

# Viewpoint

"Although I disagree with everything you say, I will defend unto death your right to say it"

## Clouds thicken over I-S Schools

Within our public schools, this should be a time of renewal, excitement and great expectations.

Fortunately, it's exactly that for our students as they begin classes today in Mooresville and next Monday in the Iredell-Statesville system.

But for employees of the Iredell-Statesville Schools, the sense of excitement about another school year is overshadowed by what many of them perceive as an absence of trustworthiness.

Editor's Corner

First, they have spent the past 18 months, awaiting the results of a criminal investigation into possible financial misdealings in the school system's administrative offices.

According to rumor — and that's all we have, because the district attorney is sitting on the case, apparently hoping it will go away — a contractor billed the I-S Schools for several hundred thousand dollars in services he never rendered. But, curiously, he was paid.

Next, a newly hired assistant superintendent, with a salary topping \$100,000, billed the district nearly \$18,000 for moving expenses. He came here from Asheville, only 60 miles away. Curiously, he was paid. He no longer works here, though.

During all this, Supt. Buddy Coleman held up the board of education for more money. He dangled another job offer in front of them and all but forced the board to fork over a higher salary, even though he already had a valid contract. Shades of pro sports.

Now come revelations of a board of education trip to San Diego for an education conference. Problem is, the board members took several side jaunts — Disneyland, Tijuana, etc. — and you the taxpayer paid for it. Board members insist they were going to pay those personal expenses themselves and even asked Coleman ahead of time to make sure they were properly billed.

Unfortunately, that billing didn't occur until the media got hold of the matter. The money has been repaid, but the image of board members having their hands in the cookie jar remains, whether they actually did anything wrong or not.

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## Reading between the lines

On June 20, there was an article in the Tribune about My Sister's House — the county's only battered women's shelter — moving to Troutman to better serve Mooresville women who need shelter from abusive relationships.

A week later, a story about a "Men's Rally" in Mooresville was published — a story that I feel helps depict exactly why communities need battered women's shelters in the first place.

At first glance, the goal of the men's rally sounded noble: Men uniting for the sake of the community and their families, coming together to encourage thousands of men to "stand up and be the man God called them to be," one rally leader said.

But perhaps it's what they didn't say that's more important. The men's rally organizers aligned themselves with the Promise Keepers, a group that applauds the efforts of "good men" — "real men," like themselves — who stand up and demand that the feminization of men and the feminization of family structures be destroyed. It encourages men to be "masculine men" and become closer and more responsible to their families, churches and communities.

Promise Keepers feel they need to share with others the word of God — as they see it, at least — and convince people that the reason the world is crumbling is because men are becoming wimpy and venturing away from the will of God.

The whole concept sounds really pretty on the outside. But on the inside, candy-coated fireballs are still, well, fireballs. And all that glitter is certainly not gold.

The Promise Keepers' argument, in essence, is that somehow in the grand scheme of things, men have given their role (i.e. power) to women, and now it's time to take that power back. "I'm not suggesting that you ask for your role back," said Dr. Tony Evans. "I'm urging you to take it back ... There can be no compromise here. If you're going to lead, you must lead. Be sensitive. Listen. Treat the lady gently and lovingly. But lead!"

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## Testing helps teaching

By JEANNE ALLEN  
 Center for Education Reform

Congress isn't expected to come out with a final compromise over President Bush's education plan until September, and much of the disagreement centers around his proposal for annual tests, using the National Assessment of Educational Progress, or NAEP tests, as an "audit" of state standardized tests.

Opponents to using any national tests for any reason are an odd coalition of liberals and conservatives: Liberals seem opposed to anything with the word "test"; conservatives seem to oppose anything with the word "national." But on the basis of recent reports from around the country, it's clear that both need to put aside their opposition for the sake of our children.

There is a consensus that the NAEP exams are an accurate reflection of student achievement. And without a "national audit" of state tests by an accepted national tool, parents will be left to wonder whether their state's examination is a good one or not.

