
Youth Truth



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Here's Looking At You, Kid

Lisa Freeman

In 1998, the federal law called the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) took effect throughout the land. COPPA was created to satisfy people who were bothered by unsolicited advertisements for products. Online services—news sources, organizations, clubs or shopping outlets that required membership or registration—retained information to facilitate future transactions, or to send notices to their users. But registrants often didn't realize that their information might be sold to marketers who would try to sell them other things.

The authors of COPPA decided to put a dent in this practice by focusing on children—you can't go wrong writing a law to "protect" children! COPPA prohibited online operators from collecting any information from people under 13 without written consent of the parents. Online services panicked, fearing prosecution and wondering just how they could confirm the ages of their members or customers. To provide a big cushion, many services decided to exclude anyone under 18, just to be on the safe side. Young people who had given their date of birth when they registered for some online activities received messages that they were being dropped. MeetUp, a web site that enables people with similar interests to get together in their communities, initially required its members to be 14, but later decided that to raise the age to 18. Fan clubs and literary interest groups became adult-only. More kids lie about their ages now, since COPPA segregates the honest ones from the online world and deprives them of information they care about.

Has the unwanted advertising stopped since 1998? Perhaps kids get fewer ads for sneakers or books or games, but kids and adults, as we all know, get as many unsolicited ads as ever, for products that are, shall we say, much less *appropriate* to our interests? COPPA made things more difficult for reputable companies, but didn't hurt the disreputable ones at all.

Now two states, Michigan and Utah, are trying again. Once again, they're singling out kids. The bill passed in April by the

Utah legislature, HB 165, lets parents put their children's e-mail addresses and other contact information on a "do not contact" registry¹ (which opened for business on July 1). "Children," by the way, means kids *up to age 18*. Once the law goes into effect on August 15, no communication may be sent to any address or other "contact point" on the registry that "contains or advertises material that is harmful to minors."² The registry's web site gives examples of messages that would be likely to violate the law, but warns that the list is not comprehensive. No one really knows what might be called "harmful to minors."³ Complaints may be lodged by Utah's Attorney General or the state's Division of Consumer Protection, parents of children residing in the state, or any internet service provider; penalties include felony charges and fines of up to \$5000 per message.

The bill is clearly aimed at spammers whose explicit messages embarrass kids and adults alike. Unlike the similar law recently passed in Michigan, the Utah law doesn't limit its restrictions to advertisements. The law wouldn't stop those spammers anyway; they generally know how to avoid being tracked down, often operating outside the U.S. (In fact, the registry site even warns that it cannot guarantee the security of the information on the registry. Placing information there probably makes it *more* likely that it will fall into the hands of hackers and be sold to disreputable companies.) Organizations and businesses who want to observe the law must pay a fee for every e-mail address they check, which can add up to a lot of money and nuisance.⁴

ASFAR has members in Utah, some of whom may be under 18. Members can post messages to ASFAR's discussion listserv. If one of those messages contained a swear word, would that posting be "harmful to minors" even if it also contained valuable information or discussion? If a parent in Utah complained about the message, would ASFAR get in trouble with the law? Or perhaps it would be the message's author?

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Bills

Vote At 16 in Big Apple?

On June 8, New York City Councilwoman Gale Brewer introduced a bill to lower the city's voting age for municipal elections to 16. Public hearings on the bill should be held late this summer. Check <<http://www.lowerthevote.com/>> for the latest news. Two recent articles appear at <<http://www.nydailynews.com/boroughs/story/317118p-271245c.html>> and <http://abclocal.go.com/wabc/news/wabc_060805_votingage.html>. Audio from an "All Things Considered" segment on lowering the voting age can be found at <<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4714616>>.

Taking On Teen Treatment

ASFAR's planned "gulag school" protests seem to be dead in the water, but U.S. Representative George Miller of California hasn't forgotten about the kids confined in private, unlicensed, unregulated "treatment" facilities. On April 20 he introduced the "End Institutional Abuse Against Children Act" which would establish federal civil and criminal penalties for abuse in these programs, require monitoring by the states, expand federal authority to regulate U.S. run programs located outside the U.S., and require the State Department to report any abuse of American children overseas. The story and a link to the bill is at <<http://www.nospank.net/g-miller.htm>>.

Today Brookline, Tomorrow, Massachusetts?

