School-To-Work

Will Track and Train,

Not Educate

by Phyllis Schlafly March 12, 1997

School-to-work (STW) is the most recent "reform" that is "restructuring" the nation's public schools. It's not just a fad like self-esteem; it's a systemic change in the schools' mission, the curriculum, and its lasting effect on students.

The School-to-Work Opportunities Act, signed by President Clinton in 1994, codifies the concept that schools should track and train students into specific jobs instead of educate them so they can make their own life choices. STW is being implemented nationwide by STW state laws, federal and state regulations, and the federal mandates that encrust the granting of federal STW funds.

Dictionary definitions explain the difference. To educate means to develop the faculties and powers of a person by teaching. To train means to cause a person or animal to be efficient in the performance of tasks by responding to discipline, instruction, and repeated practice.

That's exactly what STW is: "performance-based" training of students to move into predetermined jobs. This is in contrast to the traditional purpose of education: the older generation imparting basic knowledge and academic skills to the younger generation in order to enable each child to achieve his God-given potential.

STW changes the traditional function of education from academic (reading, writing, math, science, history, etc.) to mandated vocational training to serve the workforce. Reducing the class time spent on an academic curriculum makes time available for field trips, encounter groups to discuss feelings, and long sessions with counselors.

STW laws and regulations require vocational training to start "at the earliest possible age, but

beginning no later than middle school grades." The federal STW statute even says that "career awareness" should "begin as early as the elementary grades."

How many elementary or even middle school children do you know who are capable of choosing their lifetime career? Obviously, these decisions will be made by the school, not by the individual or his parents.

The STW plan is for workforce development boards, in a "partnership" between school and business administrators (usually appointed by the Governor, bypassing all elected bodies), to determine what jobs are needed in the coming years. The schools then construct the curriculum to meet these governmentally determined workforce needs, and use counselors and computers to subject students to "job matching" and tracking.

The goal is not to graduate highly-literate individuals but to turn out team workers to produce for the global economy. In the STW scheme, individual grades are inflated or detached from academic achievement, individual honors are eliminated or deemphasized, and instead we have such "team" techniques as group grading, cooperative learning, peer tutoring, horizontal enrichment, block scheduling, job shadowing, mentoring, and job site visits.

Computers are an essential component in STW. A computer profile is to be inputed for every student containing an awesome array of personal and private family information. The data will be available to the school, the government, and prospective employers.

The social engineers driving school-to-work include Robert Reich, Ira Magaziner, and Marc Tucker. They dream of using the schools to implement industrial policy, a.k.a. national economic planning, following the German and East European model.

Robert Reich's and Ira Magaziner's 1982 book entitled "Minding America's Business" bemoans America's "irrational and uncoordinated industrial policy" and that we lack a single agency to monitor our domestic economy and adjust it to changes in the world markets. They think we need an economic czar.

In his 1983 book "The Next American Frontier," Robert Reich wrote enthusiastically about Germany and Japan, where government-managed industrial policy uses loans and subsidies to shift resources into favored industries, and "induces" disfavored firms to exit from the industry. He praised the high percentage of their national economies that is poured into numerous, generous, tax-financed social

benefits and "elaborate programs of job training," which he claimed resulted in low unemployment.

Marc Tucker, in his 1992 book "Thinking for a Living," expressed admiration for the Soviet bloc countries. He wrote that they "have done a better job than we of building human-resource development programs."

The alleged success and efficiency of the German and Eastern bloc countries, so highly praised by Reich, Magaziner and Tucker, is now on the rocks. Germany's unemployment rate is 12 percent and the extravagances of the welfare state are heading that nation into economic decline.

School-to-work is the "human-resource development" segment of the Reich-Magaziner-Tucker strategy to inflict America with a national industrial policy dictated by government economic czars. These elitists have convinced themselves that they possess "extraordinary insights," but the world's experience teaches us that central planning is a failure everywhere in the world.

School-to-work is a direct threat to the individual student, his privacy, his goals, and his acquisition of an education that can help him reach them. It's also a direct threat to freedom as we know it in America.