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## FROM THE PRESIDENT

This is the short version of the *SQE Forum* to read on your monitor. To read the full version of the *SQE Forum* on your monitor, click [here](#). To print out the printer-friendly version, click [here](#).

Highlights in this month's newsletter include a list of **resources for teaching children to spell**, **campus squirrel listings**, the lowdown on how and why **certain Ontario students are being neglected**, and a review of a book that shows why **gifted students should be accelerated**.

If you know someone who would enjoy reading our newsletter, please forward it to him or her. If there is a topic you would like me to address in a future newsletter, please click [here](#). Best regards, Malkin

## YOUR VOTE IS IMPORTANT TO US

Last month, we asked whether you thought Al Gore's film "An Inconvenient Truth" should be shown in classrooms. The results are as follows: 59% thought the film should be shown; 32% thought it should not be shown; and 9% weren't sure. Several people responded that it all depended on the age of the students and how the film was presented to them. As promised, we put the names of those who posted a comment into a hat and pulled out the name of Solette Gelberg. Congratulations, Solette – enjoy your spree at Chapters!

This month, we want to learn about your use of our reading program, Stairway to Reading. We would be particularly interested in particulars about the children involved – their ages, their progress, and so forth. Please help us by clicking on [vote](#). We will print some of your comments in the next newsletter.

## SQE ACTIVITIES

- SQE is currently planning a visit to Toronto from Dr. Howard Fuller, a former school superintendent in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Milwaukee introduced the first school choice program in North America. Now almost 15 years old, school choice has revolutionized education in Milwaukee. Dr. Fuller is a riveting speaker: click [here](#) for an example of his speaking style. Further details will be supplied in the next newsletter.

## EVERYONE CAN BE A GOOD SPELLER

Click [here](#) for our list of web-based resources to help with spelling instruction.

## MAIL BAG

Our readers' comments are always interesting and insightful. Click [here](#) for some of the feedback we've received on departmental examinations, well-paid bureaucrats, school board monopolies, special education, and much more.

## WEB-SITE OF THE MONTH

This month, we feature Ontario's Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO), the province's testing body. On its [home page](#) are links to several years' actual tests (grade 3, grade 6, grade 9 math, and grade 10 literacy) and in some cases examples of student work at the various marking levels. The site also includes the results of [several national and international assessments](#) since 2000.

## ASK AUNT MALKIN

A veteran of the school wars herself, with the scars to prove it, Malkin Dare has all kinds of advice to offer. If you would like some been-there-done-that advice from Aunt Malkin, call her at 519-884-3166 or e-mail her. Click [here](#) for Aunt Malkin's answer to George's question on the importance of Standard English.

## FEATURE ARTICLES

### Put OUR Money where Your Mouth Is

By Charles Cirtwell

This *Halifax Chronicle* article was written in response to a controversy over the quality of Halifax public schools. The main point of the article is to challenge the local public school monopoly, which claims to be offering a good service, to forgo its monopoly and prove its worth in a competitive environment where if it fails, the students get to go elsewhere.

[more](#)

### You Will Be Tested on This

*Researchers are dusting off an old insight: To maximize classroom learning, quiz early and often*

By David Glenn

This *Chronicle of Higher Education* article reports the news-to-some research finding that quizzes are a really good teaching tool. Not only do they allow teachers to find out how much of the lesson was retained, but also they actually cause students to learn more. [more](#)

## **Failure is Not an Option**

**By Louise Brown**

This *Toronto Star* article discusses how it has become almost impossible to fail a high school course in Ontario. Late assignments? No assignments? Inability to keep up? Not a problem! It turns out there is such a thing as a free lunch after all. [more](#)

## **Top of the Class**

***Two of the best 15 young spellers in the world come from Alberta. Hardly surprising, given the province's remarkable education system***

**By Patrick McGee**

This *Western Standard* article provides yet more evidence of Alberta's superior education system. As if we needed it... [more](#)

