

Kilpatrick

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lower economic slopes, the picture is bleak.

How come? One study after another has come to the same conclusions on the same evidence and offered the same recommendations. Our public school students have an average school year of 180 days. In Japan and most European nations the school year is 200 days or more. Our school days are roughly 8:30 to 3:30. The high school student in Japan goes from 8 to 5, and puts in half a day on Saturdays.

At every grade level, American students have less homework than their foreign counterparts. Our schools, generally speaking, are weak in foreign languages and higher mathematics. Relatively few American students take physics and calculus. Thousands of our teachers are themselves poorly educated. In some states a new teacher may pass a competency test by getting 47 right answers out of 104 questions.

In a book scheduled for fall publication, Charles Colson and Jack Eckerd find an explanation of "Why America Doesn't Work" in the moral laxity of American society today. Public schools, for the most part, shy away from instruction in moral values. Sex education becomes value neutral. As the statistics on teen-aged pregnancies indicate, old-fashioned discipline has yielded to a pathetic permissiveness. We are a marvelously tolerant people. We tolerate the wrong things.

If President Bush could get his head out of the clouds of euphoria, perhaps he could provide the down-to-earth leadership toward reform. But public education is primarily a state and local responsibility, and if the picture is to improve it must improve locally. Where to start? Look in the nearest mirror.

James J. Kilpatrick is a nationally syndicated columnist.

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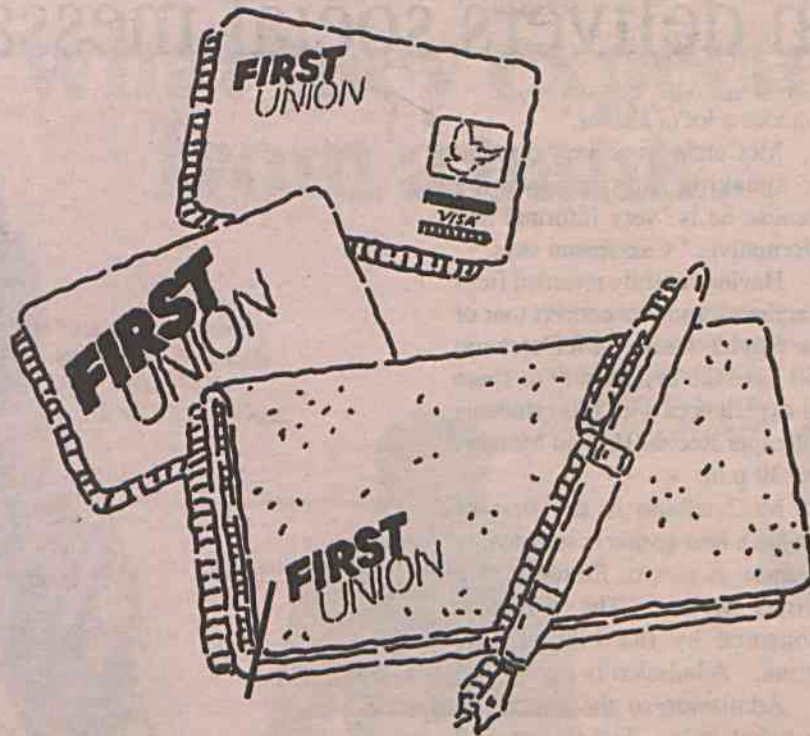
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