

Public schools in limbo

Unions can fix educational standards



CALEB MCDANIEL

In recent years, educational standards in public schools have become extremely lax. At playing limbo, the bar continues to drop lower and lower. These flexible standards are frequently waived to school administrators. Since students are required to pass, they rarely fail. Their self-esteem is stroked, their parents are pleased and their teachers are less taxed. At the moment, everyone is happy. In the long run, no one benefits from educational guidelines that prove to be no limit to how low they can go. School requirements which bend to the abilities of students may be the way out of educational slumps, but a broad-minded perspective can see they are not real solutions. When standards are lowered, students suffer. Unfortunately, mainstream proposals to increase educational accountability have not been promising. Many think the government should implement rigid, nationwide standards. Critics should then be forced to measure themselves against state-mandated sticks, and their hands should be bound if they fall short of the mark. George W. Bush's recent policy suggestions reflect this unyielding carrot-stick approach. If elected president, would threaten to withdraw funding from "failing" schools, giving them an incentive to meet pre-determined criteria of student achievement. This kind of punishing accountability is the wrong path to a worthy destination. By hinging school success on standardized tests, Bush and others would lay from their own create the problems that first made id. "I think if you're testing standards popular. Exams like each, your focus is on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) stress basic skills at the expense of general academics. Roughly, here is how it works. The TAAS puts pressure on schools to raise TAAS scores; the schools, in turn, put pressure on teachers to teach TAAS. Embattled teachers, at risk of losing their jobs, are forced to comply with such stultifying conformity limits in their jobs. Ultimately, a rigid standard with no flexibility is just as bad as a flexible standard with no rigidity. Fortunately, the gathering clouds of national crisis have a silver lining.

And ironically, the emerging saviors of the educational standard are those who were once its fiercest enemy — teachers' unions.

Traditionally, unions have strongly opposed strict state-enforced measures of student achievement.

But in a recent issue of *The New Republic*, Sandra Feldman, President of the American Federation of Teachers, charts a moderate course between inflexible government standards and unregulated teacher autonomy.

She proposes that schools and unions draft contracts together outlining general teacher expectations.

"However — and here's the important difference — the streamlined contract will leave the specifics to teachers and principals at each school," she said.

That "important difference" is nothing short of the two-fold answer to public education's prayers.

First, Feldman and union leaders recognize the drawbacks of having standards set only by the state.

"Teachers who have taught under these conditions will tell you this approach doesn't work," Feldman said.

Secondly, unions also realize that lax standards and poor student performance reflect badly on their profession. According to the current issue of *The American Prospect*, National Education Association President Bob Chase recently admitted this.

"There are indeed some bad teachers in America's schools," Chase said in a speech, "and it is our job as a union to improve these teachers or — that failing — get them out of the classroom."

The floating standard can only be stopped if, with the unions' help, schools and the government meet in the middle.

Educational reformers with foresight will recognize this as the only road to school betterment. When standards are imposed from above by the government, teachers are pressured and students are cheated. When standards are invisible, teachers are too relaxed and students are cheated.

But when teachers' unions and the government cooperate to draft educational standards, schools are given the flexibility they deserve within the boundaries students need. When teachers are free to teach, students will be more likely to learn.

Caleb McDaniel is a junior history major.



RUBEN DELUNA/THE BATTALION

THE DREADED FIFTEEN

Freshmen can avoid weight gain with creative dieting

Freshmen are easy to pick out around campus. They are the ones with freshly ironed clothing who actually show up to class on time. Within the next year — or perhaps even the semester — these newcomers will begin to blend in more with their surroundings. Many things will make this change apparent, but one of the most loudly lamented is the nearly inevitable weight gain. The "Freshman 15" has practically gained urban legend status across campuses nationwide.



JESSICA CRUTCHER

Fortunately, avoiding the "Freshman 15" is really not that difficult. In fact, by following this simple plan, a freshman will almost be guaranteed to actually lose weight.

The best way to keep one's appetite (and weight) in check is to drink alcohol. A lot. There are several ways to go about this plan.

First, try to stay drunk 25 percent of the time. This is only two days out of the week (i.e. the weekend). This method should produce a hangover at least as long as the time you spend drunk.

For those who do not know, hangovers equal lying in bed and wishing for death, which in turn equals no appetite.

Do the math. This means that 50 percent of the time you will have no appetite, equalling 50 percent less calories.

This method is not fool-proof. Some people argue that they never get hang-

overs (the key to restraining the appetite), no matter how much they drink.

Never fear — there is a remedy to this problem. One of the biggest complaints of college students is that purchasing beer and alcohol gets extremely expensive.

However, you can turn this to your advantage. If you spend all your money on alcoholic beverages, you will not be able to buy food.

This does not mean you will starve, just that you will be forced to buy a meal plan and eat at Sbis Dining Hall. Somewhere between the "macaroni surprise" and the veggie burgers, most people either lose their appetites or decide to stick to the canned fruits and vegetables.

Either decision will help you keep from gaining weight, but the safest alternative is probably to just go home and drink more beer.

Some people will inevitably balk at this form of "dieting." One of the most commonly expressed concerns is "Doesn't beer have a lot of calories?"

This is a valid question. However, this diet provides alternatives for the extremely health conscious.

First, drink light beer if the calories make you uncomfortable.

Second, try looking at beer from a different perspective entirely. Since beer is a yeast-based product, it could technically be viewed as a member of the bread group. Therefore, if you drink a six-pack, you will have satisfied the recommended daily whole-grain allowance.