The third time was the charm: a resolution "discouraging" corporal punishment in the town of Brookline, Massachusetts, narrowly defeated twice before, finally passed on May 26 with a vote of 89 to 80; see <<http://www.nospank.net/n-o58r.htm>>. Less than two weeks later, Rep. James Marzilli, Jr. introduced HB 1787, a bill banning corporal punishment in the entire state, says <<http://www.thebostonchannel.com/news/4582708/detail.html?subid=22100410>>. (From the public opinion poll accompanying the article, the bill hasn't got chance ... at least, not *this* time around.)

Letters

Spreading the Word

4/14/05: In my family law class the teacher was talking about people litigating over who the children "belong to" when the question of paternity is at issue. The conversation turned in another direction before I could get in my question about whether children should be treated as "property" under the law. After class I walked with her to her car and brought up legal emancipation. She had no qualms with allowing anyone to apply for it more easily as long as they were aware there were permanent consequences and a few conditions were met. She thanked me for bringing it up, and I think from her reaction that she was impressed. This is a woman who deals with family law situations day in and day out, running a legal aid nonprofit, and who has seen many situations from many sides for many years agreeing with us. Just thought I'd share. -Daniel

Too Old

4/19/05: I have been denied auto rentals by a company that rents autos by the hour. Rejected because I am older than 75. (The name of the firm is I-Go.) -Tanny

Obituaries

Kenneth B. Clark, a psychologist and educator who studied racial discrimination and influenced the Supreme Court in its decision on *Brown v. Board of Education*, died on May 1. More details are at <http://www.freep.com/news/obituaries/dead3e_20050503.htm>.

Ray Budde, a school administrator and education professor who popularized the term "charter school" (and promoted the concept in his book *Education by Charter*), died on June 11. More information is at <<http://www.umass.edu/loop/people/articles/19041.php>>.

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Redirect

Using Family Strife For Ratings

“Keep your problem-solving communications and exchanges private,” Dr. Phil instructs parents in his book *Family First*. So why does he get parents and kids to broadcast their battles, accusations, and tears to millions on TV? Phil should practice what he preaches, says <<http://slate.msn.com/id/2107226/>>.

Enough “Kinder and Gentler” Already

Changing “tug-of-war” to “tug-of-peace”? Marking papers in soothing lavender ink, instead of using that angry red pen? Knock it off with the feel-good, ultra-soft routine. Everyone should be able to take a few hits to their self-esteem, even kids, opines a column at <http://www.usatoday.com/news/opinion/editorials/2005-05-31-kid-gloves-edit_x.htm>. The authors of *One Nation Under Therapy* agree; their comments appear at <<http://www.spiked-online.com/Articles/0000000CABF8.htm>>.

Federal Carrots and Sticks

Why are some states rebelling against the No Child Left Behind Act? A better question might be: why aren't they *all* rebelling? The efforts of U.S. Education Secretary Margaret Spellings to maintain control over unruly state education departments are examined at <<http://www.reason.com/hod/mg050605.shtml>>.

BS Earns Points On SAT

The new SAT essay section is “a completely artificial exercise that appears to reward students for writing badly,” concludes an MIT professor who examined SAT scoring patterns; see <<http://www.jewishworldreview.com/0605/perelman.php3>>.

Breakfast Could Be A Red Herring

Is it possible that kids who skip breakfast are just not morning people? Maybe, for kids who get up too late to eat, school just starts too early for them to function? This alternate explanation of a supposed link between breakfast and school performance is given at <<http://slate.msn.com/id/2121172/?nav=fo>>.

Labor For Children’s Own Good

Columnist Steve Kellmeyer is no great youth rights supporter, but he makes a pretty good—and often sympathetic—case for repealing child labor laws, at <<http://www.illinoisleader.com/news/newsview.asp?c=23474>>.

Distorted Logic and Outright Lies

Youth rights advocate Mike Males doesn't like the rationale behind the Supreme Court's ban on juvenile executions, see <<http://www.youthtoday.org/youthtoday/Apr05/males.html>>. Then two books he read made him even angrier, reviewed at <<http://www.youthtoday.org/youthtoday/June05/males.html>>.

Perspective

Criminals Vote, But Not Kids?

An article at <<http://www.suntimes.com/output/news/cst-nws-felon22.html>> says that only five states—Alabama, Florida, Iowa, Kentucky, and Virginia—deny voting rights to ex-felons after they have served their sentence. Two states even allow felons to vote while they are incarcerated.

