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*Funding social change since 1967*

# RESIST

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*A Call to Resist Illegitimate Authority*

November 2000

## Raising the Standard of Education

Reviewing *Will Standards Save Public Education?* by Deborah Meier

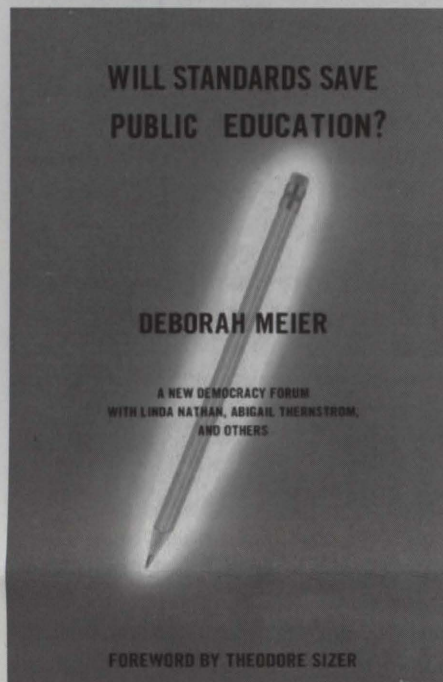
CAROLYN MAGID &  
NELLA LAROSA-WATERS

With support from both Democrats and Republicans, a “standards-based reform” movement is controlling and reshaping public education in much of the US. This development should worry progressives. Behind the rhetoric of standards and reform lie extremely serious problems.

Standards-based reform has two major components: state-imposed standardization of what students should know and “high stakes” state tests to determine whether they know it. “High stakes” tests deny high school diplomas (and in Massachusetts also admission to state college) to students who fail.

Many progressives involved in public education oppose standards-based reform. In practice, standardization generally means setting questionable, overly broad and rigid standards. High stakes tests hold students’ futures hostage to one test, whatever their academic record.

Implementation experience reveals many other problems. In Massachusetts, for example, testing proceeds while educators and state officials battle about the content of standards. Based on statewide trial tests, as many as half of the target group of 10<sup>th</sup> graders may fail this year, with significantly higher failure rates for African-American and Latino students. Test pressure has led



*Will Standards Save Public Education?* by Deborah Meier. Beacon Press, 2000. 104 pp. in a New Democracy Forum with Theodore Sizer, Linda Nathan, Abigail Thernstrom, and others; foreword by Jonathan Kozol

schools to exchange good non-standardized curriculum which emphasizes creative and critical thinking for superficial “coverage” which emphasizes test-prep drills. Test pressure has discouraged under-performing students and undermined the performance of talented teachers. Reports from around the country suggest that standards-

based reform is increasing dropout rates without improving education.

Presented with these problems, supporters of standards-based reform argue that there is no other way to help failing students and schools. Enter Deborah Meier’s important book, *Will Standards Save Public Education?* Meier argues that there is a better way.

### Meier’s Standards without High Stakes

Meier speaks with well-earned authority. Now the founding principal of a new Boston public pilot school, she is best known for her work in New York’s East Harlem. Central Park East, the public school she founded and led for 25 years, has won national acclaim for its success in educating all its students well—using its own high standards and without high stakes tests.

Meier agrees with standards-based reformers that schools need profound changes and she believes in high standards. But the changes she supports take schools in a completely different direction. On her model, we need small schools that govern themselves and determine their own curriculum and standards. Meier tells us “human learning, to be efficient, effective, and long-lasting, requires the engagement of learners on their own behalf, and rests on the relationships that develop between schools and their communities, between teachers and students, and between the

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individual learner and what is to be learned.” (pp.18-19) An integral part of this equation is for children to be exposed to powerful adults making important decisions.

In Meier’s schools, we can expect students to be actively engaged in learning and to meet high standards. Because the schools will also model democratic principles in practice, they will help students to become responsible and empowered adults.

## Different Views of Standards

The disagreements between Meier and the standards-based reformers are so systematic and profound that it is difficult to see how Meier’s schools could thrive or even survive with standards-based reform. Standards-based reformers believe learning requires rewards and (mostly) punishments; Meier believes that close relationships with powerful teachers actively engage students in learning. Standards-based reformers impose on all schools one (questionable) model of what it is to be educated; Meier believes teachers and schools should develop their own. Standards-based reformers assess students and schools with high stakes standardized tests; Meier wants students assessed by rigorous school-determined standards. Standards-based reformers remove power from schools and communities in favor of state control; Meier argues that school-based decision making is crucial for successful education and essential for a democratic society.

