Education Expert Says College Freshmen Read at Seventh-grade Level

Dr. Sandra L. Stotsky, professor emerita at the University of Arkansas, recently said that Renaissance Learning's latest report revealed that a large number of college freshman are reading at a seventh-grade level.

Stotsky, who received her Ed. D. from Harvard, is a well-known and respected figure in the world of education. She served on the Common Core Validation Committee in 2009-10 and, along with colleague James Milgram, professor of mathematics at Stanford University, refused to approve Common Core's standards, which she called "inferior."

In a recent interview with *Breitbart Texas*, Stotsky said:

> We are spending billions of dollars trying to send students to college and maintain them there when, on average, they read at about the grade 6 or 7 level, according to Renaissance Learning's latest report on what American students in grades 9-12 read, whether assigned or chosen.

Stotsky also pointed out that as a result of students reading on a lower level of difficulty and complexity in high school, colleges now assign a lower reading level of books as summer reading to incoming freshmen.

Stotsky expanded on her statement to *Breitbart*: "The average reading level for five of the top seven books assigned as summer reading by 341 colleges using Renaissance Learning's readability formula was rated 7.56."

A level of 7.56 reflects reading on a level of grade 7 at about the sixth-month mark.

Some of the statistics cited by *Breitbart* came from "How Colleges Are Dumbing Our Kids Down, Too, and What We Can Do About It," an article written by Stotsky posted online by Pioneer Institute last November 3. In that article, Stotsky wrote:

> It's not just Common Core's standards and the curriculum teachers are putting into place to address those standards that are dumbing our kids down. Our colleges are contributing in their own way to the problem by the books they assign incoming freshmen to read in the summer for their first "common experience."

Stotsky continued by noting the reading levels of 53 of the most frequently mentioned titles listed in the NAS (National Association of Scholars) report, *Beach Books 2013-2014: What Do Colleges and Universities Want Students to Read Outside Class?* The readability levels of 23 of the 53 titles were available, with an average ATOS book level of 6.8. (An ATOS [Advantage-TASA Open Standard] level on a book indicates how difficult the text is to read.) The highest ATOS book level found was 10.2 and the

lowest ATOS book level found was 4.0 (fourth-grade reading level!).

As Stotsky summarized these findings:

> Based on the information available, it seems that our colleges are not demanding a college-level reading experience for incoming freshmen….
>
> However, our colleges can't easily develop college-level reading skills if most students admitted to a post-secondary institution in this country read even high school-level textbooks with difficulty. Strong growth in reading starts in the elementary school.

Among the many recommendations Stotsky makes in her article, one stands out: "Require a college-level book as summer reading for newly admitted college freshmen and let the high schools from which their freshmen graduated know its title and reading level."

Stotsky has an impressive resumé in the field of education, adding much credibility to her observations. Prior to joining the faculty at the University of Arkansas in 2007, she was a research scholar in the School of Education at Northeastern University in Boston from 2004 to 2006. From 1984 to 2000, she was a research associate at the Harvard Graduate School of Education affiliated with the Philosophy of Education Research Center (PERC). She served as editor of *Research in the Teaching of English*, the research journal sponsored by the National Council of Teachers of English, from 1991-1997.

Stotsky served as senior associate commissioner in the Massachusetts Department of Education from 1999 to 2003, where she directed complete revisions of the commonwealth's preK-12 standards for every major subject.

Stotsky is the author of *Losing Our Language* and was editor of *What's at Stake in the K-12 Standards Wars: A Primer for Educational Policy Makers.*

With such credentials, Stotsky's evaluation of the lack of preparedness of incoming college freshman for being able to handle college-level work cannot easily be dismissed.

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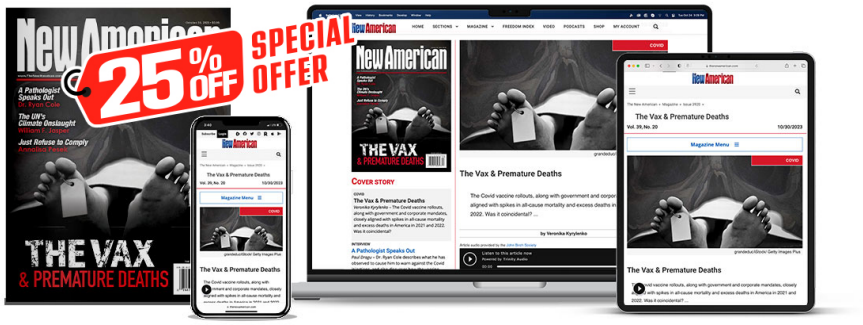

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