National Standards Mean Federal Control

September 17, 1997

Google Ads are provided by Google and are not selected or endorsed by Eagle Forum

Now that Clinton has made a giant leap toward federalized health insurance through KidCare, he is moving rapidly to federalize public school curriculum through national reading tests for 4th graders and national math tests for 8th graders. In both areas, he's using the incremental approach to achieve total federal control of a large segment of our society.

Liberalism may have lost its lustre, but its essence is marching right ahead despite the Republican majority in Congress. The liberal New York Times crowed in a recent front-page headline, "U.S. Government Is Expanding Role in School Policy."

Clinton does not have Congressional approval for his national tests, and Administration spokesmen boast that no Congressional action will stop them from going full-speed ahead with the development of the tests and plans to administer them in 1998. Fortunately, Congressman Bill Goodling (R-PA), chairman of the House Education and Workforce Committee, has taken up the challenge to oppose this terrible idea.

Clinton pleads that national tests should be acceptable because there's no difference between math and reading standards in New York, Texas or Idaho. He's dreaming. How to teach math and reading is highly controversial, and it's impossible to construct a test without knowing what the students are being taught.

Testing for math is no longer as simple as asking what is 2+2. Will the national tests be written by those who believe it's important to learn the multiplication tables, or by those who think that such skills are obsolete because now we all use calculators?

Check the Internet and you'll discover what has happened to the teaching of math. Will Clinton's national math test be based on Old Math, New Math, Whole Math, New-New Math, Algebra Lite, or MTV Math?

The gulf between the different systems of reading instruction is even wider. Will Clinton's national

reading test be written to test students who have been taught intensive, systematic phonics, or those who have been taught Whole Language?

There is absolutely no way to have the national tests and the "real, meaningful national standards" that Clinton demands unless the students who take the tests have been taught what they will be tested on. That's why national tests inevitably require a national curriculum, plus federal standards for textbooks and teachers, and that's why Clinton's promise that the tests will be "voluntary" is a myth.

The math and reading tests will become the control mechanism by which the federal Department of Education will determine the content of local school curriculum. It doesn't really matter whether the feds actually prescribe the content and the methodology, or whether the feds just write the tests and then the local schools "teach to the test."

Clinton's words even belie his promise that the tests will be voluntary. He said, "I believe every state must participate and that every parent has a right to honest, accurate information about how his or her child is doing."

Clinton's national tests have been greeted with enthusiasm by business and the teachers unions, but only six Governors and 15 cities have signed up. After the bureaucracy starts its carrot-and-stick manipulation of federal grants, we can expect the cave-in to Big Brother to begin.

Clinton tweaked the Governors for "dragging their feet" about national tests. Former Tennessee Governor Lamar Alexander retorted, "It's a good idea to drag your feet if you're going down the wrong road."

Anyone who has studied our recent experience with national standards for United States history must realize how politics can control both standards and tests. A high school social studies teacher told me that three new social studies textbooks all pay homage to the new gods of multiculturalism by teaching that we got our U.S. Constitution from the Iroquois Indians.

The latest College Board Advanced Placement Examination in United States History is a good example of how testing can be used for political indoctrination of students. It requires the student to spend 45 minutes writing an essay based on six reading selections, two pictures and two cartoons, all of which toe the feminist line about how badly American women were allegedly treated from 1890 to 1925.

One of the cartoons shows a woman on the ground chained to a large ball labelled "Unwanted Babies." The other cartoon depicts a bunch of cigar-smoking, pot-bellied men saying, as they point to a group of women going to church, "Let 'em sing an' pray -- we got th' votes and make th' laws."

The test booklet makes it clear that "high scores" will depend on the student citing what the instructions call the "evidence from the documents." It is obvious than any student so foolhardy as to advance an opinion contrary to the "evidence" would not receive a good score.

Centralized control of the public schools through national testing is a predictable failure just like centralized planning of the economy, and America's children will be the losers. No wonder Goodling calls Clinton's tests "the most controversial issue in Congress this year."