Meier’s approach is supported by student success at Central Park East where students meet rigorous school-determined standards. 90% of its students go to college and most go on to graduate. Inspired by Meier’s successes, thousands of small schools have been created on this model.

Standards-based reformers may acknowledge Meier’s successes. But they say that local initiatives like Meier’s are insufficient to address the “crisis of educational decline” in US public education. Meier argues that public education is not in decline—witness the soaring economy, high level of worker productivity, strong higher education system, leadership in technology and inventiveness, and elementary school literacy test scores. The “real crisis,” as she sees it, is a crisis in human relationships: too little decency, too little community responsibility. Public education

has contributed to this crisis with institutions that are too standardized, too large, and too impersonal. The schools she supports will help with this crisis; standards-based reform will not.

Meier makes an exceptionally clear and persuasive argument for her kind of reform. As a result, she undercuts a common argument for standards-based reform. Standards-based reformers often argue that theirs is the only way to improve education, and so we should take it, warts and all. Meier provides a very viable model that promotes high standards and student success, fosters democratic practices, and avoids the (many) problems of standards-based reform. Given those problems, Meier’s argument and record of success strengthen the case against the approach and rationale of standards-based reform.

## Book Includes Dissenting Voices

Meier’s book includes her essay, seven short responses, and her reply.

There is a middle position between Meier and standards-based reformers, one taken by several of her respondents. They oppose high stakes testing on the Massachusetts model, but support some form of standard setting beyond the local level. They worry that self-governing schools may lose the benefits of broader expertise or leave too much room for mediocrity, inequity and bias. The issues they raise are important and deserve further discussion by progressives.

The book includes one response in support of high stakes testing. Abigail Thernstrom, Massachusetts Board of Education member and strident opponent of affirmative action, makes the remarkable claim that “already in Massachusetts the new demands are driving better instruction.” (p.36) She ignores both the many problems we describe above and the decline in 10<sup>th</sup> grade test scores from the first year of the tests to the second. But since Thernstrom holds power and represents the thinking of many standards-based reformers, her comments are instructive.

Although Deborah Meier responds briefly to Thernstrom, *Will Standards Save Public Education?* could use a more systematic critique of high stakes tests. It would also be helpful to have more explicit information about the motives of standards-based reformers. For some, the real agenda appears to be corporatizing and

ultimately privatizing public education, pushing lower-performing students out of school, and/or abandoning equity.

These small suggestions aside, *Will Standards Save Public Education?* will be extremely useful both for readers new to the topic and for already committed activists against standards-based reform. Although this one small book can’t stem the tide in favor of these “reforms,” it can embolden activists, deepen our understanding of the issues, and provide a clear vision of better ways forward.

*Carolyn Magid and Nella LaRosa-Waters, parents of Massachusetts public school students, are long-time activists on education and other social justice issues. Carolyn teaches education policy in philosophy courses at Bentley College and runs a service learning partnership with a Boston public elementary school. Nella teaches in a Boston public high school and is a member of CARE (Committee for Authentic Reform in Education) and MEME (Massachusetts Educators for Mathematical Excellence).*



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# Beneath the Accountability Rhetoric

## *The Harmful Impact of the TAAS System of Testing in Texas*

LINDA MCNEIL &  
ANGELA VALENZUELA

Those who promote state systems of standardized testing claim that these systems raise the quality of education and do so in ways that are measurable and generalizable. They attribute low test scores to management's failure to direct its "lowest level" employees (i.e., the teachers) to induce achievement in students. In Texas, the remedy to this situation has been to create a management system that will change behavior, particularly the behavior of teachers, through increased accountability. The means of holding teachers and administrators accountable is the average scores of each school's children on the state's standardized test, the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills, or "TAAS." However, this over-reliance on test scores has caused a decline in educational quality for those students who have the greatest educational need.

Texas, a state with a history of low educational achievement and low investment in public education, has put into place an accountability system that hinges on the testing of children. The test has high stakes consequences for the children: not passing the high school-level test is a bar to graduation (regardless of the student's accomplishments and courses passed); and soon, scores on the reading section of the test will determine whether a child can be promoted from third to fourth grade. The scores on the test are also used as the chief means of monitoring the performance of teachers, principals, and schools. School-level aggregations of children's scores are used to rate principals, schools, and even superintendents.