Consider Mandatory annual testing was first proposed by Senator Robert Kennedy (D-NY) in 1965. It was then that he urged that the new Elementary and Secondary Education Act include a provision that districts report testing results to the federal government. Unfortunately, because it was left to districts to decide, it didn't work and, according to historian Diane Ravitch, the tests were spotty and not consistently applied.

Having a national benchmark can reveal which standards work well and which do not. The most recent NAEP scores reveals that in Virginia, where there is a rigorous set of Standards of Learning, the gap between high and low achievement.

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Popularity waning, Bush throws a kegger

The most recent polls suggest that President Bush's popularity and job approval ratings are at an all-time low. As a dedicated card-carrying member of the newspaper media, I can only say "Hooray!" This polling culminates a 5-month odyssey of defamation that every journalist in America has secretly been waging. Using special handshakes, synchronized winking, beer, and code words, we journalists have succeeded in making yet another public figure — a politician, no less — less

Well, la de da. They figured us out. This public condemnation is not particularly painful to the press corps, though. Remember, we are the vehicle that gets the message to the public. So our headlines, despite the fact that Republicans are so mad, they could spit, will probably remain self-aggrandizing and read something like "Media Discovers Cure for Freckles!" or possibly, "Journalists Gorge on Potted Meat! Public Very Grateful!"

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## Testing helps teaching

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has decreased over the last decade. Meanwhile, in Maryland, where the curriculum and the tests trend more toward the "touchy-feely" constructivist approach, the gap between high and low performers has widened.

This phenomenon isn't new. Because of NAEP we know that many state tests really do not tell us anything about how our children are performing. Even as far back as 1997, there were massive differences between NAEP scores and the state tests. That year, parents in South Carolina were told that 82 percent of the students were passing, but when they looking at the NAEP exam they discovered that only 20 percent were meeting a rigorous standard. The same "credibility gap" existed for other states: In Louisiana, there was a

70 percent difference in seventh grade math exams; in Oklahoma, there was a 50-point gap between pass rates; and in Wisconsin, 88 percent met the state's reading standard, but only 35 percent hit NAEP's reading standard.

State tests — and a national audit of those tests — are vital to educating students in high-poverty, inner city areas. Research shows "A" students in high poverty schools test at about the same level as "C" or "D" students in wealthy communities. For children in low-performing schools, an intense focus on well-defined, measurable educational outcomes is long overdue. Without a standardized test, there will always be a concern of college admissions officers and employment counselors: that if a student went to school in Harlem, the grades are going to be inflated.

Perhaps Education Secretary Rod

Paige said it best in response to the charge that students will be "tested to death": "That's a charge made by people who feel that testing is somehow external to teaching. But it isn't. It's the other side of the same coin. If you don't assess where you are, what the students have learned or not learned, you're teaching in the dark. That's analogous to driving at night without headlights: Do you every hear anyone saying we're teaching them to death?"

The Center for Education Reform is a national, independent, non-profit advocacy organization providing support and guidance to individuals, community and civic groups, policymakers and others working to bring fundamental reforms to their schools. For more information, please call (202) 822-9000 or visit the website at <http://edreform.com>

the Tour de France (literally "Tour of Belgium") winner proudly toted the Texas flag and even tried to declare Portugal a colony of Texas. After the race, he said, "My eyes don't sting and I can't even taste the air here. I miss riding in Texas."

Bush hopes that this public display of good cheer will both improve his domestic ratings and his image with the local chapter of the Delta-Zetas.

Lake Norman-area resident Corey Walcott's column appears every other Wednesday on the Tribune's Viewpoint page.

Now, that does not necessarily mean that you are invited, unless you are from the country of Texas. Lance Armstrong is at the top of the invitees list. Recall how

global neighbors, many of whom can not even speak proper English. The bad press that the U.S. is receiving from other countries, notably Australia, has dominated CNN's feature segment titled "Foreign insults in unfamiliar languages."

