

Social Studies **A1**

Home Schoolers Learn How to Gain Clout Inside the Beltway

A Powerful Lobbying Force, Parents Wage Campaigns Through Phone and Fax

George W.'s 'Big Promise'

By DANIEL GOLDEN

Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

WASHINGTON — Driving here from their Maryland home one March morning, Tabatha Freivald asked her nine-year-old son, "How does Congress know what we want?"

Joshua thought about it, but was stumped. His mother supplied the answer: "Lobbying."

It was no idle question. The Freivalds were headed to the nation's capital as trainees for a little-known but potent educational lobbying force — home schoolers. Soon they joined 130 home-school parents and 40 children in a Holiday Inn conference room, praying and singing hymns as they learned such techniques as researching a congressman's voting record on the Web.

"When I started home-schooling, I was worried that we were withdrawing from society," says another trainee, Jo Hershey of Lancaster, Pa. "But now I feel we have the best of both worlds. We home-school, and we influence educational policy nationwide."

Do they ever. Although often portrayed as an isolated fringe group, parents who teach their children at home have become inside-the-Beltway pros, wielding enough clout to help block a Clinton administration bid for national student testing, launch their own political action committee and push their concerns into the midst of this year's presidential race.

Despite relatively small numbers — an estimated million to 1.5 million of the nation's 53 million schoolchildren are taught at home — their ability to overwhelm Congress and state legislatures with phone calls, faxes, e-mails and visits has won them a unique status as educational conscientious objectors, in the form of exemptions from compulsory attendance laws and state tests.

But home schoolers aren't content to be left alone. Suspicious of any federal intervention in what they consider a family matter, they are rallying resistance to the bipartisan coalition of government, business and academic leaders seeking more accountability and higher standards in K-12 education.

For instance, in a quiet alliance with publishers McGraw-Hill Cos. and Houghton Mifflin Co., home schoolers are assaulting the National Assessment of Educational Progress, a federal test given to a fraction of schoolchildren that is the preferred tool of policymakers for figuring out whether learning levels are rising or falling.

Pennsylvania Congressman Bill Goodling, chairman of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce, calls home schoolers the most effective educational lobby on Capitol Hill. They frequently volunteer in his election campaigns. "They know the issues," says Rep. Goodling. "And they have an outstanding phone network."

A study last year by two University of North Carolina sociologists concluded that home-schooling families are more likely than public-school families to work for political campaigns, contribute to candidates, participate in protests or boycotts, sign petitions and write letters to the editor. "We're the activists," says Michael Farris, president of the 60,000-member Home School Legal Defense Association in Purcellville, Va.

That activism often trumps public opinion. Ninety-two percent of Americans believe that home-schooled students should take the same standardized tests that are required of public-school students, says a 1999 Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup poll. Yet home-schooled children, like private-school students, are exempted from these tests, which public-school students in many states must pass to graduate.

This exemption has emerged as an issue in the presidential campaign. The presumptive Republican nominee, George W. Bush, rarely misses a chance to espouse accountability in education. As Texas governor, he toughened consequences for students who do poorly on state tests. If elected president, he says, he will boost funding for states with high test scores — and punish the laggards.

Nevertheless, Mr. Bush was among four Republican presidential candidates who addressed the legal-defense association's convention last September and expressed support for home schooling. And Mr. Bush has made what Mr. Farris, who has endorsed him, calls the "big promise": to shield home schoolers from all regulation, including testing mandates. Mr. Bush contends that home schoolers don't need to be held accountable in this way because they don't receive government funding.

Mr. Bush's supporters include some prominent home-school activists: Mr. Farris; Tim Lambert, the Republican national committeeman from Texas and head of the Texas Home School Coalition; and San Antonio hospital-bed magnate James Leininger. Dr. Leininger, whose four children have been taught at home, has given at least \$40,000 to Mr. Bush, \$50,000 to Texas Lt. Gov. Rick Perry and \$300,000 to other Republican committees and candidates since 1996, according to state and federal records.

The Democratic National Committee says it is inconsistent for Mr. Bush to exempt home schoolers from tests. More surprisingly, so does Chester Finn Jr., a former assistant U.S. secretary of education whom Mr. Bush identifies as an adviser. "If standards are important for all kids, they're important for home schoolers too," Mr. Finn says. "But it's a kind of accommodation that America frequently makes with strong-willed minorities. They protest loudly, they have very vigorous fax machines, and they are capable of mobilizing a very large fraction of their actual numbers."

Kristen Amundsen learned that the hard way. When the Democratic member of the Virginia House of Delegates proposed in February that home-schooled children take the state's Standards of Learning exams, which public-school students starting with the Class of 2004 must pass to receive diplomas, so many angry calls and e-mails poured into the legislature that her bill was scuttled without a vote. Its supporters, she says, were afraid to go on record against the home-school lobby.

Fear of similar initiatives on the federal level motivates the 170 people in the hotel conference room who are training to be volunteer lobbyists for the legal-defense association. "Any organization that's going to stand up and say, 'Hands off,' has my support," says Elizabeth McCormick, a home-schooling mother from Wisconsin.