### **Testing and Accountability**

The rhetoric surrounding this accountability system is that it is raising educational quality. Politicians claim that this testing system is "saving" the Texas schools. The system is gaining national recognition as an exemplary accountability system, because scores on the state test have, in most districts, been rising. The system's popularity is further bolstered by the idea

that it must be improving the education of Latino and African-American children since, in many parts of the state, their test scores are also rising.

However, emerging research on high-stakes testing and other long-term investigations reveal that behind the rhetoric of rising test scores are a growing set of classroom practices in which test-prep activities are usurping a substantive curriculum. These practices are more widespread in those schools where administrator pay is tied to test scores and where test scores have been historically low. These are the schools that are typically attended by children who are poor and African American or Latino, and many are non-English-language dominant. In these schools, the pressure to raise test scores "by any means necessary" has frequently meant that a regular education has been supplanted by activities whose sole purpose is to raise test scores on this particular test.

Because teachers' and administrators' job rewards under the TAAS system of testing are aligned to children's test scores, the TAAS system fosters an artificial curriculum. It is a curriculum aimed primarily at creating higher test scores, not a curriculum that will educate these children for productive futures. The testing system distances the content of curriculum from the knowledge base of teachers and from the cultures and intellectual capacities of the children. It is creating an even wider gap between the curriculum offered to children in traditionally high-scoring schools (white, middle and upper-middle class) and those in typically minority and typically poor schools.

### **Teaching to the Test**

It is a myth that TAAS sets the minimum standards and that teachers are encouraged to go beyond that. In many schools, it is the best-prepared teachers with the richest curriculum who are required to scale back in order to teach to the sequence and format of the TAAS. In low-performing schools, even the most knowledgeable teachers are asked to set aside their lesson plans to teach to the TAAS.

Whether children were being taught

"nothing" before or whether they were being given a meaningful curriculum, the pressure to raise TAAS scores shows no evidence of opening children's access to great literature, to conceptual understanding in mathematics, to fluency in writing, or to other learning experiences that seriously address previous inadequacies in their education. Nor does TAAS seem likely to do so. Under the current accountability system based on this test, financial rewards go to those schools whose scores go up, not necessarily to those in need of serious upgrading of staff and materials. In addition, the statewide system of testing has not been accompanied by a parallel investment that could reduce inadequacies and inequities in low-performing schools. The result is that many very real problems persist, problems which are not addressed by more, and more centralized, measurement and testing, or problems which testing may exacerbate by its focus on a narrow set of measures rather than a comprehensive look at children's learning.

The TAAS system of testing reduces the quality and quantity of course content in subjects not tested by TAAS, because teachers are encouraged or required to substitute TAAS test preparation activities for the curriculum in those subjects.

The study of science, social studies, art, and other subjects that are not examined by the TAAS are all undermined by the TAAS system. For example, many science teachers in schools with poor and minority children are required by their principals to suspend the teaching of science for weeks, and in some cases for months, in order to devote science class time to drill and practice on the math sections of the TAAS. The first loss, of course, is the chance to learn science. The second is the chance to learn to become highly knowledgeable in mathematics. Many science teachers have little background in mathematics; the "mathematics" they are doing is drill and practice with commercial TAAS-prep materials.

### **Diverting Money from Education**

Under TAAS, there is a widespread press to spend instructional dollars on test-

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prep materials and activities. These include expenditures on expensive materials for "alignment" and "accountability" systems and consultants. It also includes diverting dollars from Texas' classrooms to out-of-state vendors of tests, test-prep materials, consultants and related materials.

The press to spend instructional dollars for test prep is felt most especially in schools with large populations of poor and minority children, which have been historically underfunded. In these schools, scarce instructional dollars are being diverted into

materials and activities whose only value is to increase TAAS scores, not to produce educated children well prepared for college or future work. For example, to the extent such schools had fewer sets of classroom novels and other reading materials before, the pressure of the TAAS test does not lead to such purchases. Rather, it tends to lead to the purchase of costly, commercial test-prep materials. These provide practice in answering multiple choice, recall questions pertaining to brief passages that are written explicitly for test-prep purposes.

