from Phyllis Schlafly

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Pennsylvania School Battle Boils Up

We all want school reform, right? But in Pennsylvania, reform apparently means abandoning all pretense that public schools are to provide an “academic” education. Henceforth, the schools' avowed mission will be to conform student attitudes and behavior to prescribed social norms.

At issue is whether a high school diploma in Pennsylvania will continue to mean that a student has taken 21 courses, called Carnegie units, or instead will mean that a student has met 15 goals and 51 “learning outcomes” newly formulated by the state department of education.

The traditional Carnegie units include four years of English, three years each of mathematics, science and social studies, two years each of arts and humanities, a year of health and physical education, and several electives. These are widely accepted standards of student achievement which college admissions tests can measure.

The goals and “learning outcomes,” on the other hand, are vague, subjective, devoid of accountability, and largely based on attitudes, values and behaviors instead of on academic subject matter. This new system proposed by the state Board of Education, called “outcome-based” education, will make it virtually impossible to conduct tests, standardized or otherwise, that allow comparisons with students in other schools or states.

After a two-and-a-half hour debate on April 6, the Pennsylvania State House voted l-50 to 47 to delay implementation, pending further study, of the state board. regulations mandating “outcome-based education.” But on April 16 the Independent Regulatory Review Commission voted 3 to 2 with one abstention to approve the new regulations anyway.

This oversight commission (whose members were appointed by the Governor) had previously opposed the outcome-based system, but Governor Robert Casey is believed to have applied political pressure to win speedy approval. The matter is now scheduled to go to the Governor for his signature, but the State Legislature

returns to Harrisburg this week and is expected to investigate why its April 6 vote has been so blatantly defied by the executive branch.

when the Pennsylvania state department of education first proposed converting to outcome-based schooling last fal1, it had 575 outcomes on the list of requirements that students would have to meet, before graduation, but the outcomes have now been condensed to 5L. Most of the goals are affective, which means that they concern attitudes, values, feelings and emotions rather than academic achievement.

A look at some of the 51 “learning outcomes” listed by the Pennsylvania Department of Education makes clear that they cannot possibly measure students' performance objectively. Here are some examples.

“All students develop interpersonal communication, decision making, coping, and evaluation skills and apply them to personal, family, and community living.” “All students understand and appreciate their worth as unique and capable individuals, and exhibit self-esteem.”

“All students relate in writing, speech or other media, the history and nature of various forms of prejudice to current problems facing communities and nations, including the United States.” “All students relate basic human development theories to caregiving and child care strategies.”

“All students apply the fundamentals of consumer behavior to managing available resources to provide for personal and family needs.” “All students make environmentally sound decisions in their personal and civic lives.”

What alarms thoughtful parents is not only the concentration on “politically correcty” attitudes and feelings, but the fact that graduation, as well as promotion from one grade to another, are linked to requirements about behavior change. Students will have to meet vague objectives relating to self-esteem, ethical judgment, and adaptability to change, and will be subjected to remediation if they don/t meet these requirements.

Parents trying to rear their children with strong religious values wonder: Is willingness to go along with the crowd viewed as positive or negative? What types of programs will be used to change behaviors that are deemed incorrect?

Parents have organized to oppose outcome-based education under the name Pennsylvania Coalition for Academic Excellence. Started in January, the Coalition already has 50,000 members and it is storming the Legislature.