Now one of those states, Iowa, is on the verge of repealing its lifetime ban on voting for these ex-cons, the article says. And I'm all for that. Even people who get in trouble should have a voice in the system—they need it, perhaps, more than most.

But it makes me pretty angry to think that people found guilty of crimes can make a case to have the right to vote—and win—while law-abiding young people are still denied that right, and are often laughed at for even asking for it.

Even if the brain scans of many teens really are distinctive, haven't studies on criminals' brains (not to mention those of people over 40) also found distinctive differences? Let's not discriminate on the basis of brain scans. We need all kinds of brains to participate in our democracy. - Sandra Buckley

News Links

Lower Drinking Age (Soldiers Only)

Wisconsin State Representative Mark Pettis introduced a bill to lower the drinking age to 19 for military enlistees, but the big obstacle is the potential loss of federal highway funds—to get them, states must have a drinking age no lower than 21. Mothers Against Drunk Driving opposes the bill, of course—even if a young person is risking his or her life, they shouldn't be allowed to damage any precious brain cells with alcohol. And *we* might also oppose the bill—for excluding 18-year-olds in service. See <<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/8058374/>>.

California Youth Still Lack Vote

On May 24, the City Council of Berkeley, California defeated a proposal to lower the voting age for local elections to 16. The story appears at <<http://www.connectforkids.org/node/3140>>.

U.K. Movement Lives On

After disappointing responses last year from the Conservative and Labour Parties, as well as the British Electoral Commission, advocates for lowering the voting age in England to 16 haven't given up arguing their case, according to <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/vote_2005/frontpage/4511267.stm>.

News Links

Girls Nabbed As Terror Threats

In March, federal agents removed two 16-year-old girls from their homes in New York City, detaining them as terror suspects in a maximum-security juvenile detention center in rural Pennsylvania. Adama Bah, a native of Guinea, who'd lived in the U.S. since she was a baby, was released in May but forbidden to speak about her case. But Tashnuba Hayder, who came from Bangladesh when she was about five years old, was deported to her native country, despite a psychiatrist's recommendation that she be released and sent home. Tashnuba's visits to an Islamic chat room, some essays she had written for school, and her willingness to argue to defend her positions were enough for the feds to deem her a threat—although they maintained that she was deported for immigration irregularities. On May 12 she arrived in Bangladesh on May 12 with her mother, who left her husband and young son behind to be with Tashnuba. See <<http://www.reuters.com/newsArticle.jhtml?type=domesticNews&storyID=8119699>> and <<http://www.registerguard.com/news/2005/06/17/a1.deport.0617.html>>.

Anti-Gang Bill Criticized

A bill to broaden the definition of a “street gang” and allow its members, including those under 16, to be federally prosecuted, passed the U.S. House in May, and awaits action in the Senate, says <<http://www.mlive.com/news/sanews/index.ssf?/base/news-2/111720364370331.xml>>. Editorials at <<http://www.youthtoday.org/youthtoday/June05/justice.html>> and <http://newstandardnews.net/content/?action=show_item&itemid=1801> say the bill's authors obviously know nothing about gangs or their members; another article at <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/05/15/AR2005051500797.html>> calls the bill “a disaster.”

Cops Round Up Kids After Late Movie

After a Friday night movie ended after midnight, police in Houma, Louisiana arrested 37 kids for curfew violations when they emerged from the theater, and cited 8 adults for contributing to their “delinquency.” Sheriff Jerry Larpenter gives his lame-brained reasons for the crackdown at <<http://www.wwltv.com/local/lafourche/stories/WWL062205kimberly.35b8002c.html>>.

Ivy Ridge Loses Accreditation

In April, the Northwest Association of Accredited Schools suspended the accreditation of New York WWASPS-affiliated Academy at Ivy Ridge when the Attorney General of New York began investigating the school's educational credentials; see <<http://deseretnews.com/dn/view/0,1249,600129539,00.html>>. A general article about recent WWASPS news appears at <<http://deseretnews.com/dn/view/0,1249,600128053,00.html>>.

Juvenile Jail Abuse Case Settled

On May 3, the state of Mississippi avoided going to trial over the horrible abuse of inmates in one of its youth detention facilities. The notorious Columbia Training School agreed to stop making kids eat vomit or run while carrying mattresses or tires, and will also refrain from hog-tying and shackling youth. The state must also ensure that children in its juvenile justice system have access to lawyers. See <http://www.splcenter.org/legal/news/article.jsp?aid=89&site_area=1> and <http://www.jacksonfreepress.com/comments.php?id=6103_0_4_0_C>.