The trainees are taught how to dress (suits for men, skirt and blouse or dress slacks for women), field frequently asked questions ("How are you going to teach calculus and physics?") and access the association's online library and Congressional directory.

If they pass muster with the association, the volunteers will be expected to spend four or five days a year on Capitol Hill, meeting each day with seven to 10 staffers for 20 minutes each. That includes children. The association encourages them to lobby with their parents so congressional staffers can see that they're not social misfits.

This early introduction to politics breeds the home-school activists of the future. With similar foresight, Mr. Farris, the legal-defense association president, is opening a college in Purcellville for home-schooled students in September. All students at Patrick Henry College will major in government, and as many as possible will be placed in public-sector summer jobs and internships.

The association is not popular with secular home schoolers. Many are alienated by its fundamentalist religious bent and three Rs approach to education. But the secularists also tend to be individualists. Their latest stab at a national organization, the National Home Education Network, doesn't take positions on issues.

Beth Richardson, a home-schooling mother, belongs to a splinter group that left the legal defense association's Rhode Island affiliate three years ago. The association fosters "groupthink," she says. "We feel that nobody should really lead, nobody should be in charge."

In practice, such iconoclasm leaves the legal defense association as the home schoolers' voice on Capitol Hill. Founded in 1983, it first worked in courts and legislatures to legalize home schooling, which came to pass in every state by 1993.

That year, in response to Bill Clinton's election, the association set up what one official calls its "one-two punch." Volunteers from nearby Comb the Hill, a more-distant members make their views known by phone, e-mail or fax. Members are organized by Congressional district, with a parent coordinator in each.

This system got its first test in February 1994, when George Miller, a Democratic representative from California, offered an amendment to an education bill known as HR6. Mr. Miller says he didn't intend the amendment, which specified that teachers must be certified in the subjects they teach, to apply to home-schooling parents. But the association, alarmed that the courts might interpret it that way, activated its network, alerting Christian-right radio shows as well.

Hundreds of thousands of phone calls deluged Congress and tied up Mr. Miller's office lines, forcing him to resort to a voice mail recording for five days. The amendment, which had sailed through committee, got only one vote on the House floor — Mr. Miller's. Since then, major federal education legislation has since contained boilerplate language exempting home schoolers. And Mr. Miller has become a valuable bogeyman for Christian-right fund-raisers, who elicit home-school contributions by warning that, if the Democrats win back the House, he would become the education-committee chairman.

Mr. Miller says that the association exaggerates potential dangers to justify collecting \$100-a-year dues from members. HR6, he says, "was a tuneup to see whether they could stampede the House. And the evidence is, they can."

As a nonprofit, the legal defense association can't endorse candidates, because it would lose its tax-exempt status. But the

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Home Schools

Why Russian Police Tried to Take Public The Privatized Baths

In Pavlovo, Sergei Vanin Ran
A Truly Vital Enterprise,
Into the Ground, Some Say

By ANDREW HIGGINS

Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

PAVLOVO, Russia — Police pounced early in the morning, armed with guns, a saw and orders from the Committee for Emergency Situations, a municipal crisis unit responsible for order in time of war, natural disaster and other calamitous events.

"We were warned that there could be an outbreak of civil unrest," says Georgy Chinyonkov, deputy mayor of this grubby central Russian town. "We had to act." Fearing for the welfare of Pavlovo's 75,000 residents, the local government declared a state of emergency and mobilized security, health and civil-defense officials for a swift strike.

Their target: Bathhouse and Laundry Complex No. 4.

Police moved in to secure the saunas. Their adversary, defiant bathhouse baron Sergei Vanin, was waiting — along with a camera crew from a local television station. "It's like 1917 all over again," thundered Mr. Vanin, "This is how all revolutions start."

Not quite. But he had made his point. Unnerved by the TV camera, the police retreated.

French revolutionaries stormed the Bastille. Lenin's Bolsheviks seized the Winter Palace. Here on the banks of the River Oka, 220 miles east of Moscow, the citadel that really gets the blood boiling is a malodorous concrete bunker equipped with two steam rooms, four broken washing machines and a pile of birch twigs ready for use as well-raising whips. (The town's other passions are ice fishing and scavenging at a municipal dump.)

Stripped bare, the issue is this: Can the cold hand of free-market economics keep people clean? The local government says no. Accusing Mr. Vanin of overpricing and underinvesting, it has tried to nationalize his bathhouse. Mr. Vanin sees a naked grab for power and property.

The dispute has left a lot of people steamed up. Mr. Chinyonkov, who heads the administration's property committee, is so stressed, he recently checked into a hospital with heart trouble. Mr. Vanin, who also has a stake in a gas station, says he fears for the safety of his family and wants to emigrate. "This fight will never end," he says. "I deserve a mention in the Guinness Book of Records."

A few days after the first abortive attempt to grab the bathhouse, police returned to complete their mission. With the TV crew gone, they sawed off a big lock on the door, banished Mr. Vanin and installed in his office a bureaucrat from the local housing department. "Red Flag at the Bathhouse," proclaimed a banner newspaper headline.

