



Whatever Happened to Goals 2000?

If you want to know why we should get rid of the Department of Education, a little look at what the educators have done in the recent past, with the sanction of a Republican president, ought to convince us that the Department is useless and ought to be abolished.



Back in February 1990, instead of trying to get rid of Carter's Department of Education, President Bush proposed his Goals 2000 initiative in his State of the Union address. I then expressed my usual skepticism over any government program that promises to "solve" our education problem with catchy slogans. In an open letter to the president, I wrote:

The present education establishment is simply too big, too self-serving, too financially secure, too corrupt, too monopolistic, too utopian to do the simple, efficient job that needs to be done. What is needed is realism and good faith. Realism requires that we see our education system as it is and not continue this endless charade of reforms that waste billions and do not produce the desired results. Good faith requires that we acknowledge the right of a free people to seek alternatives to failed government institutions and programs.

Well, ten years later, what were the results of the billions spent on the much publicized goals? The first goal was that all children would be ready to learn by the time they were ready to attend school. I wrote: "The problem is not that the children aren't ready to learn, it's that the teachers aren't ready to teach! Children are ready to learn the moment they are born. In fact, by the time they are of school age they have learned to speak their own language quite fluently. Every child, unless born with a serious defect, is a very efficient self-teacher and self-learner — a veritable dynamo of language learning. Yet, after one year in a government school many of these same intelligent children become 'learning disabled.' How come?" By the use of such lunatic programs as Whole Language, Invented Spelling, the New New Math, and other academic insanities, that's how!

The next goal was that by the year 2000, the high school graduation rate would be 90 percent. I asked: "But how is it to be achieved if so many children are academically crippled by what is done to them in the first three grades? *U.S. News* reported in 1987 (May 18) that: 'Nationwide, nearly a million students graduate each year unable to read and write.' So graduation is not a guarantee of competence. But the educators may very well increase the graduation rate by simply giving out more meaningless diplomas." As for graduation stats, the highest rate achieved was 77 percent in 1969. In 2006, it was down to 69.2 percent, and in 2007 it was down to 68.8 percent.

The third goal was supposed to prevent giving out meaningless diplomas. President "Read My Lips" Bush stated: "And we're going to make sure our schools' diplomas mean something. In critical subjects — at fourth, eighth and 12th grades — we must assess our students' performance." That spurred the



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development of the national assessments, such as the NAEP (National Assessment of Education Progress), which continue to report student deficiencies, which then justify spending lots more money on education. The recent cheating scandals are making a mockery of the NAEP program.

The next goal proposed by the President was that by the year 2000, American students would be first in math and science. As of 2000, we were nowhere near that goal, and in 2007 we were still nowhere near it. According to the 2007 International Math and Science Study (TIMSS), U.S. Eighth Graders ranked 11th overall among all nations, 9th in Math, and 11th in Science. And yet we spend more money on education than many of the countries in the top 10 combined. Who were the top ten? Here they are in the order of their academic achievement: Singapore, Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, England, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovenia, Hong Kong, and Russia.

Another goal was that every American adult would be a skilled and literate worker by the year 2000. In September 1993, the Fed Ed Department released the results of its 14-million-dollar survey of adult literacy in America. The results were shocking: 40 million American adults were found to be functionally illiterate. Another 50 million fared only a little better. Only about 34 to 40 million Americans could be considered literate. According to Brenda Bell of the National Alliance of Business: "We have estimated that only about 25 percent of the adult population is highly literate." No wonder we have to import so many foreigners to take the high tech jobs that go wanting.

In November 2007, the National Endowment for the Arts issued its own grim report on the present state of American literacy, *Reading at Risk*. According to the report, the number of 17-year-olds who never read for pleasure increased from 9 percent in 1984 to 19 percent in 2004. About half of Americans between the ages of 18 and 24 never read books for pleasure.

Endowment Chairman Dana Gioia stated: "This is a massive social problem. We are losing the majority of the new generation. They will not achieve anything close to their potential because of poor reading." The survey found that only a third of high-school seniors read at a proficient level. "And proficiency is not a high standard," said Gioia. "We're not asking them to be able to read Proust in the original. We're talking about reading the daily newspaper."

Unfortunately the endowment's report did not state the cause of this decline in national literacy: the refusal of our educators to use the time-tested, traditional reading instruction methods that once made Americans the most literate people on earth.

The Eighth Annual Report of the National Goals Panel made the results official: We are far from outpacing the world in math and science. In fact, in some areas, U.S. students have fallen farther behind. In reading, NAEP scores of 12th graders fell and showed no improvement in the other grades. Little or no progress on goal four: an improved teaching force; goal six: every adult will be literate; goal seven: schools will be safe and drug free. In fact, drug use among students is on the increase.

And so, what does the nation have to show for all of the money spent on Goals 2000? Nothing! However, the education establishment is richer, the assessment bureaucracy larger, the Fed Ed budget bigger than ever, and the American people are as bamboozled as ever. But as Lincoln is reported to have said: "You can fool all of the people some of the time, you can fool some of the people all of the time, but you can't fool all of the people all of the time."

But when it comes to public education, it's apparent that you can fool most of the people all of the time.



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