The Phyllis Schlafly Report

Leftist Math Doesn't Compute

By John and Andy Schlafly

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Kids are back in school now, but schools are not back to excellence. Our students lag far behind the rest of the world in basic learning, including a dismal ranking in the bottom third in math skills among industrialized nations with whom we compete.

Math is a casualty of the Leftist takeover of education, which makes diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) more important than teaching basic skills. When schools postpone algebra to the ninth grade, students never complete the basic math they need for a STEM-related job.

In their mindless push for greater diversity, New York Democrats recently dropped the words "math and science" from the name of their once-elite Math & Science Exploratory School in Brooklyn. Test scores at that middle school have plummeted from more than 95% of 7th-graders passing the math exams a half-decade ago to merely 69% passing last year.

The school used to select students based on academic performance, thereby giving families an incentive to compete for admission. But under the DEI approach imposed by New York's Democrat politicians, the renamed Exploratory School now uses a lottery to select its students, and 52% of accepted students must come from unstable, impoverished, or non-English speaking families.

Math is one of the biggest casualties. The Left disliked how some groups do better at math, particularly advanced math, and this conflicts with the DEI political agenda.

Math competitions are usually won by boys, for example, so prizes and awards are not inclusive. The Leftist solution is to eliminate honors and awards, lumping all the kids together in one dumbed-down math program, and the end result is less achievement.

Studies showed that white and Asian students were enrolling in precalculus math classes at rates of two to four times the rates of black and Hispanic students. To conceal this uncomfortable discrepancy, the DEI ideologues ended the tracking that enables advancement by talented math students, and started requiring everyone to take low-level math classes in high school even though they are too easy for some.

School districts in Democrat-controlled cities, particularly in California, have imposed "de-tracking" to choke off opportunities for high-achieving math students. The purported goal is

to provide the same access to advanced math to all students, but the effect is to hold back talented students who have the aptitude to qualify for higher-level classes.

A Stanford study earlier this year showed that de-tracking causes smarter kids to be denied an opportunity for advancement, while yielding no measurable improvement for the kids who were left behind in regular classes. If anything, their progress got worse rather than better.

“Leveling,” another name for de-tracking, prevents students with greater math aptitude from progressing to more advanced material. Distraught parents in the ultra-Democratic enclaves of Silicon Valley and San Francisco filed lawsuits earlier this year to challenge this liberal ideology imposed on the schools.

An impressive total of 50 San Francisco parents filed their lawsuit in March to challenge the leveling or de-tracking policy. The parents want the public schools to restore an Algebra I class to middle school, and stop requiring talented students to retake the same class in ninth grade if they have previously passed it.

On Aug. 29, a Palo Alto school board meeting heard from two-dozen students complaining about the de-tracking. One pointed out how a math placement test appeared designed to block accelerated course enrollment.

There is not enough time for students to get to calculus in high school if they are held back by being forced to take Algebra I as freshmen. In Japan and other countries that are far ahead of us in math education, students learn algebra in middle school.

Recently our students’ math skills have fallen another half-year below where they are expected to be, according to a report. Some blame this on the Covid pandemic, during which many schools shut down for too long, but a bigger cause is liberals prioritizing equity over education in public schools.

The math achievement in our country has dropped to its lowest level in two decades among fourth-grade and eighth-grade students. Many pre-teens cannot even do basic subtraction with two-digit numbers.

For decades public colleges were forced to offer remedial math programs to help students catch up to where they should be, but recent studies show that approach to be a failure. Like reading, math is best learned at an early age and it becomes harder to learn basic skills as a student gets older.

Electing conservative school board members may help a bit, but not so much in deep blue states like California where the Democrat-controlled legislature imposes its leftwing

ideology statewide. Headed to California Gov. Gavin Newsom's desk for signature is Assembly Bill 1078, which would penalize local school boards if they fail to teach the state-mandated DEI curriculum.

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