The soap opera has since come to involve much mudslinging, a bitter court battle, a hunger strike in the changing room, overheated letters to the press and an appeal to Vladimir Putin, Russia's

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Sergei Vanin

newly elected president, to lower the temperature.

Why such a froth?

"A bathhouse is not just a place to get washed," says Alexander Vereshchan, leader of the local Communist Party. "It is a place of celebration and ceremony." Every resident, he says, has a "basic human right" to stew in infernal heat, flail the flesh with bunches of twigs and plunge into tubs of freezing water.

Such rituals have been a feature of Russian life for centuries. In the early 19th century, a visiting French nobleman, Astolphe de Custine, noted that "so many individuals resort to these establishments, where the warm humidity is so favorable to insect life. . . that the visitor rarely departs without carrying with him some irrefragable proof of the sordid negligence of the lower orders."

After the 1917 revolution, the communists launched a bathhouse-building blitz, embracing singeing heat as an agent of hygiene and revolutionary ardor. When a competition was held in 1920 for the design of a model bathhouse, Leo Trotsky and several other Bolshevik leaders submitted grandiose entries.

The tradition transcends ideology. Boris Yeltsin is a devotee of *banyas* and, according to his former bodyguard, did much of his decision-making in a Kremlin bathhouse. Mr. Putin is a more buttoned-down sort but spent election day last month in a rural bathhouse.

As with many Russian passions, humdrum concerns about profit and loss have tended to wilt in the steam. In the Soviet era, that made little difference: The state footed the bill. Bathhouse and Laundry Complex No. 4 was owned and run by Pavlovo's municipal government. It kept prices low and did a communist youth camp's laundry free of charge.

The free market introduced the frigid grip of economic reality and exposed the rot afflicting one of Russia's most cherished institutions. Across the country, the state sold off its assets—oil wells, aluminum smelters, nickel mines and, in Pavlovo, four public bathhouses.

Mr. Vanin, the head of a small company called Giant, bought one of them, calculating that necessity—many of the town's homes have no hot water—and habit would fuel a booming business. Before long, he had a monopoly as rival bathhouses closed: One became a casino, another a drug dispensary. A third crumbled into a derelict ruin inhabited by drunken tramps.

But instead of making his fortune, Mr. Vanin lost his shirt.

Lyubov Shovina, editor of the Pavlovo Metallist, the local newspaper, blames "market romanticism." Privatized public hygiene, she says, will never produce a healthy bottom line. "He's a romantic. He should have given up long ago," she says.

At first, though, Mr. Vanin did turn a modest profit. Fuel was cheap, and the local government paid the entrance fees for needy residents. It also gave him tax breaks and intervened when the price of fuel oil skyrocketed: Officials ordered the bakery next door to supply steam. In return, Mr. Vanin pledged to keep the price of admission at just six rubles, then worth less than a dollar, and bathe pensioners free of charge.

After Russia's financial markets blew a gasket in August 1998, though, the heat was on. The bakery demanded payment for its steam. The local government, scrambling for cash, suspended bathing subsidies. Mr. Vanin sought to boost revenue by opening a bar. Bureaucrats accused him of illegal vodka trading and shut it down. Mr. Vanin

raised the price of admission. Residents started howling.

"This town needs a bathhouse like it needs oxygen," says Vladimir Plakhsin, general director of the steam-supplying bread factory. "But air is free and steam costs money. . . . It's a vicious circle."

Last spring, the local administration increased the pressure. A swarm of inspectors descended on Mr. Vanin's bathhouse. The health department declared it unsanitary. The fire department ruled its wiring unsafe. The tax people pored over its accounts. Mr. Vanin, his money and patience exhausted, retaliated by turning off the heat.

Authorities flew into a panic. The Committee for Emergency Situations called an urgent meeting and issued a decree placing Mr. Vanin's property under government control. "People had to wash somewhere; our grannies, our poor people had to keep clean," says Mr. Chinyonkov, the deputy mayor. "Private property is protected by the law . . . but this is a special situation: We had to open the bathhouse." He says the town risked an epidemic of scabies and civil disorder.

When Mr. Vanin won a court judgment declaring the expropriation illegal, authorities appealed. In protest, Mr. Vanin, his wife and their eight-year-old son staged a hunger strike. They suspended their fast after the court upheld Mr. Vanin's ownership. Authorities then accused him of abusing his monopoly and hauled him before a competition watchdog board to answer complaints of price gouging. He again prevailed.

But it was a hollow triumph. He won by proving that he was losing money. Soon afterward, the bathhouse's pipes burst and flooded the changing room with icy water. (Mr. Vanin suspects sabotage.) Unable to pay for repairs, he offered to sell his bath-

house back to the government for \$178,000. Authorities scoff at the price and, now that winter—the main bath-going season—is over, they want Mr. Vanin to stew in his debts. "Business is about taking risks," gloats Mr. Chinyonkov. "Maybe we'll open another banya."

At his home overlooking a cemetery, Mr. Vanin fumes while his wife watches a Mexican soap opera on TV. "I'm fighting a whole system," he says. "They could never let me win." He has put up a U.S. flag in his living room as a protest. In a wooden shed in the back garden, he is building a sauna.

line sometimes gets blurry. Its president, Mr. Farris, is also chairman of the Madison Project, a political action committee that says it funneled about \$350,000 in each of the last two Congressional elections to conservative Republican challengers for Democratic-held and open seats.

