



## Educational Rot

American education is in a sorry state of affairs, and there's enough blame for all participants to have their fair share. They include students who are hostile and alien to the education process, uninterested parents, teachers and administrators who either are incompetent or have been beaten down by the system, and politicians who've become handmaidens for teachers unions. There's another education issue that's neither flattering nor comfortable to confront and talk about. That's the low academic preparation of many teachers. That's an issue that must be confronted and dealt with if we're to improve the quality of education. Let's look at it.



Schools of education, whether graduate or undergraduate, tend to represent the academic slums of most college campuses. They tend to be home to students who have the lowest academic achievement test scores when they enter college, such as SAT scores. They have the lowest scores when they graduate and choose to take postgraduate admissions tests — such as the GRE, the MCAT and the LSAT.

The California Basic Educational Skills Test, or CBEST, is mandatory for teacher certification in California. It's a joke. Here's a multiple-choice question on its practice math test: "Rob uses 1 box of cat food every 5 days to feed his cats. Approximately how many boxes of cat food does he use per month? A. 2 boxes, B. 4 boxes, C. 5 boxes, D. 6 boxes, E. 7 boxes." Here's another: "Which of the following is the most appropriate unit for expressing the weight of a pencil? A. pounds, B. ounces, C. quarts, D. pints, E. tons." I'd venture to predict that the average reader's sixth-grader could answer each question. Here's a question that is a bit more challenging; call your eighth-grader: "Solve for y:  $y - 2 + 3y = 10$ , A. 2, B. 3, C. 4, D. 5, E. 6."

Some years ago, the Association of Mexican American Educators, the California Association for Asian-Pacific Bilingual Education and the Oakland Alliance of Black Educators brought suit against the state of California and the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, charging that the CBEST was racially discriminatory. Plaintiff "evidence" was the fact that the first-time passing rate for whites was 80 percent, about 50 percent for Mexican-Americans, Filipinos and Southeast Asians, and 46 percent for blacks. In 2000, in a stroke of rare common sense, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 9th Circuit found CBEST not to be racial discriminatory.

Poor teacher preparation is not a problem restricted to California. In Massachusetts, only 27 percent of new teachers could pass the math test needed to be certified as a teacher. A 2011 investigation by Atlanta's Channel 2 Action News found that more than 700 Georgia teachers repeatedly failed at least one portion of the certification test they are required to pass before receiving a teaching certificate. Nearly 60 teachers failed the test more than 10 times, and one teacher failed the test 18 times. They



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also found that there were 297 teachers on the Atlanta school system's payroll even though they had failed the state certification test five times or more.

Textbooks used in schools of education might explain some teacher ineptitude. A passage in Marilyn Burns' text *About Teaching Mathematics* reads, "There is no place for requiring students to practice tedious calculations that are more efficiently and accurately done by using calculators." *New Designs for Teaching and Learning*, by Dennis Adams and Mary Hamm, says, "Content knowledge is not seen to be as important as possessing teaching skills and knowledge about the students being taught." Harvey Daniels and Marilyn Bizar's text *Methods that Matter* reads, "Students can no longer be viewed as cognitive living rooms into which the furniture of knowledge is moved in and arranged by teachers, and teachers cannot invariably act as subject-matter experts." The authors explain, "The main use of standardized tests in America is to justify the distribution of certain goodies to certain people."

With but a few exceptions, schools of education represent the academic slums of most any college. American education could benefit from slum removal, eliminating schools of education.

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