

College Board President Donald M. Stewart faulted widespread use of television and videos in the classroom, which he said distracts from the ability of students to read and analyze. He also pointed to the scores of prospective teachers, which he said remain the lowest of any career group and significantly lower than the national average.

Prospective teachers scored only 406 in the verbal category (out of 800), 16 points below the national average, and 441 in the math category, 33 points below the national average.

## Private Schools Outdo Public Schools

Public school combined scores for verbal and math were down to 892 (out of 1,600), which is four points below the national average. Religious schools scored 909, the same as in 1990, and 13 points above the national average. Independent private schools showed a two-point rise to 994, almost 100 points above the national average.

Ethnic and cultural groups showed dramatic improvements, but most still trailed the national average significantly. Over the past 15 years, the scores for black Americans rose 50 points, Mexican-Americans rose 23 points and American Indians rose 22 points. Asian-Americans' scores remained the highest of the minorities at 941, only three points below the high-scoring independent private schools. (*Wyoming Journal*, 9/13/91)

## Comment:

Note that Mrs. Ravitch finds the main causes of academic decline outside the school: too much television watching, too little homework, too little book reading. But the schools have the children 30 hours a week, and if the children are not developing their reading skills there it's because the school's philosophy and pedagogy specifically prevent the children from doing so. Naturally, a child who is the victim of such teaching disability will prefer to watch television than struggle through a book which he or she has never been taught to read. Our primary schools teach children a lot about reading, but not how to read.

Donald Stewart is closer to the mark by

pointing out the low verbal skills that prospective teachers have. Obviously, there is a correlation between semi-literate teachers and their inability to impart literacy in the classroom. And so the fault lies with our teacher-training programs that deprive student teachers of the knowledge of how to teach children to read. I don't know of a single teachers college in the United States that trains primary teachers in intensive, systematic phonics.

The prejudice against phonics is so strong and pervasive among professors of education and within the reading-instruction establishment that a young teacher who would like to do the right thing can be effectively prevented from doing so. In fact, intensive phonics is considered a tool of the "New Right" which is supposedly plotting to take over public education. In an article entitled, "Political Philosophy and Reading Make a Dangerous Mix" (*Education Week*, 2/27/85), the authors write:

The accumulating evidence clearly indicates that a New Right philosophy of education has emerged in this country. . . . By attempting to control the kinds of materials and questions teachers and students may use; by limiting reading instruction to systematic phonics instruction, sound-symbol decoding, and literal comprehension; and by aiming its criticism at reading books' story lines in an effort to influence content, the New Right's philosophy runs counter to the research findings and theoretical perspectives of most noted reading authorities.

If this limited view of reading (and, implicitly, of thinking) continues to gain in influence . . . the New Right will have successfully impeded the progress of democratic governance founded on the ideal of an educated — and critically thinking — electorate.

In other words, the teaching of reading has become so politicized that student teachers undergo ideological indoctrination, not objective training, when they attend a teachers college. Thus, if you espouse the philosophy of John Dewey and his views on primary education, then a return to the traditional

methods would be considered a betrayal of everything the progressives stand for.

And so, American children have become the victims of an ideological war they know nothing about. And the only way to make certain that a child does not become one of the victims is to remove him or her from the battlefield.

## More Money Is Not the Answer

According to a chart published in *World* magazine (10/12/91), the 1991 state SAT scores in no way reflect the amount of money spent on a state's schools. For example, Utah spent \$2,629 per pupil in its schools but achieved one of the highest SAT scores in the nation: 1031. The District of Columbia spent \$7,550 per pupil and achieved the second lowest SAT score in the nation: 840. The lowest state score of 832 was achieved by South Carolina at a cost of \$3,834, about \$1,200 more than was spent in Utah. New Jersey, which spent the most money per pupil of any state, \$7,795, achieved one of the lowest scores: 886.