Mr. Farris expects the Madison Project to give between \$20,000 and \$30,000 to each of 20 candidates this year. It is also spinning off a home-school political action committee to focus on key congressional races. One likely target: Kansas Democratic Rep. Dennis Moore. In 1983, when Mr. Moore was district attorney of Johnson County, Kan., he brought—and won—a case against two children for truancy because they were home schooled.

Legislatively, home schoolers want to shrink the National Assessment of Educational Progress, or NAEP. "This will probably be the first issue you'll be lobbying on," Christopher Klicka, senior counsel of the association, tells the group at the Holiday Inn. "We noticed what we call 'NAEP creep.' It's the back door for another national test attempt."

Two years ago, home schoolers joined a right-left coalition—also including black and Hispanic Democrats in Congress—to defeat the Clinton administration's proposal for a national test for all students. Though participation would have been voluntary, home schoolers predicted the test would spawn a national curriculum.

Unlike that proposed test, NAEP doesn't give results for individual students. It provides state and national scores on various subjects, based on a sample of public, private, and parochial school students. (Home schoolers haven't participated because the survey is limited to schools.) The nonprofit Educational Testing Service in Princeton, N.J., designs NAEP under a five-year, \$75 million agreement with the federal government.

Now, the Clinton administration and Vice President Al Gore have proposed extra funding for states that do well on NAEP, which is due for congressional reauthorization this year. (Gov. Bush would use NAEP as one of several mea-

asures for rewarding states.)

Worried that NAEP will morph into a national test, home schoolers linked up with McGraw-Hill and Houghton Mifflin, which fear that an expanded NAEP would give states and local school districts less reason to buy their standardized tests, now used chiefly to measure individual student performance.

"I actually was shocked the first time I met with the test publishers," says Doug Domenech, director of governmental affairs for the home-school association. "I didn't think they'd buy our changes."

Executives at both CTB/McGraw-Hill, the McGraw-Hill division that sells the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills, and Houghton Mifflin, which sells the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills, confirm the alliance. Michael Kean, vice president of CTB/McGraw-Hill, describes NAEP as a competitor and says its state results are largely useless. "In terms of networking in Washington, the home schoolers provide some access," Mr. Kean says. "They carry some people power."

Keith Oakley agrees. As chairman of the Texas House of Representatives' public-safety committee in 1997, he sought to repeal a law that allowed parents to teach their children to drive, in place of certified instructors. Hundreds of home-schooling families packed the legislature in protest.

With the help of a state representative whose own son was home-schooled, the bill was trounced.

Chastened, Mr. Oakley cites the defeat as part of the reason he didn't seek re-election in 1998. "I've still got their tire tracks on my back," he says.

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Prison Labor AI With Unemployment Low, a New Group Is In Demand: Ex-Cons

Bosses Who Resort to Hiring Former Prisoners Find Many Are Ideal Workers

Ohio's Killer Car Salesman

By MARK TATGE

Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

LIMA, Ohio — Car dealer Tom Ahl's disinclination to hire ex-convicts diminished when the unemployment rate here dipped below 5%. Suddenly, people released from the three prisons that ring Lima represented a labor pool he couldn't ignore. Against his better judgment, Mr. Ahl hired a convicted killer as a car salesman.

That was three years ago. Today, the killer, Ben Laws, is the star of the 24-person sales force at Tom Ahl Buick GMC. And prison records no longer represent a red flag for Mr. Ahl, who has hired several other ex-convicts since Mr. Laws.

"I realize they are not that different than me," says Mr. Ahl, 49 years old. "We all deserve a second chance."



Ben Laws

The tight labor market is accomplishing what years of pleas and programs from penal experts and social scientists failed to do: It is persuading America's employers to hire ex-convicts. What statistics exist about employment of ex-prisoners suggest that companies are hiring them at higher rates than ever before. In New York, about 40% of offenders on parole are employed, up from 33% six years ago. The pool of ex-convicts is growing substantially because of the record number of felony convictions since the late 1980s. About 2.5 million felons were on probation or parole in 1998, up from 1.5 million a decade ago.

Few employers are happy about having to resort to this pool. But once they do, most are finding that despite their preconceived notions, the ex-prisoner isn't necessarily a repeat offender waiting to happen. Only 40% of ex-cons commit crimes again, and that number is much lower for those who find employment. "I don't think a person's history matters as much as who that person is," said Richard Lord, manager of a J.C. Penney store in Columbia, Mo., where unemployment of less than 1% has prompted him to hire ex-prisoners as sales clerks.

As industry hires more ex-prisoners, perceptions of them are changing in a way that could outlast the tight labor market and perhaps even lower the crime rate. "All the data and research indicate if you have a positive experience upon leaving prison — and getting a job would be just that — the chance of recidivism is going to be lower," says R. Dean Wright, a Drake University professor of sociology who specializes in penal issues.