Girl Tasered At Hospital

Here's what April Rene Burleson of Florida was doing when police picked her up on June 23: walking. She was picked up for “loitering” and taken home, but since she seemed to be under the influence of something, her mother let the police take her to the hospital. When the small 13-year-old lashed out at hospital staff, police stunned her with a taser. Now she's charged with resisting an officer, disorderly public intoxication, and battery, says <<http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,160569,00.html>>. Maybe the cops should've let her walk on by?

Missouri Town Rejects WWASPS Offer

For the purchase of the abandoned Kemper Military Academy, the town of Boonville, Missouri got a \$100,000 down payment from Robert Lichfield, founder of the World Wide Association of Specialty Programs and Schools (WWASPS). A statement by U.S. Representative George Miller of California, urging the town to consider calling off the deal in light of WWASPS “egregious record of child abuse complaints” was reported in a Missouri newspaper on April 13, at <<http://www.columbia.tribune.com/2005/Apr/20050413News006.asp>>. On April 18, the Town Council unanimously rejected the sale, says <<http://www.showmenews.com/2005/Apr/20050419News010.asp>>.

Majestic Ranch Sued

A California mom regrets sending her son to Majestic Ranch in Randolph, Utah last year. She now alleges abuse, claiming her son was slammed against a wall and table, thrown to the ground, beaten, and repeatedly restrained and handcuffed during his stay. On April 20, she sued the place, according to <http://www.sltrib.com/utah/ci_2679149>.

Whitmore Academy Charged

Kicked out of Mexico for running a business on a tourist visa and expelled from Canada on charges of animal cruelty, Whitmore Academy owner Cheryl Sudweeks thought it would be safe to set up her boarding school in Utah. But even Utah couldn't ignore complaints of abuse, licensing violations, and false claims about educational and therapeutic aspects of the school. See <<http://tv.ksl.com/index.php?nid=5&sid=211898>> and <<http://deseretnews.com/dn/view/0,1249,600141350,00.html>>.

Gay Conversion Camp Exposed on Blog

Refuge, a fundamentalist Christian camp in Tennessee which claims it converts gay youths into heterosexuals, has been run by the ex-gay ministry Love In Action for three years. Now the blog of one 16-year-old sent to Refuge by his parents has prompted an abuse investigation by the state, says <http://www.sovo.com/thelatest/thelatest.cfm?blog_id=1264>.

Georgia Death Ruled Homicide

Travis Parker, age 13, died April 21, the day after six staffers at Georgia's Outdoor Therapeutic Program allegedly restrained him on the ground for over an hour and denied him his asthma inhaler. All six resigned or were fired, and the district attorney will press charges, says <<http://www.whitecountynews.telegraph.com/articles/2005/06/09/news/news02.txt>>.

Sister Soldier Shut Down

Parents paid \$2800 a month to send their "difficult" daughters to Sister Soldier Military Academy, where they were reportedly forced to carry heavy logs and beaten by staff. Under investigation by the state, the Florida boot camp closed on May 31, says <<http://www.miami.com/mlm/miamiherald/11802617.htm>>.

Buffalo Soldiers Jailed

Four years ago, 14-year-old Anthony Haynes, exhausted, overheated, dehydrated, and nearly drowned in a bathtub intended to cool him off, died at an Arizona boot camp run by the Buffalo Soldiers Re-Enactors Association. His death brought other abuses to light, and in recent months some staffers, including the camp's director, were sentenced to jail time. See <<http://www.azcentral.com/news/articles/0621buffalo-ON.html>>.

Camp Won't Accept Medical Evidence

On February 20, claims 14-year-old Larrel Dallas, a counselor at a Pennsylvania camp called Pressley Ridge threw him face-down in the dirt and broke both his arms by pulling them behind his back. Staff, disbelieving his complaints, told him to pick up trash. Larrel finally made it to a hospital and got casts on both arms. After he sued Pressley Ridge, its president wrote to the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* in April still denying that Larrel's arms were ever broken, says <<http://www.post-gazette.com/pg/05123/498116.stm>>. *That's their story? The X-rays were wrong? They'd do better to claim that Larrel broke his own arms!*

WWASPS Founder Sues Critic

On February 22, Robert Lichfield, founder of the World Wide Association of Specialty Programs and Schools (WWASPS), sued Shelby Earnshaw, director of the International Survivors Action Committee (ISAC), a "gulag school" watchdog group, for "defamation, invasion of privacy and interference with prospective economic advantage," says an editorial at <<http://www.showmenews.com/2005/Apr/20050413Feat001.asp>>.

