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FROM THE PRESIDENT

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 feature article on **teaching three-year-old Aidan to read, down-home advice on French immersion**, and "It's Being Done", a review of a **book that proves disadvantaged children can learn**.

If you like our newsletter and would like to help our work, please consider making a financial donation (any amount is appreciated) by clicking [here](#). We accept no government funding, but instead depend on our supporters to fund our operations. All contributors are sent a tax receipt, along with our heartfelt thanks.

Your feedback helps us improve the *Forum*. Please e-mail me [here](#).

Best regards, Malkin

YOUR VOTE IS IMPORTANT TO US

Last month, we asked whether the requirement to take the old Ontario departmental examinations was beneficial or harmful to your education. The results are as follows: 71% thought the exams were beneficial; 7% thought they were harmful; and 21% couldn't make up their minds.

This month, we want to find out how people feel about Al Gore's film "An Inconvenient Truth" being shown in elementary and high schools. Please help us by clicking on [vote](#). If you choose to post a comment, your name will be entered into a draw for a \$50 Chapters/Indigo gift certificate. We will print some of your comments in the next newsletter.

SQE ACTIVITIES

- The Society has provided funding for a C.D. Howe Institute policy seminar on the subject of choice in public education. The event will take place in June. Seminar participants will include leading policy-makers, academics, education ministry officials, school administrators, and invited guests. The Institute expects to publish a report that will draw on the day's proceedings within a few months of the event.

- The Society has provided funding to a Toronto publicly-funded school to fully outfit one classroom with *Open Court* materials. Although *Open Court* is an excellent phonics program, the school cannot use its literacy money to purchase it because *Open Court* is not on Ontario's approved list. In fact, there are no phonics readers on the approved list.

EVERYONE CAN KEEP BUSY

With summer vacation time fast approaching, click [here](#) for some sites from Franlie Allen to help keep minds active and avoid the dreaded "I'm bored!" chant in your home.

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 more.

WEB-SITE OF THE MONTH

This month, we feature www.brainsarefun.com, a comprehensive site for teachers and parents with a plethora of resources to promote academic success and positive character and behaviour development in all students. The author, Rory Donaldson, is an experienced parent and educator who has made this web-site a personal project to share effective and proven teaching strategies and helpful resources (such as sample contracts and homework management plans). There is so much information that the reader is best advised to start at <http://brainsarefun.com/Alphainx.html> and click on the link near the top, "How to get started, Fast!" and go from there.

ASK AUNT MALKIN

A veteran of the school wars herself, with the scars to prove it, Malkin Dare has all kinds of advice for parents. This is the first in this series. Click [here](#) to get Aunt Malkin's answer to this month's question as to whether or not a parent should enroll her child in French immersion. If you would like some been-there-done-that advice from Aunt Malkin on a schooling issue that is worrying you, click [here](#) to send in your question.

FEATURE ARTICLES

Free to Choose to Learn

This article in the respected *Economist* magazine tackles school vouchers. Looking at voucher schemes around the world, the magazine concludes that there is no evidence of ill effects for social cohesion, while at the same time the recipients of a voucher get a better education than those who do not. The article highlights Sweden, which has one of the strongest voucher programs, and which is getting excellent results. [more](#)

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Teaching Aidan to Read

In her last message before stepping down as president of the Organization for Quality Education, Nancy Wagner mentioned that she would try to teach her young grandson to read before he started school, promising to report back on this endeavour. She found the process both easier and more thrilling than she ever dreamed. [more](#)

Good Citizenship

This article asks the question whether assigned public schools have a comparative advantage over public schools of choice and private schools when it comes to creating good citizens. The author examines the results of 21 studies of the effect of school choice on such things as political participation, voluntarism, and patriotism. The statistical record suggests that school choice and private schooling often enhance the realization of the civic values that are central to a well-functioning democracy. [more](#)

WHAT'S NEW?

[Charter Schools Multiplying](#)

The Center for Education Reform's "2007 Annual Survey of America's Charter Schools" reports that the number of charter schools grew by 11% in 2006, serving a student body that is on average 53% minority and 54% low-income. There were a total of 3,940 charter schools operating this year.