Employers of ex-prisoners say it isn't simply a crapshoot as to who will and won't return to prison. As owner of a boat maker in Fort Dodge, Iowa, where unemployment stands at 2.8%, Lisa Wilson has hired felons convicted of robbery, burglary, drug possession and involuntary manslaughter. She doesn't regret a single hire. But she has a code — no sex offenders — and a test for prospective hires: "We walk through the plant at a brisk pace and see if they keep up," she says. "You can tell if they are going to work at a good pace by how they walk."

Signs of the Times

In a sign that the trend is picking up pace, consultants who specialize in figuring out which ex-cons can be trusted have begun to emerge. In Columbia, Mo., Dale Wolchko has placed ex-prisoners in jobs ranging from sales clerk at the local Dillard's department store to kitchen assistant at an Olive Garden restaurant. He looks for a positive attitude and a desire to please. "When a guy who has tattoos all over his body has gone through the trouble to wear a collar shirt with long sleeves, that is a good sign," said Mr. Wolchko, an employment specialist with the Job Center in Columbia, Mo., which helps ex-cons get work.

Some of these consultants, operating on the theory that you can't con a con, tout their own criminal records as credentials in selecting from among ex-prisoners. "I look for phd's — poor, hungry and driven," says Mark Paulus, a former police officer who spent three years in prison for theft and now recruits ex-cons for employers. "This economy has given offenders a chance to show they are not all Jeffrey Dahmer."

Labor demand is so hot these days that many workers don't hesitate to hop from job to job. But employers say that ex-prisoners often demonstrate extraordinary gratitude and loyalty in exchange for trust, responsibility and a paycheck. And an ex-con who is honest about his background is often less a gamble than the average candidate, bosses say. "I know more about them than I know about John Doe off the street," said Thomas Lewis, chief executive of Digital Design Inc., a Columbus, Ohio-based supplier of telecommunications wire.

Mr. Lewis' enthusiasm for hiring ex-criminals seems particularly remarkable. Ten years ago, his 25-year-old stepson was murdered. The case remains unsolved. But soon after the tragedy, Mr. Lewis began hiring ex-prisoners. He sees it as a way of reducing crime. "We've got to do something," he says. "We are throwing so much money at the prison system" and nothing seems to be working.

Before hiring ex-cons, Mr. Lewis scours the Internet, where he sometimes can find their criminal records. He talks to their parole officers. "I look for change in their behavior," he says. "What did they accomplish when they were incarcerated? Did they further their education?"

At his 65-person firm, Mr. Lewis has hired more than a dozen ex-cons. When his business got burglarized a while back, "everybody said it is those ex-cons you are hiring," he recalls. "It turned out to be one of my other employees."

Of course, some employers steer clear of ex-cons. "We are very selective in who we hire," and that doesn't include convicted felons, says Pam Kassner, spokeswoman for USG Corp., a Chicago-based building-supply company. Demand for USG's factory jobs, paying \$11 to \$20 an hour, is so great that the company doesn't have to turn to convicted felons.

Sometimes, employer fears turn out to be warranted.

Neill Davis owns the Learning Shoppe, a toy store in Panama City, Fla. Last year, he hired Henry G. Moore, a 55-year-old whom Mr. Davis had known for more than 20 years. "He was having trouble buying groceries," Mr. Davis explains.

Mr. Moore is a convicted child molester. Mr. Davis put him to work supervising the remodeling of a new store, and made sure Mr. Moore's job didn't put him anywhere near kids.

But midway through the remodeling, Mr. Davis was stunned to learn that Mr. Moore was allegedly paying female members of the construction crew overtime

wages in exchange for sexual favors. Moore was arrested in November and later convicted of embezzlement and sentenced to one year in jail. Mr. Davis says he's out \$18,500, and that he won't hire any more ex-cons. "It has made me a lot more cautious," he says.

Caution seems in order. Ronny Medina finished serving a six-year drug-dealing sentence in January 1997. During the next three months, seven employers turned him down, though all needed workers. The 28-year-old says he thought he would never get a job. Then building-supply maker Stark Truss Co. hired him. Three years later, he says he has been turning down better offers to go elsewhere. Stark gave "me a second shot on life," Mr. Medina, whose computer-programming job pays \$35,000, said in an interview a few weeks ago.

But now, Mr. Medina is in trouble again. Recently, Charter One Bank mistakenly deposited \$80,000 in his checking account. "I am not going to lie," Mr. Medina says. "I probably should not have spent it." But he did — at least \$22,000 of it, mostly on trips to see family in Honduras, on clothes and to pay off credit-card debt. "I kind of went crazy, like I had won the lottery," Mr. Medina says.

Charter One declined to comment, but it has told Mr. Medina and his employer that if the bank doesn't get the money back fast, it will press charges. Mr. Medina's bosses at Stark are disappointed in him — but, in a measure of the goodwill his hard work has inspired, they say they won't fire him, even if he's indicted. "My heart hurts for him," says Javan Yoder, a Stark executive vice president. "Ronny has been a good employee and even if he goes to prison, we would hire him back when he gets out."

That kind of dedication to ex-con employees seems surprisingly common. After his release from prison on a heroin-dealing conviction, Bob Whaley did such a fine job for Decor Lighting in Cincinnati that owner Robert Carter felt compelled to elevate him. Particularly impressive, Mr.

