

EDUCATION: February 6, 2007

Parents should trump school screening

Mental health screening of all children is the goal of legislation introduced into many state legislatures this year. Typical of these controversial bills is the Missouri bill that would require every Missouri school district, in collaboration with "the office of comprehensive child mental health," to develop "a policy of incorporating social and emotional development into the district's educational program."

THE MISSOURI BILL requires schools to "address teaching and assessing social and emotional skills and protocols for responding to children with social, emotional or mental health problems." The bill also requires the Missouri State Board of Education to set "social and emotional development standards."

One marvels at the arrogance of government officials who think they can set children's social and emotional standards.

Where on the chart would they place a child crying because he fell and skinned his knee?

Cortland County, N.Y., has already announced a plan to screen annually every fifth-grader and ninth-grader for mental health problems. The purpose, according to the county director of youth services, is "to raise awareness that mental health issues are in essence no different than other physical issues, such as heart disease." Apparently, you are not "aware" if you think otherwise.

The screening process, which takes 15 minutes, involves getting the kids to answer a series of yes-or-no questions, on either computer or paper. It is claimed that parental permission will be necessary, but

all children of any age in foster care will automatically be screened.

Mental health screening is based on the assumption that 10 percent of children suffer from a mental disorder severe enough to cause impairment, and that 5 percent of children have emotional or behavior difficulties that interfere with learning, friendships and family life.

Cortland County plans to refer the 10 percent to the county mental health clinic or other providers for further evaluation, and it is well-known that referrals often result in orders for drug therapy. The clinic will be rewarded with \$50 of taxpayers' money for every child sent to the clinic.

PARENTS ARE STARTING to wake up to this invasion of their authority over the care and upbringing of their own children. A bill that would prohibit school personnel from making mental health recommendations or requirements for children, including the use of psychotropic medications, just passed out of a committee of the Utah Legislature.

This bill would prohibit schools from requiring a student to take psychiatric medication in order to attend school and prohibit the state from removing a child from parental custody based on a parent's refusal to consent to the administration of psychotropic medication.

A bill introduced into the Connecticut General Assembly is more specific. It would require all parents who are requested by the school to have their child evaluated be first provided with a statement that the government does not recommend any particular checklist, assessment or evaluation for psychiatric or psychological disorders, plus a copy of the Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment (the federal law that requires prior written parental consent before schools can require students to submit to psychological or psychiatric testing or treatment).

In 2006, Alaska enacted a law forbidding schools from conducting psychiatric or behavioral health evaluations and from requiring that a child take a psychotropic drug as a condition for attending a public school. Also in 2006, Arizona passed a law requiring that schools obtain written parental consent before conducting any mental health screening on any pupil and must make the actual survey questions available for inspection by parents.

Someone should notify state legislators and school districts that are contemplating mental health screening requirements that the American Psychological Association recently urged that "in most cases" of childhood mental disorders, nondrug treatment should "be considered first." This should include techniques that focus on parenting skills as well as help from teachers.

Even the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, an organization whose members strongly favor drug treatment, just completed new guidelines recommending that children receive talk therapy before being given drugs for the common complaint of moderate depression.

PARENTS SHOULD take on the responsibility of being parents. They should beware of the psychotropic drugs that have unfortunate or even tragic side effects. Parents should help to pass pro-parent legislation before those who think the "village" should raise all children use mental health screening to label their child as nuts.

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MEDIA: February 6, 2007

All the 'news'?

The latest in a long line of *New York Times* editorials disguised as "news" stories was a recent article suggesting that most American women today do not have husbands. Partly this was based on census data — but much more so on creative definitions.

THE TIMES DEFINED "women" to include females as young as 16 and counted widows, who of course could not be widows unless they had once had a husband. Wives whose husbands were away in the military, or in prison, were also counted among women not living with a husband.

With such creative definitions, it turned out that 51 percent of "women" were not living with a husband. That made it "most" women and created a "news" story suggesting that these women were not married. In reality, only one fourth of women have never married, even when you count girls as young as 16.

While the data quoted in the *New York Times* story were about women who were not living with a husband, there were quotes in the story about women who rejected marriage.

What was the point? To show that marriage is a thing of the past. As a headline in the *San Francisco Chronicle* put it: "Women See Less Need for Ol' Ball and Chain."

In other words, marriage is like a prison sentence, complete with the old-fashioned leg irons with a chain connected to a heavy metal ball, so that the prisoner cannot escape.

This picture of marriage and a family as a burden is not peculiar to the *New York Times* or the *San Francisco Chronicle*. It is common among the intelligentsia of the left.

Negative depictions of marriage and family are common not only in our newspapers but also wherever the left is concentrated, whether in our schools and colleges or on television or in the movies — most famously, in the *Murphy Brown* TV program that Vice President Dan Quayle criticized, provoking a fierce counterattack from the left.

The *New York Times* was not the first outlet of the left to play fast and loose with

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statistics in order to depict marriage as a relic of the past. Innumerable sources have quoted a statistic that half of all marriages end in divorce — another conclusion based on creative manipulation of words, rather than on hard facts.

THE FACT THAT there may be half as many divorces in a given year as there are marriages in that year does not mean that half of all marriages end in divorce.

It is completely misleading to compare all the divorces in one year — from marriages begun years and even decades earlier — with the number of marriages begun in that one year.

Why these desperate twistings of words and numbers by the left, in order to discredit marriage?

Partly it is because marriage is a fundamental component of a social order that the left opposes. Moreover, marriage

is seen as one of the social restrictions on individual free choice.

These are not new ideas, even though they may be more pervasive than in the past, simply because the intelligentsia is larger and more vocal today.

As far back as the 18th century, Rousseau said that man is born free but is everywhere in chains. In other words, the social restrictions essential to a civilized society were seen as unnecessary hindrances to each individual's freedom.

It never seems to occur to those who think this way that if everyone were free of all social restrictions, only the strongest and most ruthless would in fact be free, and all the others would be subject to their dictates or destruction.

Marriage and family are also barriers to the left's desire to create a society built to their own specifications. Friedrich Engels' first draft of the Communist Manifesto proclaimed the end of families but Karl Marx thought better of it and took that out.

In one way or another, however, the left has for more than two centuries tried to undermine families — including today redefining the words "marriage" and "family" to include whatever kind of people want to live together in whatever way for whatever reason.

If "marriage" can mean anything, then it means nothing.

THE *New York Times'* long-standing motto, "All the News That's Fit to Print," should be changed to reflect today's reality: "Manufacturing News to Fit an Ideology."

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