

# 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 these risks.

"Without vision, the people perish."

## Establishment Happy With Clinton's New Education Secretary

The selection of Richard W. Riley, former governor of South Carolina, to head the Education Department was greeted by the education establishment with considerable satisfaction. The National Association of Elementary School Principals called it "a superb choice." Although the National Education Association would have preferred one of its own — such as former NEA president Mary Hatwood Futrell — in that spot, it heartily approved of the choice. Keith Geiger, president of the NEA, said that if Clinton "wasn't going to pick a real live kindergarten teacher, this was the best that he could do. . . . [Riley] has been honest, he's built consensus, and he never pulled back on the money issue." And, as our readers know, money and power are what really counts with the NEA. The Association predicted that Riley "will be a champion and advocate for America's public school students."

Albert Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers, said that Riley's appointment marked a "180-degree turn" from the Reagan and Bush years, with Republican emphasis on choice and private schools and a minimal federal role. "It's going to be the most interesting period in the

history of American education," he said. According to Shanker, Riley has a reputation for approaching education improvement "not with a magic bullet, or a single solution, but with the recognition that it's a complex job, requiring seven or eight or nine things to be done simultaneously."

In South Carolina, Riley is known as an independent, methodical public servant. A graduate of Furman University, a liberal arts college in Greenville, and the University of South Carolina Law School, he persevered through a painful arthritic condition in his spine — which today leaves him with a slight stoop — and ran as a reform-minded state representative in 1962. He moved to the state Senate in 1967, where he remained until elected governor for two consecutive terms in 1978.

Since leaving office, Riley has been a senior partner in a Columbia, S.C., law firm. But he remained active in education, and became friends with Clinton, a fellow "education governor," at governors' conferences. Clinton has referred to Riley as "my partner and often my mentor."

"I can't imagine a better choice," said Dennis Doyle, a senior fellow at the Hudson

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Institute and specialist on education reform. "It sends exactly the right signal: someone who knows about education and cares about it, but is not part of the interest groups, so you wouldn't be putting a fox in charge of the chicken coops."

"I think it's a very good choice for them, one of the best choices they could have made," said Chester E. Finn Jr., former assistant secretary of education under President Reagan. Finn is now a senior scholar at the Edison Project, Chris Whittle's ambitious plan to revolutionize education in America by creating one thousand for-profit private schools to compete with the public schools.

## Riley's Reforms

Riley, who is 59 and served as governor of South Carolina from 1979 to 1987, is best known for selling that state the toughest kind of education reform package: one with a one percent sales tax increase. The 1984 Education Reform Act was a comprehensive program that included increased graduation requirements and curriculum standards, mandatory kindergarten, new remedial programs, bonuses for improving schools, increased spending on early-childhood programs, an exit examination for high school students, and state intervention in failing school districts. It also instituted a tough graduation testing program, along with cash penalties and incentives for school districts and a system of merit pay for teachers. Concerning the latter program, James Gilstrap, president of the South Carolina Education Association, said, "We basically agreed to keep our mouths shut on [the merit-pay plan] in order to get the rest." After the bill was passed, however, the merit-pay program was quietly dropped.

Barry Wynn, chairman of the South Carolina Republican Party, was critical of Riley's education reform. "We've spent a lot

of money," he said, "and there's little evidence that the money was spent effectively." Riley "was not open to systemic change, to breaking open the barnacle-laden system" with more far-reaching approaches like school choice.

But according to Allyson M. Tucker, manager of the Center for Educational Policy at the Heritage Foundation, Riley "is a moderate choice, and we could have done much worse. Except for the choice issue, he's really not that different from [outgoing Secretary] Lamar Alexander."

Alexander agreed with Tucker's assessment, noting that Riley and Clinton were among the governors who worked with him on the National Governors' Association "Time for Results" education initiative when Alexander was chairman of the group. Riley chaired a task force on early-childhood education.

Praising the appointment as "a wise choice," Alexander said in an interview, "If President Clinton and Secretary Riley approach education the same way as Governor Clinton and Governor Riley, more will continue than will stop."

## America 2000

Alexander said he hopes that President Clinton will similarly choose to continue the community-action portion of the Bush Administration's America 2000 school-reform strategy.