Home schoolers No. 1 on college-entrance test

Top traditional peers 3rd year in row

By Andrea Billups
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Home-schooled students have scored higher than their traditionally educated peers on the ACT, one of the nation's two major college-entrance exams, for the third consecutive year.

While the average ACT assessment score was 21 nationally, home-educated students scored an average of 22.8 — yet another academic benchmark that has given the movement increasing credibility and attention.

"Parents are doing a great job of educating their own children," said J. Michael Smith, president of the Home School Legal Defense Association in Purcellville, Va. "This explains why many highly selective colleges are recruiting their complement of home schoolers."

Mr. Smith called 2000 a "banner year" for home schoolers, citing their first-, second- and third-place finishes in the Scripps-Howard National Spelling Bee and their second-place finish in the National Geography Bee sponsored by the National Geographic Society.

The number of home schoolers taking the ACT this year, 4,593, represents a 41 percent increase over last year, ACT officials said.

Across the nation, a record 1,065,138 high school students took the 2000 ACT exam, which includes curriculum-based achievement tests in English, mathematics, reading and science. The tests measure achievement, as well as preparation and readiness for college course work. The scale for scores is 1 to 36.

Traditionally schooled students scored 21 in 1998 and 1999. In those two years, home-schooled students scored 22.8 and 22.7.

Nationwide, ACT scores have remained constant for the last four years, but the past decade marks the first time that scores have risen consistently, ACT officials said.

"We haven't seen a decline in the national average since 1989," said Richard L. Ferguson, president of ACT Inc., formerly known as the American College Testing assessments.

Average composite scores for girls remained steady this year at 20.9; composite scores for boys

rose to 21.2 from 21.1 in 1999. Overall, minority students scored slightly higher on this year's ACT exam.

New Hampshire (22.5) and Oregon (22.7) posted the highest 2000 ACT scores. The lowest were earned by students from Mississippi (18.7) and the District of Columbia (17.8).

The ACT, much like the more popular SAT test, the other major college-entrance exam, is used not only for admissions, but for making decisions on scholarships and course placements.

ACT officials said this year's results showed that students were taking more rigorous course work in preparation for college.

"Ten years ago, fewer than half the graduates reported taking what we call 'core curriculum,'" Mr. Ferguson said. "This year's graduates set a new record in core-course participation, with slightly more than 63 percent reporting that they took a full complement of courses."

While students today are better prepared for college, they are not following labor forecasts when making career choices, said ACT officials.

In 1999, 4.5 percent of test-takers reported interest in technology careers, while in 2000 that fig-

ACT TEST SCORES

Recently released scores on the ACT college-entrance exam showed that:

■ Home-schooled students posted the highest composite scores nationally at 22.8, on a scale of 1 to 36.

■ Traditionally educated students scored 21.0 for the fourth consecutive year.

■ Students in Maryland scored 20.7; Virginia, 20.5.

■ Students in the District of Columbia earned the lowest scores in the nation at 17.8.

The Washington Times

ure rose to just over 5 percent.

"These small increases suggest that more students are realizing that the computer field offers significant opportunity, but the situation remains little changed," Mr. Ferguson said.

Results from the 2000 SAT exam will be released Aug. 29. A spokeswoman from the College Board, which administers the SAT, said a question on home schooling was recently added to the student information section of the exam.

Edue -
Home Schooling

Was smooch kiss of life for Gore?

By Jennifer Harper
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

A kiss used to be just a kiss. Now it constitutes a media event.

Al and Tipper Gore exposed the world to podium passion when the pair kissed with great vigor before the vice president's big speech last Thursday night. The moment has since caused a rumpus in print and broadcast.

Was it real or staged, tacky or cute? Was it the mark of a man of passion or some old coot all full of himself? Would there be, uh, lip bounce?

While new polls showed the vice president pulling into a virtual tie with George W. Bush, and the two candidates spent yesterday criss-

crossing the country drumming up support, the only topic on everyone's lips was "the kiss."

The press has hissed and buzzed about the kiss — which the New

ON MEDIA

York Times clocked at 3 seconds long — for four days now.

It was, the Associated Press noted, "a lingering liplock" and "the passionate kiss he sprung on his stunned wife before his convention speech." The kiss was called disgusting, wonderful, hot, defining and just plain

"yucky" by various observers.

Yesterday morning, Mr. Gore addressed his lips on all three networks.

"Everyone was talking about it over the weekend," said ABC's Diane Sawyer, advising Mr. Gore that 107 articles had already been written on the topic. "Did you plan it?"

"No," replied Mr. Gore, 52. "I think you can tell from watching it that it was completely spontaneous. I was just overcome with the emotions that I was feeling. . . . It was kind of an outpouring there that just moved me to express my love for Tipper."

It was the same story on NBC.

"I didn't map out some strategy. I was really overcome by the emotions in the hall," Mr. Gore said, again denying it had been scripted into the program, which included a family slide show, a group hug and much self-congratulatory hoopla.

Over at CBS, Mr. Gore again assured one and all that the spooning was not an attempt to shirk his old "wooden" image.