This diversion of dollars further widens the gap between the quality of education offered to poor and minority children and that provided to wealthier children. Middle class and wealthy districts either do not spend money on these TAAS-related systems or they have the capacity to make up the difference in local funding for schools; either way, wealthier districts continue spending money on high quality instructional materials, which advance their children's education and place them in the

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# MCAS: Opposition Grows

HANNAH JUKOVSKY &  
ZORA RIZZI

The long-awaited Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) results were as dismal as had been anticipated. When 1999 scores were released in December, it appeared that more than half the students in the state would not receive their high school diplomas if passing scores on the MCAS were currently a graduation requirement.

It is not surprising that criticisms about the test as a graduation requirement are beginning to get louder and louder around the state. Students are getting organized. On November 17, 1999, students from 16 different high schools who attended the Bill of Rights Forum at Boston Public Library put the MCAS at the top of the list of issues they wanted to organize around.

Teachers have come together in CARE (Coalition for Authentic Reform in Education) to call for multiple forms of assessment instead of a single standardized test to improve the quality of public education. And from western Massachusetts to Cambridge, parents are voicing their concerns, and are circulating a petition calling for the MCAS to be replaced "with a system of multiple assessments tuned to the needs of our children."

At a December 7, 1999 meeting of the Cambridge School Committee, a large number of people spoke out against the exam. Cambridge mayor Francis H. Duchay called the test an "attack on public education." The School Committee then unanimously passed a motion that any students who refused to take the test, or teachers who



At a May 16, 2000 rally on the Boston Common hundreds of students, parents, and teachers rallied against the MCAS tests which students will have to pass to graduate from public high school. *Photo by Marilyn Humphries*

spoke out against it, should not have reprisals taken against them or their families. Parent Rozann Kraus expressed the general tone of the Cambridge meeting when she said, "I hope that not too far into the next millennium when we look back at this hopefully small period of time, that we'll view the MCAS in the same way we look at bloodletting now."

### What's Wrong With MCAS

The Massachusetts Education Reform Act wanted schools to be accountable for the education they offered, and wanted them to be able to show improvement in the quality of education as a result of increased public funding. The state legislature feels that in order to keep giving schools money, it needs to have a way to monitor the schools' progress and to make sure they are putting funds to good use. The Educa-

tion Reform Act called for multiple forms of assessment to determine the quality of education that was being received. But instead of that, we have a single form of assessment—the MCAS. This test, which has never been independently validated, has been brought to us by associates of the Pioneer Institute, a think tank hostile to public

education. MCAS is supposed to measure the performance of students and schools in learning material covered by the curricular frameworks.

The test itself has been criticized on many grounds. Questions are badly worded and confusing. Some multiple choice questions could have many answers based on many different interpretations, especially in the history section. Questions in the English Language Arts section are several grades above the test takers' reading level. It is unclear to parents, students, teachers and the public who it is that grades the open-ended essay section of the test, and what criteria are used in the grading.

Then there is the preparation for the test. Because the MCAS focuses mostly on specific subject knowledge rather than critical thinking skills, aligning school curricula to

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national mainstream of what is considered to be a quality education.

In districts where schools' TAAS scores are tied to incentive pay for teachers or principals, and where TAAS-based performance contracts have replaced tenure, there is an even greater tendency for school personnel to shift dollars away from instruction and into the expensive TAAS-prep, "alignment" materials, and consultants. Again, frequently these incentives are applied in schools or districts whose populations are poor or minority or both. Because such consultants and materials are narrowly focused on boosting test scores, they are unlikely to enhance children's capacity for learning in the many realms beyond the TAAS test.

If only those schools whose scores increase receive additional funding (a form of merit reward), then the incentive to focus only on TAAS will increase (to the detriment of more substantial learning). Likewise, if the neediest schools, which are least likely to have adequate resources, are trapped in that need until they can raise scores, they will see no compensating investments to bring their students opportunities to learn in line with more privileged schools. There is no plan to make a massive investment in the neediest schools. In fact, much of the public rhetoric is that "low performing schools" do not deserve additional public investment. It is as if their poverty is tied in some Puritanical sense to lack of virtue, with low scores as their Scarlet Letter of guilt.

Preliminary research is showing that those schools that score higher on TAAS (usually wealthier, with fewer minority children) rarely teach directly to the TAAS. They teach children; they teach science, math, social studies, literature, writing, the arts. They teach the subjects. A tortured logic governs the highly prescriptive administration of the TAAS in predominantly minority schools: If the scores increase, it is because the school taught more to the test; however, if the scores decrease, the school needs to teach more to the test.

