left to the NEWS

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by PHYLLIS SCHLAFLY
Box 618, Alton, Illinois **62002**
Phone: 618-462-5415

S A T SCORES

This is the time of year when thousands of eager high school students are anxiously taking their Scholastic Aptitude Tests or eagerly waiting for the results. The SAT scores are the principal admissions examination used by most colleges because they show each individual's scholastic aptitude in relation to his or her classmates all over the country.

For the last thirteen years, the SAT scores have been telling us something else that they certainly were not designed to show. Every year from 1963 through 1976 revealed a significant drop in average SAT scores in both the verbal and the mathematics tests.

This steady drop in SAT scores is an embarrassment and a puzzlement to the educators who have been telling us that students have been getting smarter. The SAT scores prove that the students of the 1970s simply do not do as well in verbal and mathematical skills as students in former years.

One cause could be that children now watch television instead of reading books. A more basic cause is that, since students lack real proficiency in reading, it is not the pleasure that it ought to be.

When educationists eliminated phonics from the teaching of reading and substituted the look-say or whole-word method, and when they replaced drilling in multiplication tables with the new math, they handicapped our students as much as if they had put a indfold over one eye of every child.

When a student hasn't been taught phonics, he cannot spell and he has an artificially limited vocabulary. When a student hasn't memorized addition sums

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and multiplication tables, he cannot solve the simple arithmetic problems that confront him in everyday life.

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Under the look-say or whole-word method of teaching reading, first graders are subjected to volume after volume of boring, repetitious, stupid books from which they are taught to memorize a few dozen words by guessing at them from accompanying pictures. THe childre.n aren't taught the fundamental phonetics of the English language.

The result is that many chi ren do not learn to read at all, and many more do not learn to read well. They limp along from year to year, frustrated and discouraged. R ading is not a pleasure but a chore.

When they get to high school, they have had so many years of what is called the controlled vocabulary that they cannot read the classics; so they are fed great literature that has been rewritten in the vocabulary of the elementary grades.

It is easy for the doubting Thomases tomeasure the decline in reading skills by comparing currently used readers with the old McGuffey readers that were used in this country early in this century. The McGuffey readers are about two years advanced over modern readers of the same grade level in all reading skills, including vocabulary, comprehension, spelling, writing, pronunciation, grammar, and intellectual and spiritual content.

It is no wonder that Dr. Sidney P. Marland, Jr., former U.S. assistant secretary for education, said that "Americans in significant numbers are questioning the purpose of education and the competence of educators." Our spending on education has increased seven times faster than our population, but we are getting less than ever for it.

Progressive educationists seem to adhere stubbornly to the dogma that anything new must be superior to whatever is old. It isn't, and the SAT scores prove it. What education needs is a fresh willingness to replace the failures of the present with the successful teaching techniques of the past.

It will be interesting to see if the 1977 SAT scores show an upturn or a downturn from the last thirteen years.

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