It might be a quick fix, though. In their zeal to reinvent Mr. Gore as an alpha male by November, his campaign handlers have floated several trial balloons past the American public in the past year.

In a dubious moment, Mrs. Gore declared her husband "sexy" in a TV interview, which caused considerable glee among his critics. The idea has since been adjusted to be "sexy" within the confines of his own home.

The Gore's nuptial bliss has been fodder for much campaign content lately, a deliberate contrast to the travails of the Clinton marriage. Some analysts believe it is yet another canny way for Mr. Gore to distance himself from the Clinton White House.

There's more, though.

This year, Mr. Gore sported a new earth-toned wardrobe, tight blue jeans, cowboy boots. He hollered on occasion, and gesticulated. Earth tones, however, were absent during the convention, replaced by a classic navy suit and red power tie.

The podium kiss, meanwhile, has amassed some negative points.

It was, noted the New York Times, "more suited to the third date than the fourth night of a convention," and a mark of "kissy-face" and "exhibitionist" conventions.

"Memorable but embarrassing," said CNN's Robert Novak.

"Here's a guy who says the Playboy Mansion's not an appropriate place for him to go to somebody else's fund-raiser because it's too racy, and then he gives an X-rated kiss on national television," noted Jack Germond of the Baltimore Sun.

The romantic moment did not get good marks at the London Daily Telegram, either.

Perhaps Mrs. Gore thought "passion could transform the frog into the prince," wrote Mark Steyn, who theorized that Mr. Gore's

"problem is not that he's dull as the media keeps telling him, but that he's insecure about seeming dull."

Which can take its toll.

"You must remember this: a kiss is just a kiss, a sigh is but a sigh. And as the Dems left Los Angeles, that sound you heard is one long, weary, resigned sigh," Mr. Steyn concluded.

Democratic delegates, party loyalists and a few commentators bought into the kiss.

"Wow, he's got fire," said a woman delegate from Wisconsin. "Nobody can say he doesn't have a personality."

"Did you see his kiss," gushed a peer from Texas. "I was, like, o-o-o-o."

Before moving on to regulation campaign mode yesterday, Mr. Gore did a little damage control. After reaffirming that the buss was genuine, he tweaked his story a tad.

A man of passion, after all, should have a little of the playful rogue in him.

Mr. Gore declared yesterday his kiss was not meant to sway the public but "to send a message to Tipper." On cue, Mrs. Gore later assured reporters yesterday that she had indeed received that message.

The couple crossed over from politics to pop culture when "Entertainment Tonight" declared that the "gripping lipper with Tipper" was right up there with other famous televised kisses, like the one between Lisa Marie Presley and Michael Jackson six years ago.

"But will Al's big mouth-move help him politically?" asked the "ET" reporter.

We won't know for months. Both public image and campaign message is a cumulative process. Perhaps it would be best to wait until at least Halloween to determine how Mr. Gore and his passions have played out in the collective voter psyche.

The kiss, for now anyway, is still just a kiss.

*Educ -
Home
Schooling*



No place like home

A year ago, a young man by the name of Jedediah Purdy surprised the book world with the publication of his first major work. *For Common Things: Irony, Trust, and Commitment in America Today*. The book was an insightful, well-written call for a return to core values and an abandonment of an ironic stance toward life.

Critics wondered: Just who is this 24-year-old kid who has given a fresh voice to the Y generation? It turns out that Purdy is a graduate of Harvard and is now studying law, environment, and social values at Yale. But the twist that caught people's attention was the fact that Purdy grew up in the ragged foothills of West Virginia and, until he became a young man, was taught at home by his parents.

Until then, "homeschooling" had been brushed aside by many as a fringe movement, encouraged mostly by white evangelicals who have never been accorded the social respect they deserve. Purdy forced critics to take another look at the issue. Was something going on there that they were missing?

This month, the answer came in: Yes indeed. homeschooling is a phenomenon that deserves a far more serious look. The evidence piled up at the 73rd Scripps Howard National Spelling Bee, an annual event that attracts some of the smartest kids in the nation. This year, there were 248 participants at the national run-off; some 27 were homeschoolers, up from 19 last year.

Ahead of the class. The winner was George Abraham Thampy, age 12, a homeschooler from the St. Louis area who, just a week earlier, had finished second in a national geography competition. Thampy's parents are both from Kerala, India, and they began homeschooling their son, along with six siblings, after an incident of school violence scared them away from public education. Notably, the second- and third-place winners were also homeschoolers.

Jed Purdy and George Thampy have both written moving accounts of their educational experiences. It is easiest to call them "homeschoolers," says Purdy. "Really, though, our parents did something more radical. They freed us to learn."

Educators do not yet have enough data from homeschooling experiments to draw definitive conclusions. The National Home Education Research Institute reports that between 1.3 million and 1.7 million school-age children—

about 3 percent—are currently homeschooled. Apparently, these children have not been as closely studied as they should be. But the data we do have show that the numbers are growing rapidly, from 7 percent to 15 percent a year. Lawrence Rudner, of the University of Maryland, has found that the median income for homeschool families (\$52,000) is higher than that of all families with children (\$36,000). Further, about a quarter of homeschool students are enrolled one grade or more above their age-level peers, and their median scores on tests are "well above" those of public- and private-school students.