The other popular criticism of this diet refers to the legendary "beer belly." Many people are worried that while they may

not gain weight, they will still end up with a flabby body or pudgy stomach.

Luckily, even this unsightly circumstance can be avoided by doing two simple exercises. They can even be done while drinking, so as not to lose valuable weight-suppressant time.

The first exercise is widely called the "kegstand." It involves drinking beer in the handstand position, which will help build the triceps and biceps as well as increasing the sense of balance.

Another easy exercise can be done by simply attaching weights to the bottoms of beer cans or shot glasses while drinking. The amount of weight added should depend on the person. There are many other possible exercises, but these two, when done properly, have been shown to best maintain the desired weight level.

The "Freshman 15" is certainly a daunting foe that could terrify the most self-confident person. However, by following this diet, it should be a problem students will never be concerned about. By the end of the semester, a freshman should have gained and maintained the perfect body.

Of course, it should be noted that the illegality of this diet for most freshmen could have a serious side effect — incarceration. Not that this would be all bad — jails are rumored to have great gyms. On the other hand, a more legal manner of maintaining weight might be advisable. It all comes down to which is preferable — 15 pounds or 15 MIPs.

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Mike Luckovich ATLANTA CONSTITUTION



VIEW POINTS

Content vs. context

Political correctness has, once again, gone too far. A recent production of a musical version of Mark Twain's *Tom Sawyer* in Mesa, Ariz. has halted due to concerns that the play is culturally insensitive. Educators say villain "Injun Joe" is portrayed as a savage, wears few clothes and carries a knife.

This is not an issue deserving of such a national response. What needs to be remembered is that characters are drawn as they are drawn with a purpose. In Joe is characterized as a savage because Mark Twain was (as he usually did) criticizing the society for allowing that stereotype.

Exposing insensitivity in order to depict it is not a bad thing.

Stephen Sondheim's *Assassins*, the actor of John Wilkes Booth, on the actor having assassinated President Lincoln, offers a moving justification of actions. Then Sondheim has the character become caught up in his own logic. Booth accuses Lincoln of being a high and mighty n-----r lover," destroying the sympathy the audience has not for Booth, but for bigots everywhere.

Political incorrectness is included to show just how incorrect it is. Cultural insensitivity is not determined content, as the politically correct would people believe, but by context.

True, the inclusion of questionable material may be culturally insensitive, but that cannot be determined without looking at the intent of the author.

— Chris Huffines

Bye-bye Buchanan

Once again, Pat Buchanan is making rumbly about leaving the Republican Party and running with another party, possibly the Reform Party. Many ranking members of the GOP have rushed to speak with Buchanan on the issue. For the sake of the party, their message to Buchanan should be "Don't let the door hit you on the way out."

Many in the GOP while not having any love lost for Buchanan, do not want to see him leave because he will take some of the most conservative voters with him. However, the loss of Buchanan will make the GOP more moderate, and not just in terms of looks. Buchanan has been able to force portions of his agenda in the Republican Party platform at both the 1992 and 1996 conventions, which the Democrats were able to take advantage of.

A more moderate political approach is more likely to succeed in this day and age. If this party is going to support George W. Bush all the way, it should let Buchanan walk away. It will find out that it will gain more votes than it will lose.

So go, Pat go. Go very far away.

— Mark Passwaters

Fish Camp counselors react to column

In response to Eric Dickens' Sept. 6 column.

Dickens portrays Fish Camp in a demeaning manner that insults not only the dedicated Fish Camp staff, but also any freshman who had a positive experience at Fish Camp.

The Fish Camp staff prepares for a minimum of six months before the "intense four-day affair" that serves to introduce Aggie spirit.

If the staff were not excited about the freshmen and passing the Aggie spirit, why should there be a Fish Camp?

The article makes a true statement that "freshmen do not usually have a fully conceived idea" of what college life is like.

Each semester 42,000 Aggies have different classes, different parking problems and many other different obstacles to overcome.

But Fish Camp is not one of those obstacles.

Fish Camp is a support group for the freshmen that helps them overcome the obstacles college life throws in their path.

Dickens says Fish Camp "staff should get a grip on what daily life in Aggieland is really like" and should not "mislead freshmen."

As a 1999 Fish Camp counselor, I take offense to being labeled as an idiot and as a hypocrite.

Surely the sampling of 900 Aggies has the same grip on college life as the rest of the student body, and surely these same 900 Aggies are not the only people with Aggie spirit.

What better place to teach Aggies about Aggie spirit and Aggie traditions than at Fish Camp.

Hopefully, the more than 2,000 freshmen unable to attend Fish Camp will be introduced to the Aggie Spirit and tradition in the same positive manner that Fish Camp and its staff present them.

Texas A&M is known worldwide for its spirit and traditions. If the incoming freshman class does not catch the "undying" Spirit of Aggieland,

the Aggie spirit will undoubtedly die and A&M will be no different than t.u.

Karen Meyer
Class of '02
With 31 signatures

It is a sad day in Aggieland when one of our own can say "this University is not much different from anywhere else in the world." Texas A&M is different from anywhere else in the world and the reason is because we make it so.

Our "reality" is the reality we have chosen and continue day to day. We (all Aggies) are the ones who build the Bonfire, stand in silence on a Tuesday night and answer "here" under the glow of a candle.

Texas A&M is different. I have been involved with Fish Camp as a counselor for two years now and the portrait Dickens paints is simply untrue.

The freshman class is the future of this University. They will be the keepers of the spirit and the leaders of tomorrow. Every Aggie that becomes a Fish Camp counselor does so

Patrick Bresinger
Class of '01

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