The major differences, said Alexander, are that "you will hear less about break-the-mold schools and about choice. You may also hear less about giving teachers flexibility from federal rules, and less about involving the private sector in creating better schools."

Although Riley will be a visible spokesman, those who know him say that he will not emphasize the "bully pulpit" aspect of

the job as much as Alexander or Bill Bennett did, and he will not take a confrontational approach like Bennett's.

Observers have suggested that Clinton's choice of a longtime friend with a similar education-policy background is not surprising, since Clinton has a strong, personal interest in education and is expected to play a direct role in setting policy.

According to Thomas H. Kean, former governor of New Jersey and now president of Drew University, "[President] and Hillary Clinton have both been on the edge of the reform movement. One or both of them has been on every leading commission for the past six years. Mr. Clinton comes to this with a working policy agenda. He doesn't need someone to design one for him." (*Education Week*, 1/13/93, and *Boston Globe*, 12/22/92)

### Comment:

The appointment of the former governor of a state which has the lowest academic standing in the nation as Secretary of Education might seem a little strange at first, but perhaps speaks volumes for the way that government thinks when it comes to education. IBM recently sacked its chairman for failing to improve the earnings and competitive standing of that great company. It is a foregone conclusion that he will not be replaced by an executive whose company did even worse.

Riley's job will be to keep the dinosaur of public education alive for as long as possible. It also means keeping in place all of those programs that will tend to federalize the fifty state systems. The education establishment represents the largest river of publicly funded cash flow in America. While there may be many in the establishment competing for the money, they all agree that the cash flow must be greatly increased.

The new ruling elite in Washington is made up of boomer universitarians who see themselves as superior beings, destined to rule because of superior intelligence. They are going to put to use all of those enlightened, quasi-utopian ideas they picked up from their left-wing professors under the illusion that they've never been tried before. An important part of their program is to dumb down as large a portion of the population as possible to insure the permanency of elite universalist rule in Washington and the state capitals. After all, who can really challenge the brain power of Bill Clinton, Hillary Rodham Clinton, and Albert Gore? And when brain power fails, as it must, we will have "compassion" to keep us warm. We will all join hands from coast to coast and hope. (Other, more spiritually sophisticated universitarians will probably climb local mountain tops and hum "ohm.")

The other Sunday (2/7/93), on David Brinkley's program, Al Gore said that the economy was improving because people had "hope." Apparently, supply and demand had nothing to do with it.

### Establishment Politician

Richard Riley is little more than a hack establishment politician who is willing to work within the system and make those small incremental "improvements" that will insure the establishment's continued prosperity and hold on power. His school reform program gave the educators what they wanted: more money! Did it improve education? How could it, since it had nothing to do with education. He was able to get the bill passed by cajoling the business people in the state to approve the increase in the sales tax in order to raise teachers' salaries and by persuading the teachers to accept the merit-pay plan. Eventually the merit-pay plan was abandoned, but the tax increase is still in

place. Let's face it, the "educators" are smarter than the businessmen.

Did Riley's reform bill improve education in South Carolina? Although Riley was governor from 1979 to 1987, the reform bill was passed in 1983 and supposedly took effect in 1984. In 1978, the SAT scores for South Carolina were 378 verbal and 409 math. Six years later, in 1984, the verbal score had risen to 384, the math score had risen to 419. In 1985 the scores were 391 verbal and 424 math. In 1986 they were 395 verbal and 431 math. In 1987 they were 397 verbal and 435 math. In 1988 the scores peaked at 400 verbal and 438 math. From then on it's been downhill with the 1992 scores at 394 verbal and 437 math, the poorest scores of any state. Apparently, whatever improvement was made under Riley has come to an end.

Nor is the situation in Arkansas much better despite the reign of the Clintons. In 1986, the SAT scores in Arkansas were 482 verbal and 519 math. In 1992 they were 474 verbal and 516 math. The reason why the scores in Arkansas were so much higher than those in South Carolina (80 points higher in verbal and 79 points higher in math) is because only 6 percent of the high school graduates took the test in Arkansas whereas 59 percent took the SAT in South Carolina. Generally, the larger the number of students taking the test, the lower the score will be. Thus, in Mississippi, where only 4 percent of the graduates took the test, the scores were verbal 478 and math 526, while in Massachusetts, where 80 percent of the graduates took the test, the scores were verbal 428 and math 474.