While these results may not be definitive, they certainly suggest some obvious implications for public education.

We have entered a period of great experimentation in the way we teach the young—"a thousand flowers are blooming"—and we ought to push forward on as many fronts as we can. The more leeway the public school authorities and the unions give to education, the better. Home schools are joining the ranks of charter schools and vouchers as critical paths toward a better educational environment.

The anecdotal evidence from homeschooling also serves as a strong reinforcement for a point that Theodore R. Sizer and Nancy Faust Sizer make in their recent book, *The Students Are Watching: Schools and the Moral Contract*. Two of the most respected figures in education, the Sizers argue that both the classroom and, importantly, the school itself should be small enough that a kid can receive individual attention.

Most high schools are organized like factories, discouraging a personal relationship between students and teachers. The Sizers write: "The loads per teacher are normally heavy—100 to 175 young people during each semester—and the rapid reassignment of students from course to course makes it likely that a large percentage of students are not known well. This creates a situation which is, unfortunately, welcomed by many students: anonymity means their freedom from all sorts of scrutiny and obligation."

It's a long distance from anonymity in a classroom to a child working alongside an adult each day, but it's a path that we must learn to travel. The future will belong to those children who, like Jed Purdy, are "freed to learn." ●

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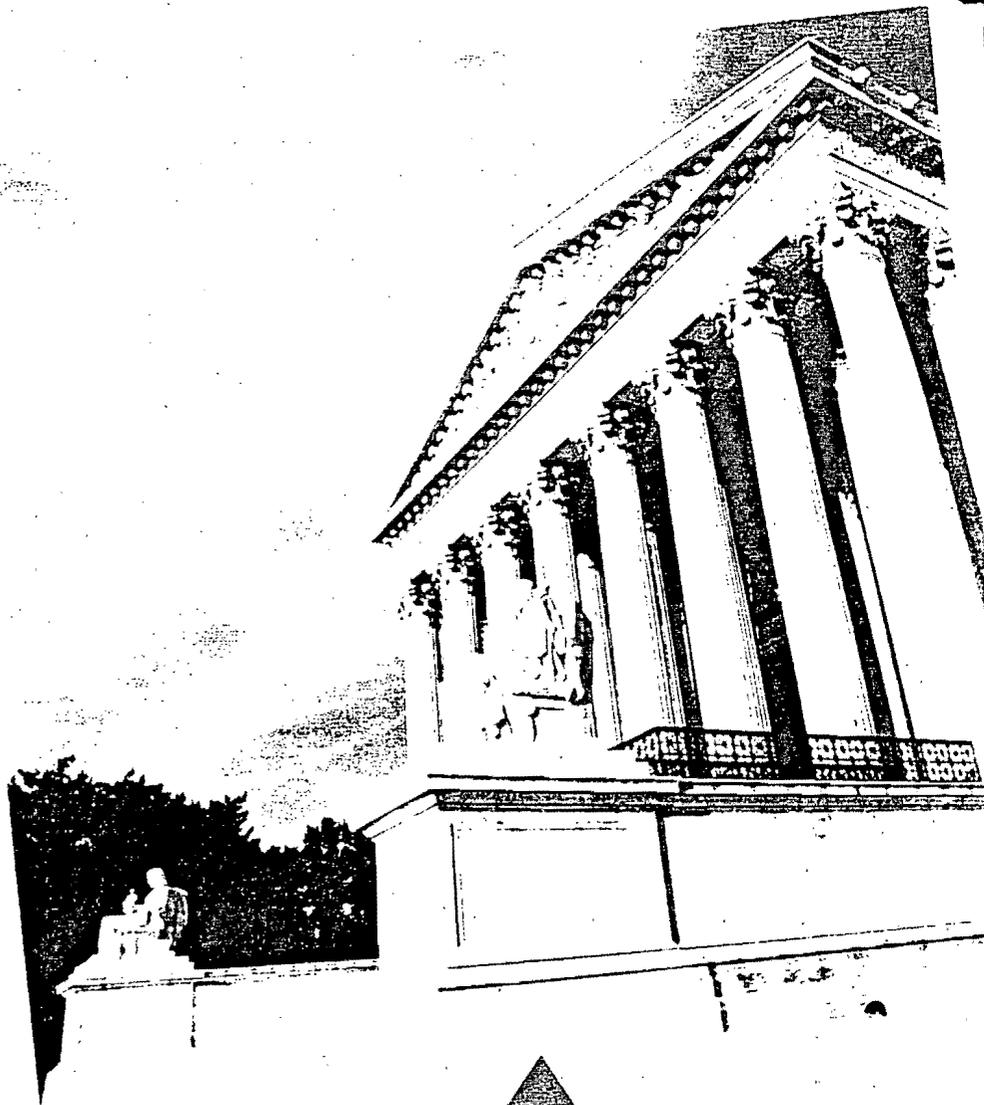
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GOVERNMENT

The current
Supreme Court is
activist, but centrist.

One strategic
appointment by the
next President could
shift the balance.



The Tipping Point