Yet, teaching to the test and thereby improving scores does not indicate increased learning or improved capacities for complex problem solving. For example, one largely Hispanic, traditionally low-performing high school with virtually no library, a severe shortage of textbooks, and little

## The TAAS system of testing. . . masks the real problems of inequity that underlie the failure to adequately educate children.

laboratory equipment for its students, spent \$20,000 (almost its entire instructional budget) for a set of commercial test-prep materials. Even the school's best teachers were required to set aside their high-quality lessons and replace them with the test-prep materials. Scores on some sections of the TAAS did go up, but teachers report that students' actual capacity to read, to handle high school level assignments, to engage in serious thought and be able to follow through on work actually declined.

This school, touted in the newspapers for increasing the TAAS passing rate on reading, is now searching for a way to counter what is seen by the faculty as a serious deficiency in the students' ability to read. It is clear that higher scores do not mean that children are learning to a higher level. Such scores may mean that nothing is being taught except TAAS-prep.

### What We Know About Learning

Two features of the TAAS and TAAS-prep materials are especially damaging to learning. The first is that under the TAAS system, students are to choose among possible answers that are given to them; they rarely have to think on their own, puzzle out a problem, come up with a possible answer, or articulate an idea. This engenders passivity and a dependent learning style that fails to develop many essential cognitive skills. The second is that TAAS presents the child with choices, of which all but one are incorrect. To the extent that children are taught test drills that are in the TAAS format, they are spending three-quarters of their learning time considering erroneous, "wrong" material. It is doubtful that there is any respectable learning theory that advocates children's continual exposure to incorrect material.

Again, the TAAS system places most at risk the children in schools that heavily emphasize raising TAAS scores (usually poor and minority). These children not only fail to learn the same rich, complex material that children in middle class schools learn, but they are simultaneously required to devote hours and hours each week to a *de*

*facto* worthless curriculum. By keeping children focused on disembodied facts, the TAAS system of testing is denying them access to forms of knowledge and ways of knowing that can lead them beyond this minimal level, into higher forms of learning.

That is why one teacher said that under TAAS, certain students in her school who previously were not being taught much math (these were bilingual students, recently immigrated), are "getting more math now that we are testing everyone." But she cautioned, "of course, it's not real math—it's not what you would want for your children. It's just TAAS Math." The opportunity costs of spending weeks, months and even years on test drills which narrow learning modes and close off complex thought may be one of the costliest effects of the TAAS system of testing. It is a cost being borne by the least-well served children.

### Where Are We Heading?

The TAAS is a ticket to nowhere. It is harmful to instruction by its rigid format, its artificial treatment of subject matter, its embodiment of discredited learning theories, its ignoring of children's cultures and languages, and its emphasis on the accounting of prescribed learning. The test itself, and the system of testing and test preparation, have in poor and minority schools come to usurp instructional resources and supplant the opportunity for high quality, meaningful learning.

This system of testing is therefore not the benign "reform" its political advocates claim. Nor is it the remedy for a malfunctioning bureaucratic system that is merely in need of stricter internal management and accountability. The TAAS system of testing exerts a direct, negative impact on the curriculum, creating new problems outlined herein and exacerbating old ones related to historic inequities. In addition, it masks the real problems of inequity that underlie the failure to adequately educate children. By shifting funds, public attention, and scarce organizational and budgetary resources away from schools and into the

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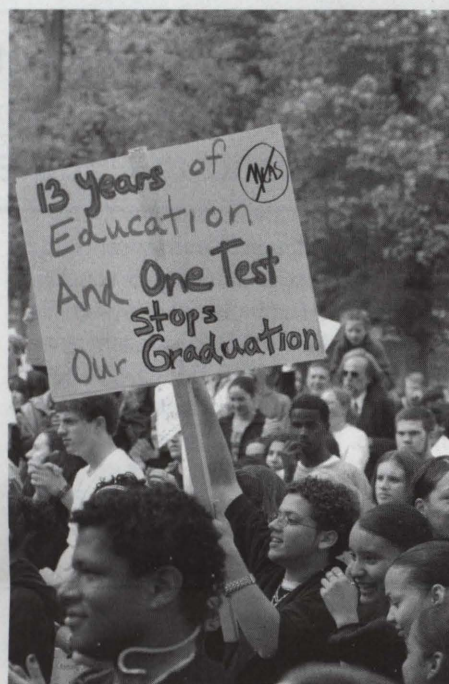
coffers of the testing industry vendors, the futures of poor and minority children and their schools are being compromised.