Of the 12 states that achieved an SAT of over 1,000, only one, Wisconsin, spent more than \$5,000 per pupil. Utah, Arkansas, South Dakota, and Tennessee spent less than \$4,000 per pupil. Of the 19 states that scored below 900, four spent more than \$7,000 per pupil, six spent more than \$5,000 per pupil.

In other words, more money does not produce academic improvement. It will probably do just the opposite, for it will enable the educators to finance more educational malpractice, not less. It does not cost much to teach a child the basic academic skills. In fact, it costs a lot less than what is now being spent on whole language. But don't expect the educators to ever acknowledge this, for it is the unwritten law of the public educator to always ask for more and, in return, produce less.

### Biggest SAT Bang for the Buck

	Verbal Scores	Math Scores	Tot SAT Scores	\$ Spent Per Student	Dollars Per SAT Point	Comp. to Avg.
UT	494	537	1031	\$2629	\$2.55	51%
MS	477	520	997	\$2947	\$2.96	59%
ID	463	505	968	\$3039	\$3.14	62%
AR	482	523	1005	\$3276	\$3.26	65%
AL	476	515	991	\$3383	\$3.41	68%
SD	496	551	1047	\$3704	\$3.54	70%
OK	476	521	997	\$3533	\$3.54	70%
LA	476	518	994	\$3593	\$3.61	72%
TN	487	528	1015	\$3707	\$3.65	72%
KY	473	520	993	\$3668	\$3.69	73%
NM	474	522	996	\$3759	\$3.77	75%
IA	515	578	1093	\$4344	\$3.97	79%
ND	502	571	1073	\$4294	\$4.00	79%
MO	476	526	1002	\$4272	\$4.26	85%
NE	481	543	1024	\$4385	\$4.28	85%
KS	493	546	1039	\$4491	\$4.32	86%
AZ	442	490	932	\$4051	\$4.35	86%
NV	435	484	919	\$4078	\$4.44	88%
CO	453	506	959	\$4352	\$4.54	90%
TX	411	463	874	\$4020	\$4.60	91%
SC	395	437	832	\$3834	\$4.61	91%
GA	400	444	844	\$3974	\$4.71	93%
WV	441	485	926	\$4365	\$4.71	93%
MN	480	543	1023	\$4865	\$4.76	94%
HI	405	478	883	\$4204	\$4.76	94%
MT	464	518	982	\$4702	\$4.79	95%
OH	450	496	946	\$4563	\$4.82	96%
IL	471	535	1006	\$4915	\$4.89	97%
NC	400	444	844	\$4300	\$5.09	101%
WA	433	480	913	\$4724	\$5.17	103%
CA	415	482	897	\$4670	\$5.21	103%
IN	408	457	865	\$4524	\$5.23	104%
WI	481	542	1023	\$5475	\$5.35	106%
MI	461	519	980	\$5269	\$5.38	107%
WY	466	514	980	\$5296	\$5.40	107%
VA	424	466	890	\$4840	\$5.44	108%
NH	440	481	921	\$5047	\$5.48	109%
FL	416	466	882	\$4910	\$5.57	110%
OR	439	483	922	\$5159	\$5.60	111%
ME	421	458	879	\$5204	\$5.92	117%
MD	429	475	904	\$5679	\$6.28	125%
DE	428	464	892	\$5647	\$6.33	126%
VT	424	466	890	\$5685	\$6.39	127%
MA	426	470	896	\$5894	\$6.58	130%
PA	417	459	876	\$5924	\$6.76	134%
RI	421	459	880	\$6395	\$7.27	144%
CT	429	469	898	\$7016	\$7.81	155%
AK	439	481	920	\$7226	\$7.85	156%
NY	413	468	881	\$7647	\$8.68	172%
NJ	417	469	886	\$7795	\$8.80	174%
DC	405	435	840	\$7550	\$8.99	178%
Average	448	496	944	\$4761	\$5.04	