



Making Schools Work Better for all Children

Newsire - November 23, 1999

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Education Reform Hotline

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Don't Know Much About History...*or* Civics...*or* School Choice...

The Education Department released the results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) 1998 Civics Report Card. The results are disappointing: Less than three quarters of all our 4th, 8th and 12th graders demonstrate proficiency in civics. One quarter of high school seniors had little or no understanding about the concept of the separation of powers. This report comes on the heels of NAEP's 1998 writing assessment released in September, which revealed the poor writing abilities of our nation's school children. Those results showed that seventy five percent of American children are not writing at their expected grade level.

The Civic Report arrived the same day that over 160 of our nation's prominent mathematicians and scientists took out a full page ad in the Washington Post asking the Secretary of Education to withdraw its recommendations for "exemplary mathematics" instruction programs. These recommendations were given to programs that have no proven research base. The signatories agreed that, "The Expert Panel that made the final decisions did not include active research mathematicians.... It is not likely that the mainstream views of practicing mathematicians and scientists were shared by those who designed the criteria for selection of 'exemplary' and 'promising' mathematics curricula." The mathematicians and scientists have begun to petition Congress to challenge the Education Department's superficial but damaging ratings.

Should the US educational system look more like New Zealand's? Oregonians are taking a serious look at reform kiwi-style. Like the US, New Zealand had a huge unresponsive public educational system which consumed 70 cents of every education dollar, leaving only 30 cents to be spent in the classroom. Today 67 cents of every education dollar is spent in the classroom. Some other sweeping changes the kiwis made are the elimination of ALL Boards of Education and the establishment of Boards of Trustees for every school. The Ministry (comparable to the DOE in the US) passes a block of money to the Board of Trustee, elected by the parents, which makes all spending decisions using a formula based on the number of students. These actions have reduced the Ministry by about half. Major benefits other than the bottom line on classroom spending have been major

investment in classroom technology, significant investment in teaching aides, and bringing all maintenance up to date. One significant difference is that there is no discrimination between private and public schools as far as receiving state monies as long as the private schools file an application and meet facilities code standards!

A recent [Public Agenda](#) survey gives great credence to the work being done to advance reform. *On Thin Ice* finds that most Americans don't know much about vouchers or charter schools. Among those who do, support is high. The Center plans an synopsis of these important Public Agenda findings later this month. In the meantime link to: [summary of On Thin Ice](#) at the Public Agenda Foundation.

Thank you for checking out the Center for Education Reform's hotline. If you'd like additional information on education reform, please call the Center directly at 800-521-2118 or surf the issues and analysis here on the web. Thanks and have a happy Thanksgiving. We will be back with a new hotline the first week of December.



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