## **WHAT'S NEW?**

### [Improving Reading Scores](#)

The U.S. Reading First program offers substantial funding to jurisdictions that adopt research-based reading approaches. This *City Journal* article explains the program and profiles some school districts that have adopted systematic phonics – with excellent results. [more](#)

### [Ontario Admits Learning Disabilities the Result of Teaching Methods](#)

Ontario's "Education for All: The Report of the Expert Panel on Literacy and Numeracy Instruction for Students with Special Education Needs, Kindergarten to Grade 6" reports that "the use of the 'tiered' approach in the early years has been shown to dramatically reduce the number of students in the later grades who would meet criteria for learning disabilities". (p. 60) The tiered approach is a delivery system for increasing intervention. [more](#)

### [Fighting for School Vouchers](#)

A group of parents in New Jersey has taken the state and 25 poorly-performing school boards to court, arguing that since public schools deny students their constitutional right to a proper education, the court should refund their money so they can spend it at any school they choose. [more](#)

### [Drugging Young Children with Antipsychotics](#)

A new Canadian survey shows that antipsychotics such as Risperdal, Zyprexa and Seroquel are being widely prescribed to children with behaviour and mood problems, with a significant proportion going to children under nine and even as young as three. None of the drugs has been officially approved for use in children. [more](#)

### [School Board Amalgamations Not Very Cost Effective](#)

Mackinac Center Adjunct Fellow Andrew Coulson found that "the relationship between district size and spending is weaker and more complicated than many people imagine. District size explains only about 2% of the difference in per-pupil spending, and bigger is not always better." The study concludes that bigger savings could come from more vigorous competition among schools. [more](#)

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## [No Teacher Trustees in Alberta](#)

The Supreme Court of Canada has ruled that provinces are free to forbid teachers from serving on local school boards. The teachers' case was backed by the Alberta Teachers' Association. [more](#)

## **BOOK REVIEWS**

### **Ivory Tower Blues**

#### ***A University System in Crisis***

by James E. Côté and Anton L. Allahar

The authors of this book are two professors at the University of Western Ontario. They provide a very frank report on the situation in modern Canadian universities, principally with reference to the problems of grade inflation and its consequences. More and more high school students have been given increasingly inflated marks, and so more and more high school students are coming to university expecting to do well – despite the fact that large numbers of them have low levels of academic interest and ability. The universities have responded by watering down their courses and inflating their grades. The excerpt tells the story of a Canadian professor in a unique position to notice how much things had changed in a 20-year period. [more](#)

### **The Last Normal Child**

#### ***Essays on the Intersection of Kids, culture, and Psychiatric Drugs***

by Lawrence H. Diller

This book is a collection of articles by a San Francisco pediatrician who specializes in children with learning and behaviour problems. Although Dr Diller sometimes prescribes stimulants like Ritalin, he strongly prefers to begin by trying behavioural and educational interventions, such as encouraging parents and teachers to use more structured and immediate responses to bad behaviour. The author is very concerned about the “aspects of our society and culture that contribute to the epidemic of psychiatric diagnoses and treatment of children”. The excerpt tells the story of Ryan, a six-year-old dynamo whose teachers wanted him evaluated for ADHD. [more](#)

### **A Nation Deceived**

#### ***How Schools Hold Back America's Brightest Students***

by Nicholas Colangelo, Susan G. Assouline, Miraca U. M. Gross

This two-volume report is very informally written, although the authors are professors, experts in the field of gifted education, who base their recommendations on mainstream research. The authors are passionate about the value of accelerating gifted students' schooling. Examples of acceleration include early entrance to school, grade-skipping, moving ahead in one subject area (for example Advanced Placement), and being allowed to complete two years' work in one year. The excerpt lists 12 reasons why acceleration is very uncommon and refutes each one. [more](#)

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## **AND NOW FOR SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT**

Click [here](#) for the Campus Squirrel Listings. “The quality of an institution of higher learning can often be determined by the size, health and behavior of the squirrel population on campus. This site documents the criterion quality at schools throughout the United States and beyond!” Three Canadian universities have been evaluated: Queen’s does best, with the University of Waterloo second, and York University in last place.

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