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DUMBING OF TEXTBOOKS -- OR NUMBING OF STANDARDS?

Since Secretary of Education Terrel H. Bell got front-page publicity with his slashing attack on textbook publishers, accusing them of "dumbing down" their books to accommodate pupils at the bottom of the class, many parents have been taking a look at their children's school materials. They are finding that far more is wrong with schoolbooks than the limited vocabulary, the choppy and childish sentences, and the boring stories.

Here's a check list of what parents can look for if they take a long, hard look at elementary school materials. The "it" in these questions can be a textbook, a teacher's manual, a workbook, or mimeographed papers used in class.

Is it anti-parent? Does it lead the child to believe that parents are ignorant, old-fashioned or out of touch with the modern world? Does it suggest that the child not tell his parent what he is taught in class?

Does it instruct the child not to take home the textbook or questionnaire or other school materials? Does it encourage the child to seek advice from organizations or adults other than his parents?

Does it present information which depresses the child, leads him to a negative view of himself, his family, his country, or his future? Does it produce fear and despair in the child, instead of faith in his family and country, and hope in the future?

Is it preoccupied with death and tragedy? Does it encourage the child to dwell on unhappy or tragic events, or to foster and retain bad feelings such as hate, anger, and revenge? Does it require the child to write morbid exercises, such as his own epitaph or a description of the last person who died in the child's family?

Is it anti-parent and anti-religion by leading the child to reject the moral standards and values he has been taught in home and church? Does it lead the child to believe that there are no absolute moral standards, no eternal verities, but that the morality of an act depends on the situation?

Does it present courses about sex, alcohol, or illegal drugs in such a way as to encourage experimentation? Does it accustom the child to the use of gutter language?

Is it anti-religion? Does it lead the child to believe that religion is unimportant or out-of-date? Does it censor out all knowledge of the importance and influence of religion in American history?

Does it force the child to make choices in hypothetical situations which require him to decide that it is all right to lie, cheat, steal, kill, have sex outside of marriage, have an abortion, or commit suicide? Does it force the child to confront adult problems too complex and unsuitable for his tender years, such as nuclear war?

Does it force the child to answer questionnaires or surveys that probe into the child's or his family's attitudes, feelings, behavior, customs, or political preferences, all of which invade the family's privacy and are none of the school's business?

Does it force the child to write journals, diaries or compositions about such things? Does it require classroom discussion of personal and private matters which embarrass the child in front of his peers?

Does it spend precious class time on lessons, exercises and questions about feelings and attitudes, rather than teaching knowledge, facts, and basic skills? Does it force the child to play psychological games in class or to engage in role-playing of unhappy personal problems caused by divorce, premarital sex, pregnancy, or VD?

Does it blur traditional concepts of gender identity and force the child to accept the radical feminist notion of a gender-free society in which there are no differences in attitudes and occupations between men and women? Does it induce role reversals by showing women in hard physical-labor jobs and men as house-husbands?

Does it debunk or censor out our nation's heroes such as George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, but spend much time and space studying controversial contemporary figures? Does it lead the child to believe that some kind of global or world government would be preferable to the American constitutional republic?

Does it lead the child to believe that government spending programs are the formula for economic prosperity, instead of hard work and perseverance? Does it lead the child to believe that disarmament rather than defense can prevent a future war?

Are you shocked by these questions? If you would read the testimony presented by hundreds of parents and teachers at the seven Department of Education Hearings held in March this year, you would know that they describe what's really wrong with education.