Rather than youth failing schools, schools are failing our minority youth through the TAAS system of testing. In short, we fail to see how the state's interest is served by a policy that simultaneously diminishes young people's access to a substantive education and closes off their opportunity for a high school graduation, especially when this route represents their best hope for a socially productive life.

There is at present an enormous gap in vocabulary and in ideology between those who teach and those who set policy. This gap must be addressed if the system is ever to be corrected; that is, if what is known about teaching and learning are ever going to shape large educational systems rather than be compromised by them. Ways of governing and managing schools, even big school systems, should not depend on forms of assessing children that undermine the learning schools are intended to foster.

One step toward redressing this imbalance would be to examine the factors driving the present upside-down-system of accountability. There is a need for independent research into the economics and political forces behind this system of testing and its promulgation across state legislatures and governors (and of business groups and test vendors advising them). The reliance within these testing and accountability systems on discredited theories of learning and on artificial representations of curricular content stem from the unexamined assumptions that permit the testing of children to be used for systems of management (and political) accountability. The effects on children from this system of testing need to be brought to light if we are to assure that our public schools serve all children well.

*Linda McNeil is professor at the Center for Education at Rice University. Angela Valenzuela is an associate professor at the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Texas at Austin. This article is an excerpt of their larger study presented at the Civil Rights Project of Harvard University, which is available in full at [www.law.harvard.edu/civilrights/testing.html](http://www.law.harvard.edu/civilrights/testing.html). For references and source information, contact Resist.*



Protesters at a May 2000 rally against MCAS say that the tests are unfair and punish students who live in cities and come from low-income families. Photo by Marilyn Humphries

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the frameworks encourages memorization. Memorization isn't beneficial for students at either end of the academic spectrum. It holds back kids who are doing well and holds down kids who aren't. For students struggling academically, memorization is overwhelming, scores are discouraging, and learning straight from the textbook is uninteresting and unexciting. For students doing well academically, memorization is boring, and the textbook is limited.

The MCAS is taken as a high-stakes test in the sophomore year of high school. It must be passed to get a high school diploma. If a student fails they have the opportunity to retake the test in their junior and senior years. But a great concern about using the MCAS as a high stakes test is that students who are already barely getting by may be so disheartened that they drop out after their sophomore year. The Gaston Institute for Latino Community Development at UMass/Boston has conducted a study which predicts that MCAS results could cause 29 percent of Latino students, 22 percent of Black students, 13 percent of Asian students and 10 percent of white students to drop out of school.

The test is having an immediate effect on the curriculum. Many students involved in vocational training, bilingual programs,

and performing arts programs, for example, score lower on the MCAS, and these programs are not seen as a way of preparing students for the test. As a result, many of these programs are being cut in order to bring up an individual school's scores. Study halls, special opportunities like internships, and electives that tailor to individual interests have been cut or whittled down in many school systems.

### Long Term Effects

While public schools scramble to make their curricula "MCAS-ready," parochial schools, private prep schools and students who are home-schooled are not subject to the MCAS. While the public school "learning experience" gets more and more stifling and inapplicable to the real world, those schools that do not have to fight for state funding do not feel the pressure to teach to the test. They can be comparatively more creative, imaginative, innovating and inspiring. Parents who can afford to will send their children to private school, either so they can dodge having to pass the test, or so they can take advantage of their individual talents and interests in a school that can afford to accommodate them.

MCAS will also hurt teaching in public schools. Good teachers and new teachers will be drawn away from jobs in public schools, despite the relatively high pay, drawn by the freedom offered at schools not subject to the MCAS. Many good teachers have opted for early retirement, rather than giving up running their own classrooms as they see fit. Inferior teaching quality and the close link between income and standardized test scores will lead to lower test scores, as excellent teachers and families in higher income brackets flee public schools. Lower test scores will mean less state funding, making the possibility of raising scores even more distant. This vicious cycle could destroy public schools.

*Hannah Jukovsky is a student at Cambridge Rindge and Latin High School in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and Zora Rizzi graduated from the same school last year. Both were part of a state-wide student alliance against the MCAS working in cooperation with the International Student Activism Alliance (ISAA). For more information, contact [No2MCAS@hotmail.com](mailto:No2MCAS@hotmail.com); or visit the web site [massparents.org](http://massparents.org).*



# Organizers' Kit Teaches Lesson

## *A Welcome Resource for Beleaguered Education Activists*

PAM CHAMBERLAIN

This year's presidential campaign has had a disarming effect with its debates about education, since both main candidates are supporting different aspects of what we now recognize as essentially a conservative "education reform" movement. Can it really be true that there is virtually no debate about the privatization of public education, about the effects of Christian theocrats who want to bring Jesus into our schools or about the dismantling of programs like bilingual education that are designed to even out some of our bumpy playing fields? How has it happened that the hundreds of thousands of education activists in this country appear eclipsed by a few speech writers and spin doctors?

