

Don't Blame Teachers For Dumb Kids

Letter To The Editor

Cindy Bridges' editorial, "Children Aren't Born Smart, They Get Smart," [in the March 15 issue of the *Pride*] misses the mark when addressing the woes of public education. Yes, all of the weaknesses mentioned do exist, and while the writer blames mainly teachers for these inadequacies, she fails to identify just where a student's responsibility rests in the academic shortcomings of public education.

First, Bridges addresses teachers' salaries in correlation to a student's achievement. Several facts are misleading. While it is interesting that she failed to mention the deplorable average salary of North Carolina's teachers, what she does not tell the reader is that the averages given are inflated ones; usually salaries of principals and assistant principals are averaged in with teachers' salaries. So while it looks like teaching in the public schools reaps handsome salaries, this simply is not true.

Likewise, the only basis for ranking states by student achievement is SAT scores, for this is the only common testing factor shared by all states. Of course Minnesota and Iowa ranked the highest in "student achievement;" these are likely two of the states with the lowest numbers of students taking the test. The majority of students in these high ranking states take the ACT or other qualifying college entrance exams. In other states, such as North Carolina, over 50% of its high school seniors take the SAT while in the higher-ranking states, the percentage usually rests at 5 to 10%. Thus, this is not a fair way to determine student achievement or the success or failure of the teachers.

In addition, while Bridges purports that money does not solve the "woes of education," a series of articles recently in *The Fayetteville Observer-Times* refutes this assertion. Here a clear comparison was made at the difference in student achievement when counties such as Guilford and Buncombe "throw" money at its students and raise the per pupil spending. These articles showed how money clearly makes an impact on students' scores. In short, facts can be used to support both sides of the argument.

And, no, Ms. Bridges, teachers are not being paid enough to teach, and the teacher education programs will attest to that, even here at Methodist. Those of us in education very much want a "talented, well-prepared, dedicated teacher in every classroom." But bright, motivated students are not entering the teaching field. Period. There is very little incentive for them to do so. Teachers in public education today are expected to play the roles of parent, nurse, councilor, and teacher. And in what other profession that demands so much would an individual work with a master's degree and seven years experience for \$28,000? Not many would, yet I and a thousand others do every day in North Carolina, and we do so while gladly being held accountable for the achievement of our students.

On March 2, my 120 sophomore students along with their 200 peers took their state-mandated end-of-course test. In 100 minutes they produced essays analyzing the effect cultural change had on a literary character. They were limited to analyzing this topic based on a piece of world literature of their choosing; they did not know the question ahead of time, nor were they allowed to ask for help or to ask questions.

Too Friendly?

Letter to the Editor

I recently bought some food from the Lion's Den the other day. Unfortunately, my dining experience that day was not pleasant. I found out some disturbing news. While being helped by a worker of the Dining Hall Services, I noticed that she was upset. I asked the worker what the problem was. After my food was served she then told me why she was upset. The worker had said that her boss had accused her of flirting with students. Basically, the worker was being too friendly and polite to students coming through the Lion's Den. I was concerned to hear this news. I told the worker that one of the major concerns of many students is that some members of the Dining Hall Services are not friendly. Sometimes, when the workers are not congenial, it is viewed by the students that the workers are being rude. This worker feels that the boss is violating her First Amendment of freedom of speech. The worker is trying to be friendly, but the boss does not want the worker to interact with students except to serve the food. No smiles, no conversation. The worker also told me that if her "friendly" behavior does not stop, then she will be terminated. I am writing this editorial in behalf of the worker of the Dining Hall Services that I spoke to. I just want to show that even the people behind the dining counter have opinions too. I think that if these allegations are true, then maybe there needs to be some reevaluation of the food managers' attitudes towards the students. The students want workers to be friendly and polite. It is a shame that some workers are being intimidated by threats of termination because they enjoy working for their customers. So the next time you buy a grilled cheese sandwich or ask for another taco, think about what some of these men and women go through while they try to please you, the students.

Felix Sarfo-Kantanka

They not only wrote correct sentences with "subjects, verbs, and objects," but they wrote good paragraphs. And come June, the "rithmetic," history, and biology subjects will be tested according to this state's standards. Notably, last year, North Carolina made the most improvements in true student achievement than any other state. In this state, public education is identifying its problems and working to best educate all students; students are receiving a quality education.

However, Bridges did identify the problem with public education when she said "They [the students] believed that because they 'got through' high school—they were okay." Students who just want to "get through" do just that, and do so despite any teacher's efforts to inspire or challenge. Despite the public's opinion, as exemplified through Ms. Bridges' words, miracles do not occur every morning when a child enters the doors of the local schools. The child who was mentally or physically abused does not immediately forget, ready to learn. Nor does the student who worked until midnight ringing groceries suddenly become energized about learning. And the student who simply does not care about school does not decide to change her attitude just because she steps foot on school grounds. In short, schools are a microcosm of society; if society does not like what it sees, look at home first before making judgments. Likewise, what are students, as Ms. Bridges describes, doing at institutions of higher learning who cannot write or do math? Maybe this would not be the case if colleges raised entrance standards; perhaps a student who does not know the "three R's" has no business in a four-year college. Now, wouldn't that be a consequence for one's apathetic attitude and indolent performance in public education?

Public education does have its flaws, and not every teacher is a strong one, but until students take responsibility for their own learning, and until the public stops making education a convenient scapegoat, all the testing and finger-pointing will not create the desired results of increased student achievement. And no one wants that more than teachers; but students MUST want it too.

Michelle Harrison Lourcey

English teacher, Cape Fear High School

Evening College Professor, Methodist College



This bulletin board was up for two weeks outside Trustees'-103. Perhaps Methodist College needs to add Spelling 101 to its core curriculum! Or, perhaps the students who did this bulletin board do not belong at a four year college, hmmm? Photo and commentary by Cindy Bridges.

Note: Letters to the Editor may be edited for brevity but are not edited for grammar or spelling. The *Pride* reserves the right to reject letters that may be deemed libelous, pornographic, or in poor taste.