However, if we compare the 12 states in which 50 to 69 percent of the graduates took the test in 1992, we discover that the order of the verbal scores, from the highest to the lowest, is Oregon (439), Washington (432), Maryland (431), Vermont (429), Virginia (425), Maine (422), Pennsylvania (418), Flor-

ida (416), North Carolina (405), Hawaii (401), Georgia (398), South Carolina (394).

The order is not quite the same with the math scores: Oregon (486), Washington (484), Hawaii (477), Maryland (476), Vermont (468), Florida (468), Virginia (468), Maine (460), Pennsylvania (459), North Carolina (450), Georgia (444), South Carolina (437).

In the states where the fewest graduates took the SAT, we can reasonably assume that those students were mainly from private schools, with the public schoolers probably taking the ACT. And that is what probably accounts for the very high scores that we find in those states. Thus, although Iowa gets credit for the highest SAT scores in the nation (512 verbal, 584 math), only 5 percent of the graduates took that test. As a matter of fact, among those southern states in which 4 to 10 percent of the graduates took the test (Mississippi, Arkansas, Alabama, Louisiana), their scores were higher than virtually all of the northern states.

Incidentally, the average SAT score for the nation as a whole in 1992 was 423 verbal and 476 math.

## S. C. Scores in Decline

The decline in scores in South Carolina since 1989 means that Riley's reforms did not produce any permanent improvement. The state is still at the bottom academically, and the state's Department of Education is currently working on new "curriculum frameworks." The state still hasn't decided how to teach the three R's. One of our readers in South Carolina sent us copies of the latest curriculum guides. The framework on mathematics has such cogent statements as:

Real change in mathematics education requires action by the entire community. Schools themselves are not the sole sources of all the current problems and cannot be the sole sources for reform. . . . Reforming mathematics education is a formidable task, and this framework presents us with a challenge. It also

charts the way for us to make meaningful change. . . The current mathematics training of pre-service and in-service teachers has weaknesses and clearly calls for a restructuring of their education. . . Our curriculum is dated. It fails to integrate mathematics with other disciplines and fails to make effective use of calculators and computers. Our methods of instruction are antiquated, and our methods of assessment are often narrow and inaccurate. . . Students should not be passive absorbers of mathematical knowledge in class. To learn math effectively, students should be actively involved. . . Structure learning to proceed from concrete (actual objects) to semi-concrete (pictures) to abstract (symbols). One good way to do this is through the use of "manipulative materials." . . A student who merely memorizes a math concept will be stumped if a real-world problem isn't the same as one "learned" in class.

The framework quotes from a book entitled, *Everybody Counts*, as follows:

In reality, no one can teach mathematics. Effective teachers are those who can stimulate students to learn mathematics. Educational research offers compelling evidence that students learn mathematics well only when they construct their own mathematical understanding. To understand what they learn they must enact for themselves verbs that permeate the mathematics curriculum: 'examine,' 'represent,' 'transform,' 'solve,' 'apply,' 'prove,' 'communicate.' This happens most readily when students work in groups, engage in discussion, make presentations, and in other ways take charge of their own learning.

The framework goes on for 153 pages with no indication anywhere that the students will be required to memorize their arithmetic facts. In fact, memorization is a no-no in the new new math that is now sweeping not only South Carolina but every other state in the union.

Perhaps some of you saw Andy Rooney on 60 Minutes on 2/7/93. His desk was covered with textbooks he had collected in a visit to an elementary school. He held up one book which he said was a ninth-grade math book with fourth-grade arithmetic. He told of being in a classroom where the children were playing some sort of math game in which they came up with a bunch of numbers which they were required to add up. One little girl sat there doing nothing, and

Rooney asked her why she wasn't adding up the numbers. She said she couldn't do it until it was her turn to get the calculator! Rooney's comment was, "Don't let a child use a calculator until he or she can do arithmetic without one."