Just when you thought no one was paying attention to the hardworking progressive elements among parents, teachers and community supporters, Political Research Associates (PRA) has published *Defending Public Education: an Activist Resource Guide*. This kit, from the Somerville MA-based independent, nonprofit research center that studies the political right in the US, is designed to be used by activists and organizers opposing right-wing initiatives in education. "The right has focused much of its attention on the public schools, understanding very well that what children learn in school is important to forming their view of the world," explains Jean Hardisty, President of PRA.

For the Christian right especially, public schools are often perceived as a threat to the values that conservative Christians consider God-ordained. Economic conservatives have an interest in schools as well, eyeing them as an untapped industry that beckons risk-taking entrepreneurs. These sectors of the right share some common cause as well.

Barbara Miner of Rethinking Schools in Milwaukee says in her overview article in the kit: "They have found broad unity in the rejection of the liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s. . . [arguing] in essence, that schools serve no broader purpose than meeting individual parental concerns."

Evidence of these beliefs is strewn across the educational landscape. Why is the right-wing agenda—school vouchers, charter schools, parental rights campaigns to rid the curriculum of "offensive" material and the general privatization and commercialization of schools, including public money supporting for-profit corporations that run inner-city schools—becoming more acceptable to the general public? The kit examines how the right is attacking public education and why. It offers in-

parents and the press; and staying vigilant.

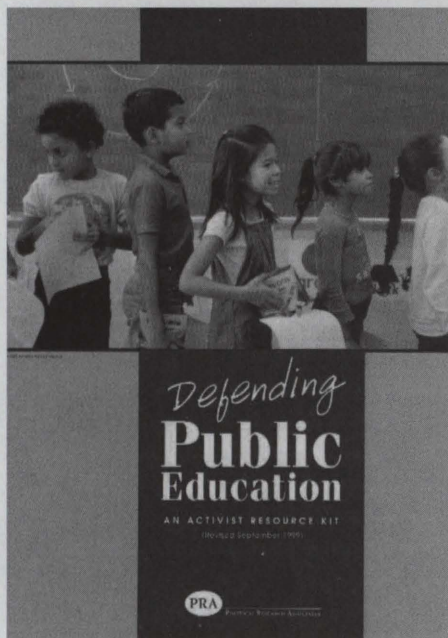
Perhaps the most useful part of the kit is a section called "Issues and Views" which examines five of the right's target issues and offers a response to their arguments. What the right says about issues such as parental rights, bilingual education and charter schools, as well as privatization and school vouchers, is described with a suggested response to each issue. This will undoubtedly prove helpful to education activists.

In addition to extensive resource directories, *Defending Public Education* includes samples of primary source materials generated by right-wing organizations as examples of the language and approach of such groups as Phyllis Schlafly's Eagle Forum, Beverly La Haye's Concerned Women for America and the Donald Wildmon's American Family Association. Secondary source materials provide counterpoint with reprints that analyze the issues from a progressive frame.

The kit focuses on such examples of education "reform" as vouchers for good reason: touted as a type of "school choice," vouchers are a unifying element on the right, and they are attracting a more centrist set of supporters as well.

But the real agenda is to use public funds to pay for private Christian schools, which in turn will lead to the privatization of public education in general. Defeating the voucher movement is key to unmasking the right-wing education agenda of both the religious right and more mainstream conservatism. Organizers across the country recognize such ploys, and several of them are represented in the kit. In fact, the publication represents the views of many cooperating groups, and it offers readers a one-stop shopping tour of national resources on authentic education reform.

*Pam Chamberlain is a consultant with the Political Research Associates and a RESIST Board member. For information, or to order the 169-page kit for \$15, contact PRA at [www.publiceye.org](http://www.publiceye.org), or write to 1310 Broadway, Suite 201, Somerville, MA 02144.*



sight for activists on how to recognize and organize against campaigns that threaten public education, and it tells several stories of local victories.

