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EDUCATION DEPT HEARINGS ON PUPIL RIGHTS

The U.S. Department of Education recently concluded a series of seven hearings on proposed regulations for the Protection of Pupil Rights Act. It is a mystery why no regulations have yet been issued to enforce this Federal statute which has been law since 1978.

This Pupil Rights Act forbids schools to subject students to psychological examination or treatment which requires the pupil to reveal information concerning "political affiliations," "sex behavior and attitudes," "mental and psychological problems potentially embarrassing to the student or his family," or "critical appraisals" of behavior and attitudes of family members, without "the prior written consent of the parent."

At these day-long hearings in Seattle, Phoenix, Kansas City, Pittsburgh, Orlando, Concord, NH, and Washington, DC, parents presented a mountain of evidence of abuses in the classroom which would be in violation of the Pupil Rights Act IF it were enforced. Their testimony was revealing and often shocking.

One woman told that she had two abortions while she was in high school and was held up before the class by her teacher as a role model of "responsible" sexual activity. She said classroom programs encouraged her promiscuous behavior and, now that she is married and has children of her own, she does not want them to be led down the same road.

Another parent testified that her son committed suicide after classroom courses and school assignments reinforced his negative attitudes and depression.

A teacher from Detroit said she was trained to be a "change agent," rather than an instructor; she was taught how to alter her pupils' values. She said, "the whole philosophy of education has become 'it's what you feel and not what you know,' and has gone 180 degrees from learning facts."

One mother told how her fifth grade boy was taught a Federally-funded "drug education" curriculum; however, of the 152 pages in the textbook, only four pages were on drugs, while the rest were on changing attitudes. The pupils were told "there are no

right or wrong answers" to such ~~statements~~ questions as: Is it OK to try anything once? Should parents have more than two children? Is a drug dealer just a business person like anyone else? Is it impossible to become an alcoholic just on beer? Is it all right to lie, cheat and steal once in a while or only at certain times?

Many parents told about the "survival game" in which the children are required to decide who lives and who dies from a list of persons. The survival question can be posed in different situations, such as, we can let only three people inside the fallout shelter while four others must be left outside to die; or, the lifeboat (or space ship) will hold only five out of ten people and the extra ones must be shoved out to die; or, seven people have a terrible disease and there is enough medicine to cure only three. The pupils debate and discuss which lives are worth saving and which are not.

Many parents told about "death education," in which pupils are required to contemplate death and dying. Sometimes children are instructed to write their own epitaphs. One parent told of the traumatic experience in which her child was told to write a graphic description of the death of his pet dog.

Some parents told about classroom courses in sex which require embarrassingly explicit nonjudgmental discussion of every variety of sex act, inside and outside of marriage, and which probe into family attitudes and behavior that are none of the school's business. Some parents told of the depressing content of the nuclear war courses which probe into the political attitudes and ethical values of the students.

These 1984 hearings revealed that many schools now look upon education as a sort of psychological treatment or psychotherapy, which is precisely what the Pupil Rights Act forbids. Many schools have replaced cognitive education with affective education. Whereas cognitive education addresses the child's intellect, affective education addresses the child's feelings and emotions.

Back in 1978, former Senator and educator Sam Hayakawa spoke out strongly against what he called the "heresy that rejects the idea of education as the acquisition of knowledge and skills" and instead "regards the fundamental task of education as therapy." He said that this inquiring into attitudes and beliefs, and psychic and emotional problems, is a "serious invasion of privacy." The need for regulations for the Pupil Rights Act is greater than ever and they should be issued immediately.