Unfortunately, American educators don't see it quite that way. After all, if Americans can do arithmetic they might be able to figure out how they are being cheated by their government let alone their education system!

## San Diego Schools Reject Scout Program Because of Ban on Gays

The board of the San Diego Unified School District this month decided not to renew an in-school program run by the Boy Scouts of America because of the organization's ban on homosexuals. Beginning in July, the school district will no longer participate in the Scouts' "Learning for Life" program that has been used in 11 San Diego high schools and four elementary schools.

However, because of California law, the board could not end the district's policy of allowing the Boy Scouts to use its facilities outside of school hours, said Christina L. Dyer, the school district's general counsel. The state Civic Center Act specifically provides that "Boy Scout troops" shall have access to school district property.

In December, the school board amended its antidiscrimination policy to include a prohibition on discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, and decided to review its relationship with the Boy Scouts in light of the new policy, Ms. Dyer said. Last year, the San Francisco school board also broadened its nondiscrimination policy in such a way that the Scouts' program would be excluded.

Ms. Dyer said school facilities are used by Boy Scouts after school and on weekends "a great deal" throughout the district's 157 campuses. (*Education Week*, 1/27/93)

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## Public School Enrollment Up

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, public school enrollment for the 1992-93 school year is now 42.2 million, an increase of 2 million since fall 1988. Private school enrollment, at 5.3 million, has remained the same. About 2.4 million teachers are employed by the public schools with a pupil-to-teacher ratio for pre-kindergarten through grade 12 at about 17.2. The ratio in the private schools with approximately 360,000 teachers is 14.8.

An estimated 2.2 million students graduated from public high schools in the 1991-92 school year and another 2.2 million are expected to graduate this year. About 250,000 students will graduate from private schools this year.

The center estimates that the cost of public education this year will be \$5,372 per student.

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## Two 7th-Graders Plot to Kill Teacher

Two 7th-grade girls in Lorain, Ohio, were charged last week with plotting to kill their English teacher. According to police and school officials, the girls, ages 12 and 13, may have felt pressured to carry out the killing because other students at Irving Junior High School had wagered almost \$200 on whether or not they would commit the act.

Capt. Cel Riveria of the Lorain police said the 13-year-old allegedly planned to stab the teacher while her 12-year-old friend restrained the woman at the end of their class on January 20. A school official, who discovered the plan after questioning a student found sobbing in the hallway, thwarted the attempt minutes before it was scheduled to happen.

Capt. Riveria said the 13-year-old told him that she had no other choice but to make good on the threat. The apparent motive was a scolding the girl had received from the teacher, he said. Authorities found a knife when they searched the 13-year-old's book bag after the alleged incident was to occur. Last week, the girls were being held in a juvenile-detention center as they awaited a hearing in juvenile court. Police and school officials withheld the names of the girls and the teacher. (*Education Week*, 2/3/93)

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## D.C. Student Shoots Security Guard

A 14-year-old student in the District of Columbia shot and seriously wounded a school security guard last week after a gang fight. The guard, identified as Robert Layne, was reportedly in serious condition last week after undergoing surgery for a single .22 caliber gunshot wound.

The student, an 8th grader at the Patricia Robert Harris Educational Center, was charged with assault with intent to kill. Because he is a minor, his name was being withheld. Authorities said the shooting took place after Mr. Layne broke up a fight between members of rival gangs and called police to take the youths into custody. (*Education Week*, 2/3/93)

## Christians on School Board Will Not Challenge Evolution

A California school board that last fall gained a conservative Christian majority has declared that, despite the personal beliefs of a majority of its members, it will not challenge a state mandate to teach evolution in science classes.

Last fall, following a national campaign by Christian conservatives to win control of local boards, two additional religious conservatives were elected to the board of Vista school district north of San Diego. They joined a fellow conservative already on the five-member board. One of the board members is an employee of the Institute for Creation Science, a leading foe of evolution-based science curricula.

The election of the new members sparked concern among some parents in the 21,000-student district that sweeping changes in the curriculum would follow. After one parent, a marine biologist, asked at the new board's first meeting how it would handle the question of evolution, the board scheduled a public hearing that drew a crowd of some 600 late last month.