For instance, the school administration of Conroe, Texas announced plans to privatize school food services, thus replacing union jobs with lower-wage positions without benefits. Community opposition, led by the local teachers union, was so great that the school board vetoed the proposal. What is so helpful about the kit is the way this story is framed; it becomes a lesson for the rest of us. The kit's "Actions and Victories" section lists the keys to success the union used: doing their homework on the issues; building unity; involving a broad group of supporters, including bus drivers,



# GRANTS

*RESIST awards grants six times a year to groups throughout the United States engaged in activism for social and economic justice. In this issue of the Newsletter we list a few grant recipients from our October allocation cycle. For more information, contact the groups at the addresses below.*

## Sweatshop Watch

310 8th Street #309  
Oakland, CA 94607  
[www.sweatshopwatch.org](http://www.sweatshopwatch.org);  
[sweatwatch@jgc.org](mailto:sweatwatch@jgc.org)

Sweatshop Watch is a coalition of social justice organizations working to eliminate the exploitation of workers in sweatshops. Since 1994, the coalition has been committed to eradicating the injustice California garment workers face. Their first efforts included a Retailer Accountability Campaign and a campaign to release the El Monte workers from INS detention.

Resist awarded Sweatshop Watch a grant of \$2,000 to fund the Sweatshop Accountability Campaign. The campaign includes outreach and education to Chinese, Thai, Vietnamese and Latino

garment workers in California, specifically regarding the state's recently passed "wage guarantee."

## Coalition for the Human Rights of Immigrants

339 Lafayette St  
New York, NY 10012  
[www.itapnet.org/chri](http://www.itapnet.org/chri); [chri@itapnet.org](mailto:chri@itapnet.org)

The Coalition for the Human Rights of Immigrants began in protest to the increase of workplace raids by the INS in the New York area. Their mission is to build a movement to confront anti-immigrant legislation and build solidarity across immigrant and non-immigrant groups.

Resist's grant of \$2,000 will help the Coalition for Human Rights of Immigrants provide outreach materials as a part of their efforts to organize a march to demand amnesty for undocumented immigrants and full rights for all workers. The May 1, 2001 march to demand amnesty will take place in New York.

## Human Dignity Coalition

PO Box 6084  
Bend, OR 97708

[fordignity@aol.com](mailto:fordignity@aol.com)

The Human Dignity Coalition was founded in 1992 in response to the Oregon Citizen's Alliance anti-gay Ballot Measure 9. Their efforts are geared to address issues of racism, sexism and homophobia in Oregon schools and communities.

Resist's \$2,000 grant for general support will help the Coalition organize community forums, anti-oppression workshops and rallies for human rights.

## Kentucky Alliance Against Racist and Political Oppression

PO Box 1543  
Louisville, KY 40201

Almost 25 years-old, the Kentucky Alliance has been working to eradicate racism in the criminal justice system, on the police force, and in the schools in Louisville. Their work includes a newsletter, a youth leadership development project, and prison outreach committee.

Resist gave the Alliance a grant of \$2,000 for the Kentucky Alliance News, a newsletter designed to mobilize people of color and whites in the fight against racism.

This grant was awarded from the Leslie D'Cora Holmes Memorial Fund, which supports activities and organizations that embody the characteristics, values, and principles that reflect the spirit-filled mission of Leslie D'Cora Holmes, including: empowerment for communities and individuals; self-determination through education and community organizing; harmonization of diverse communities of interest; actualization and recognition of individual potential; courage of conviction; and pride in culture, community and self.

Resist is pleased to announce the addition of two staff people. Jacquie Bishop will manage the Pledge Program and perform other communications work. Amanda Matos-González is the new office manager/grant program associate.

## Join the Resist Pledge Program

**We'd like you to consider becoming a Resist Pledge.**

**Pledges account for over 30% of our income.**

By becoming a pledge, you help guarantee Resist a fixed and dependable source of income on which we can build our grant-making program. In return, we will send you a monthly pledge letter and reminder along with your newsletter. We will keep you up-to-date on the groups we have funded and the other work being done at Resist.

So take the plunge and become a Resist Pledge! We count on you, and the groups we fund count on us.

**Yes! I'll become a RESIST Pledge.**

I'll send you my pledge of \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
every month/two months/  
quarter/six months (circle one).

[ ] Enclosed is an initial pledge contribution of \$ \_\_\_\_\_.

[ ] I can't join the pledge program now, but here's a contribution of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ to support your work.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Donations to Resist are tax-deductible.

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