Are All Children "At Risk"?

October 12, 1995 by Phyllis Schlafly

A new mantra has crept into the stream of discourse about government's role in social services. Identified as an African proverb, it is, "It takes a whole village to raise a child."

This statement is false, if not ridiculous. It takes a family, especially a mother and a father, to raise a child, and most parents don't want the whole village butting into the raising of their children because they know that, if the village usurps parental prerogatives, the village will teach children behaviors the parents don't want them to learn.

The "whole village" mantra is not merely a rhetorical flourish or poetic license. It is the indicia of a major initiative of the social services professionals to expand their turf at the expense of parental authority and responsibility.

The key to catching most or all schoolchildren in the social -- service web, whether their families want such services or not, is the categorization of children as "at risk," a magic phrase used to authorize the state to do whatever it wants with children. The more children who are designated as "at risk," the more personnel and funds the public school can demand.

When a survey was taken this year in Utah, the school districts officially reported that 47 percent of the school-age population is "at-risk." Before you start feeling sorry for the nearly one- half of Utah children who are designated as "at risk," consider some of the factors that produced this incredible percentage.

"Lack of or limited parental involvement with children and schools, Lack of or limited parental support of schools, Death in the family, Lack of or limited parenting skills, Generational low expectations, Grandparents raising grandchildren, Home-Schools, Parent(s) work out of town, Student sent to live with relatives, Discrepancy in readiness at preschool/kindergarten entry, Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), Lack of goals or unrealistic goals, Gender disorders, Working students."

The incredible figure of 47 percent, and the wide-ranging and subjective factors that produced it, make it clear that "at risk" is just a device to bring most if not all children into the social services web, to hire

more personnel and demand more tax dollars. Bills are flooding into state legislatures across the country which have the purpose or effect of turning public schools into social service centers.

These bills are starting to refer to public schools as "Community Centers" or "Family Resource Centers." These new-style public schools are planning to provide "early intervention services from prenatal care through 5 years of age," infant daycare, parenting education, health care services for children including immunizations, and "any other services."

Here is the sort of language commonly used in proposed state legislation. It's easy to recognize the phraseology as designed to give open-ended power to the schools to designate more and more children as "at risk."

"Collaborative service delivery system," "coordinated services for children at risk," "integrated service delivery initiatives," "on site, coordinated early intervention and case management services to children at risk," "services delivered by local teams comprised of representatives from public health, mental health, public assistance, child abuse services and school personnel."

This type of language is endless. "Early intervention and integrated service delivery with the pre-school population," "Prenatal to grade 12 coordinated service delivery," "comprehensive, team driven, community based service delivery," "coordinated, comprehensive continuum of services to assist children and their families in coping with the multiple stressors of the 1990s."

It is clear that the facilities for "at risk" children are designed to be located in the public schools, although that is usually stated obliquely by giving the authority to the State Superintendent of Public Instruction. Such bills usually have no provision for requiring parental consent -- for medical care, distribution of contraceptives, or psychological or psychiatric testing or treatment.

It is only a matter of time before legislation will attempt to bring private schools and homeschools into their web, since the bills usually use such language as "all children deserve to be cared for," or "all children will be healthy and contributing members of society," or "a child has the right to receive these services from the proper authorities," or "families will receive the support they need to raise healthy children."

Congress should repeal and/or defund all federal laws that have anything to do with curriculum, standards, or provision of social services in the schools. State legislatures should repeal and/or defund all

legislation that has anything to do with changing schools into social welfare agencies or community service organizations.

No issue in America today is more important than education. We must not allow the public schools to teach children that parents are irrelevant and that the government will be their baby-sitter, their nanny, their doctor, their nurse, their psychiatrist, and ultimately their employment agency. Our goal must be to teach all children how to read, to know about our great American heritage, and to be educated to fulfill their individual God- given potential.