Deidre Holliday, the board's president and a member of the Christian majority, last month said the district will be guided by the state's science-curriculum framework, which emphasizes evolution, and by precedents set by the U.S. Supreme Court that denied creationism equal stature with evolution in public school classes. (*Education Week*, 2/3/93)

### Comment:

We have been asked many times at lectures whether or not Christians should run for school boards in order to "take back" the public schools. And I have always replied that it was a waste of time, for the courts and

state-mandated curricula would make it impossible for Christians to change anything in a truly substantial way. Besides, if you understand anything about the genesis of American public education, you would know that the original intent of many of the promoters of government schooling was to get God out of education and turn the schools into secular instruments for the promotion of a pagan-socialist culture.

My advice has always been for Christians to spend their time, energy, and money in creating Christian institutions and schools so that parents can educate their own children in accordance with Biblical principles. The fact that there are 42.2 million children in the atheist public schools, most of whom are from Christian families, indicates that there is much to be done to educate Christian parents about the urgent need for Christian education.

Back in the 1850s, when the Catholics realized that their children were being proselytized out of their religion in the Protestant dominated public schools, they opted to build an entire parochial school system of their own which provided an excellent education for Catholic children until the Catholic church itself began to abandon its own traditions.

The illusion that Christians can "take back" the public schools is preventing thousands of good Christians from putting their efforts into the building of institutions that will carry forward the Christian traditions of this nation. If Christians don't do it, no one else will do it for them.

What many Christians do not understand is that what they see in the public schools is only the tip of the iceberg, and being elected to a school board gives them no power to do anything about that part of the iceberg that can't be seen. What's in the unseen part of the iceberg? Our universities, our graduate schools, our teachers colleges,

the professional education associations, their publications, the entire psychological enterprise that governs curriculum development, the federal education apparatus which is pouring billions of dollars into educational labs for the development of classroom programs, the testing industry run by humanist psychologists, the teachers unions and their lobbies, and a myriad of federal and state agencies with their armies of bureaucrats who oversee programs involved with or regulating education. What can a Christian school board member do about them? Nothing.

As long as Christians keep supporting the public schools, they will be sustaining their enemies, keeping them in power, and collaborating in undermining the faith of millions of Christian children. There can be no survival of Christianity without Christian education.

Christians no longer have a choice. The longer they delay doing what must be done — creating and sustaining new institutions of their own — the greater the risk that their children will be lost to the other side. Christian children deserve a better education than what they are getting in the public schools. But only their parents can change that. The fact that the Christian home-school movement is growing so rapidly indicates that many Christian parents are willing to take matters into their own hands rather than wait for the Christian community to create new institutions.

The only rationale for Christians to run for the school board is to be in a better position to monitor what is going on in the classrooms so that they can better convince parents to take their children out.

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## **People for American Way and Time-Warner Join in Project**

People for the American Way and Time-Warner Inc. have joined forces to launch a new mentoring program to promote racial tolerance among youths in the Los Angeles area in the wake of the violence following the verdict in the Rodney King case.

"We need to act now to address the racial tensions resulting from the Los Angeles violence and rebuild the spirit of community," said Arthur J. Kropp, president of People for the American Way.

Under a \$100,000 grant from the media giant, the program will use students from a number of colleges and universities, including Claremont College, the University of California at Los Angeles, and the University of Southern California, to lead discussions about racial tolerance in high-school classrooms. Individual schools in the district have not yet been chosen for the program, a spokesman for the organization said. The Racial Tolerance Mentoring Project is an expansion of a pilot program used in North Carolina for the past two years. (*Education Week*, 5/27/92)

### **Comment:**

We hope that the project includes some lessons on how jury trials are conducted. Apparently the troublemakers in Los Angeles don't think that a jury trial was really necessary since the famous video alone convicted the policemen. What more evidence do you need? Didn't everybody SEE it? Evidently, something as complicated as a jury trial is beyond the understanding of all those angry public schoolers who make up the gangs in Los Angeles. It might take a little time, but it might be useful to have the participants in the project go through the evidence as did the jury and find out how the jurors actually arrived at their verdict. Our guess is that the students need more lessons on jury trials than on racial tolerance.