[more](#)

[Setting Them Up to Fail](#)

"Setting Them Up to Fail" is the title of a report from the Atlantic Institute for Market Studies which examines the relationship between teacher-assigned marks and provincial examination results. It finds that significant grade inflation is present in New Brunswick and Newfoundland high schools, all too often accompanied by lower-than-average results on provincial math examinations. [more](#)

[Knowledge is Power](#)

Every year, KIPP (a group of 52 American charter schools that get amazing results with their disadvantaged middle-school students) presents demographic profiles and student achievement results for each of its long-term schools. Even though KIPP students typically start the program several grade levels behind, by grade 8 the average student has gained 24 percentile points in reading and 29 percentile points in math. [more](#)

[Suspensions: Buy the Numbers](#)

Using Freedom of Information data, Bob Clements looked at how many exceptional students have been suspended over the years in his school board. In 2001/2000, exceptional students constituted 24.5% of suspended students. During the next three years, the percentage of suspended students who were exceptional hovered around the 40% mark, and in 2004-2005, the percentage jumped to 70.1%. [more](#)

[School Choice Saves – In More Ways than One!](#)

The Friedman Foundation's report "Education by the Numbers: The Fiscal Effect of School Choice Programs, 1990-2006" provides the first analysis of the cost of school choice programs in the US. Over the course of these 16 years, school choice programs generated nearly \$444 million in net savings to government. [more](#)

BOOK REVIEWS

***The End of Ignorance: Multiplying our human potential.* John Mighton**

John Mighton is a Toronto mathematician and the founder of JUMP Math, a system he developed for teaching and learning math. He is also an award-winning author and playwright. In this book, Dr. Mighton diplomatically but devastatingly demolishes the constructivist approach used in most Canadian public schools to teach math. His book conceives of a world in which no child is left behind – a world based on the assumption that every child has the potential to be successful in every subject. JUMP has proved so successful that an entire class of grade 3 students, including so-called slow learners, scored over 90% on a grade 6 math test. Drawing on new research in brain development, Dr. Mighton calls for a re-examination of the assumptions which underlie current teaching. Click [here](#) for an excerpt that gives a fascinating insight into children's minds.

***It's Being Done: Academic Success in Unexpected Schools.* Karin Chenoweth**

Many educators explain away their students' low academic achievement on the basis of the children's low socio-economic status. This book, however, proves that even disadvantaged, immigrant children can be taught to a high level, profiling 15 American schools that are doing exactly that. These schools are not just good schools for poor children; they are good schools for any child. The author shows that an unyielding belief in the ability of all children – regardless of background – to excel at the highest levels, combined with a relentless commitment to excellent instruction can transform people's lives. Click [here](#) for an interesting excerpt which describes the atmosphere in these break-the-mould schools.

***Reading With Phonics.* Florence Barnes**

The author spent a lifetime teaching primary and elementary grades in Manitoba. Since retirement, she has done some individual tutoring in beginning and remedial reading. Mrs. Barnes remembers far enough back to the days before the reading wars started – when teaching letters and sounds went without saying and parents could depend on the school system to teach their children to read. This book discusses reading methods, including stories about some of the children the author has tutored since retiring from teaching. Click [here](#) for an excerpt showing the author's frustration at the plight of many children since phonics teaching was eliminated.

AND NOW FOR SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT

Google Earth is a virtual globe program that maps the earth using superimposed images obtained from satellites, aerial photography, conventional maps and other sources. The user can "fly" to almost any point on earth and then look down from above. The views are amazing: in most cases one can see individual houses and cars, and even the shadows of people and street signs. The aerial views can be zoomed, tilted or rotated at will. Google Earth also has elevation information collected by NASA's radar satellites. This means one can view the Grand Canyon or Mount Everest in three dimensions, instead of 2D like other map programs/sites. In addition, one can see 3D buildings for many major cities in the US and Japan. A visual tour of Google Earth can be found at <http://earth.google.com/>, where one can download the program for free.

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