In the vein (see also: "feign" n Ed.) of fair reporting, I suppose I should note that most of Australia descends from an impressive gene pool originally populated exclusively by lying thieves and prostitutes.

The core of the problem seems to be Bush's unilateralism. He refuses to sign anything that any other country not wholly owned by Texaco Oil agrees with. He wants America to

blaze our own trail, even if that means supporting such unlikely initiatives as germ warfare and more pollution. His strong chin is undermined, most analysts believe, by his weak brain.

The latest piece of evidence for this is the administration's attempt to boost local support the way he did back at Yale — by throwing a kegger. Complete with sorority girls, paddles, and a terrible garage band called "Shifty and the Recently Paroled," all of America Texas will be invited to "live it up," White House-style.

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## Walcott

Continued from page 1C

That brings up another wonderful service that we perform. As a convenience to you, we tell you when to have certain emotions. We do so by informing you that the entire galaxy already feels a certain peculiar way, like "aghast," "glib," or "hauseated," so you better start feeling that way, too.

I can tell you right now that all of America is positively "fractious" and possibly even "convalescent" at our President's recent behavior. The administration's ardent refusal to sign various prestigious international pieces of paper has, according to sources who have yet to comment on the subject, outraged most of our

global neighbors, many of whom can not even speak proper English. The bad press that the U.S. is receiving from other countries, notably Australia, has dominated CNN's feature segment titled "Foreign insults in unfamiliar languages."

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## Gatton

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"But respect and love can greater be shown by treating women as equals, not by opening their car doors."

Sheila Ruth writes about the masculinist ideals of groups like the Promise Keepers in her book, "Issues in Feminism."

To be a 'real man,' a godly man, is to relieve women of the burden of 'leadership' that we have been forced to take because of men's terrible error — allowing women a portion of power in our homes ... And once women have only the task of following (obeying) and no longer must make decisions regarding our own lives and that of our children's, we will all be much happier, the world will have been turned right-side up once more, God will be pleased, and men will have rid themselves of the sin of sissification."

If the true intent of the men's rally, or the Promise Keepers, is to bring the family back together, as they claim, why don't they have marriage counselors as keynote speakers instead of former pro wrestling champions and Carolina Panther football players?

What did Mooresville marcher Dean Stein mean when he said, "Men need to stand up first. They have to make sure their house is in order first before going out in the community"?

They said women would be invited to later functions, but why not the rally?

Why not the march? Why couldn't anyone give answers when asked what specific measures men could take to "stand up and be the man of their home" ...? Why couldn't they spell out the problem — the reason why Mooresville needed a men's rally in the first place?

Before the rally, one of its organizers said while men were doing the "standing up" part, women should be "supporting and praying for us." If it's for the ultimate good of the family, shouldn't she be out there marching, too? Shouldn't she have been invited to march? What good can she do, cheering you on from Main Street sidewalks?

Why are women "politely, but firmly" told not to attend the rallies, as is noted on a web page affiliated with the Promise Keepers? Don't women make up a valuable part of the family? Doesn't she count as much as the man does? Shouldn't she be a part of "bringing the family back together," especially since she has such a vital role in that family?

Maybe the answer is that the Promise Keepers' ideal family is the old-order, traditional family, when men could legally beat their wives as long as the object he beat her with was no wider than the width of his thumb ... you know, back when men were the "real men" God intended for them to be.

Jaime Gatton is a Tribune staff writer.

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## Editor's corner

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Amid all this, school is about to begin in the Iredell-Statesville system. Freshly scrubbed students will walk in the doors in new shirts and slacks, carrying new book bags and beaming with excited anticipation.

Teachers will greet them with smiles and hugs. But all the while, they'll be trying to block out the ugly mess at school headquarters on Race Street in Statesville.

It's unfortunate to begin a school year like this, with teachers and principals lacking confidence in their leadership. A couple of weeks ago, I wrote in "this space" that the best thing Coleman could do to remove the spotlight's ugly glare from his system is to resign.

Today, I'm wondering what's taking him so long.

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Write us a letter!

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