from Phyllis Schlafly December 9, 1993

OUTCOME-BASED EDUCATION MEANS MORE "DUMBING DOWN"

At a Washington gathering recently, someone asked me what I think is the biggest issue in America today. When I replied "Outcome-Based Education," I was greeted by blank stares from the people "Inside the Beltway" who had never heard of it.

Outcome-Based Education (OBE) hasn't made it onto the national TV network nightly newscasts, but it's almost the only issue that's guaranteed to bring out a crowd of hundreds of people in the highways and byways of America.

It's another issue that pits the Establishment against the people. No, I don't mean the financial establishment that showed its muscle for NAFTA, or the political establishment that perpetuates itself in power in our nation's Capitol, or even the media establishment that presumes to dictate our culture and entertainment.

Outcome-Based Education is the current demand made by the public school establishment, that network of tax-salaried people who have had total control over the spending of hundreds of billions of education dollars and now have circled the wagons to avoid relinquishing their control to mere parents, taxpayers or other citizens.

In the face of the obvious failure of the public schools to get a passing grade on the mission to which they were assigned, the public school establishment invented outcome-Based Education as a mechanism to maintain their control and conceal their failures. OBE is billed as "reform," but it's really a plan to rearrange the chairs on the deck of the sinking Titanic.

OBE is based on the theory that every child can achieve a

designated "outcome" it just takes some children longer. So, all students are allowed to take tests over and over again until they pass, and no student can advance until all in the group pass.

Under OBE, the student has no incentive to study, work hard, and pass a test, because he can always take it again later. Since the primary goal is to develop self-esteem and to be part of the group, rather than to learn or to achieve, OBE bans competition, honors, and traditional subject matter courses and grades.

To enable every child ultimately to attain the "outcomes," the outcomes must be "dumbed down." Many outcomes are also subjective, not capable of measurement, and frequently psychological and attitudinal.

OBE can usually be identified by its report cards. Los Angeles and Houston are among the school districts that have adopted a new grading system that makes it easy for students to get high marks, and almost impossible to get an F.

Los Angeles students are given grades such as "S" meaning "area of strength," "G" meaning "shows growth," and "N" meaning "needs improvement." Since self esteem has replaced self achievement, "F's" are out and the Washington, D.C. schools have declared it impossible for a student to fail an elementary grade any more.

School board elections this fall show that, when OBE is put directly to the voters, it is trounced.

The suburban school district in Littleton, Colorado had been lauded by the National Education Association as a national model for outcome-Based Education. It was described by *Education Week* as having "pioneered new performance assessments and standards for high school graduation."

The voters, however, were not impressed. In the November 2 election, they gave a 2-to-1 mandate to three new school board members to replace OBE with a traditional emphasis on the three R's. The victorious candidates ran on a back-to-basics platform opposing OBE.

The Colorado Education Association fought hard to defeat the back to-basics candidates. All 15 elementary school principals signed an open letter backing the union's candidates, and the high school principal openly endorsed them.

The teachers union called in People for the American Way (PAW) to use its favorite scare tactics against the anti-OBE candidates, and PAW accused them of being "fundamentalists" and "members of the religious right." The accusation didn't persuade the voters because (a) it was false and (b) the real issue was OBE versus the 3-R's.

OBE will continue the dumbing down of the public schools, which have already been dumbed down by at least two years from what they were 30 years ago.

Cornell University sociologist Donald Hayes just released a scholarly report showing that schoolchildren's declining verbal skills are linked to increasingly simplified schoolbooks. Hayes says that first-grade reading books are now written at about "the level at which a farmer talks to his cows."

OBE does nothing to upgrade academic standards. Instead, it is designed to conceal the progressive lowering of standards.