from Phyllis Schlafly

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Math Achievement or “Feel Good Math”?

Fewer than one in seven students in the 4th, 8th and 12th grades can do mathematics at or above their grade level, and more than half are two or more grade levels behind, according to the 1990 NAEP Mathematics Assessment.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress, which conducted the survey, is a federal agency that since 1969 has been monitoring American students’ educational achievement (or non-achievement). NAEP tested 26,000 students in grades 4, 8 and l2 from 1,3OO private and public schools in 4O states and territories.

Although only 11 percent of 4th graders passed a test of 4th grade arithmetic, 62 percent “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that they were “good in mathematics.” I suppose this shows the impact of the self - esteem classes that now begin in kindergarten.

Only 14 percent of 8th graders could pass a test based on math concepts that should have been learned in the 5th, 6th and 7th grades, and a third of them flunked the 4th grade test. But 63 percent esteemed themselves good in math.

The 12th grade results were the most dismal of all. A pitiful 5 percent of high school seniors passed a test of standard high-school algebra and geometry, and less than one-half of 1-percent knew any calculus.

More than half (54 percent) of 12th graders were still flunking the 8th grade test. But 57 percent of these same high-school seniors thought they were good in math!

The simple arithmetic that children should learn in the elementary grades is absolutely essential to survive in our society. Everyone needs this skill in order to make small purchases and get the correct change, and to know whether you have enough money in your bank account to write a check that doesn’t bounce.

Al Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers, points out that most of the horror stories about the failure of the public schools focus attention on the

plight, of poor minorities. The typical middle-class parent thinks his child is doing fine because he is getting good grades and being admitted into college.

According to Shanker, middle class children are not doing OK at all; they are being cheated in their education and deceived about the results. It's obvious that the test scores are fraudulent when every state, and nearly every school, reports that its students score "above average" -- a statistical absurdity.

Don't assume that middle class kids must be doing all right just because they get into college. Shanker points out that the reason most students get into college is that most colleges have dumbed down their requirements, both for admission and for graduation. Only a handful of the nation's 1,400 colleges and universities are truly competitive.

Shanker concludes that the overwhelming majority of U.S. students -- about 90 percent -- are not learning much in public schools, and they spend a large part of their college years learning what they should have learned in high school. So what are they doing all those hours and years in public schools?

Take, for example, the 4th grade, where children ought to be reviewing already-learned multiplication tables and learning how to do long division and fractions. Here is a typical 4th grade exercise -- I didn't make this up; it's an actual example of a questionnaire given to some 4th graders in Oklahoma.

The pupil is told to blacken circles to reveal whether the answer to the following statements is "never, sometimes, or a lot": "I go to church or synagogue. I talk to my parents about my problems. My parents make me follow certain rules. I have to be home at a certain time. I go to parties. I go on dates. The kids at school like me. I feel lonely."

Then the child is told to reveal "Within the past year how often have you smoked cigarettes? Chewed tobacco, snuff? Drunk beer? Drunk wine coolers? Drunk liquor? Smoked marijuana (pot)? Sniffed glue, 9ds, etc.? Used other drugs?" The test then asks each child to answer the same questions in regard to his friends.

Here's more. The 4th graders are asked "Where do kids your age get…" each of those same drugs. And then, "Why do kids your age start to use…" again, the same list of drugs.

This is some of the privacy-invading nonsense that uses up so much class time and is generously funded by some of the more than one billion dollars that has flowed out of the U.S. Treasury under the Drug Free Schools and Communities Act.

Phony drug and self-esteem curricula and surveys occupy hours and weeks of classroom time in the public schools. Teaching children to feel good about poor achievement is a cheat on students, parents and taxpayers.