Ohio Councilman Arrested for "Discipline"

Cincinnati City Solicitor J. Rita McNeil must appoint a special prosecutor for a domestic violence case, instead of handling it herself, since the accused is one of her supervisors. Doctors who treated City Councilman Sam Malone's 14-year-old son on May 13 contacted police about the boy's injuries. Malone has pleaded not guilty, maintaining that beating his son is a "necessary component of good parenting." See <<http://wcpo.com/news/2005/local/05/15/malone.html>>.

Social Worker Accused of Taking Bribe

A Delaware social worker who worked with sexually-abused children was arrested May 29 for failing to report the rape of her own 15-year-old daughter by her live-in boyfriend last fall. The social worker allegedly accepted her boyfriend's offer of \$1000 a month for ten years in exchange for her silence, reports <http://www.courttv.com/news/2005/0602/rape_ap.html>.

Mother of Dead Boy Defends Pit Bulls

She put her son in the basement, barring the door with a shovel, so the two family pets could mate upstairs. But 12-year-old Nicky, the little scamp, somehow managed to open the door and paid with his life, mauled to death by the dogs. California mom Maureen Faibish should stop talking to the press—she's clearly not aware of how monstrous she seems in her interview with the *San Francisco Chronicle*, at <<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/c/a/2005/06/12/MNGJND7G5L1.DTL>>.

Dad Punishes Girls By Stabbing Them

Laura Hobbs, an 8-year-old from Zion, Illinois, had been grounded, but on May 8 her mother said she could go to the park with her 9-year-old friend Krystal. Laura's father, however, was angry at the suspension of his daughter's punishment, and has reportedly admitted to tracking down the two friends, punching them, and then stabbing them both to death. Jerry Hobbs had just completed a prison term for assault, says an article at <<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/7791977/>>.

Court-Ordered Classes Didn't Save Son

Nicole Harris of Chicago, convicted last year of battery against the father of her sons, had been attending her court-ordered anger management classes, but they apparently didn't keep her from strangling her 4-year-old son to death on April 9. Nicole reportedly admitted to police that she became enraged when she found her son outside upon her return from a laundromat, after she'd ordered him to stay inside. According to <http://abclocal.go.com/wls/news/051605_ns_mother_charged.html>, Harris' other son has been placed with his grandmother. (Nicole's mother? *That* could be a bad placement decision.)

News Links

Top Mechanic Nearly Loses Teaching Job

Roger Cline, wanting to settle down after 25 years of experience as a mechanic and a dealer representative for Detroit Diesel, took a job teaching diesel mechanics at Drage Vocational High School in Canton, Ohio, a “manufacturing and trucking region” badly in need of skilled mechanics. Students loved him, and with his industry connections he persuaded dealerships to donate over \$1 million in equipment to the school. But Ohio required all of its teachers to pass the Praxis II exam, a test on “effective instructional strategies”—which Cline repeatedly failed. After some public outcry over the potential loss of a competent and beloved teacher, the Ohio Department of Education relented and agreed—temporarily, at least—to exempt vocational teachers from the test. The article is archived at <http://www.susan.ohanian.org/outrage_fetch.php?id=313>.

Teacher Fired for Helping With Punishment

An 11-year old girl in East Lynne, Missouri, threatened with suspension by her school last September for “refusing to do her schoolwork,” was offered an alternative: pick up rocks left over from drilling work on school grounds. Christa Price, a teacher who saw the girl toiling outside alone, asked the principal to reconsider the punishment; when he refused, Price went out and joined the girl in picking up rocks. In March, Price found that her contract with the school had not been renewed, on grounds of “insubordination.” On hearing the news, seven other teachers resigned in protest, says <<http://stage-www.wtop.com/index.php?nid=316&sid=523600>>. One of them, who objected to the rock-collecting punishment on the grounds that a child working alone so near the road wasn’t safe, commented “Somebody could have nabbed her in 10 seconds.”

Georgia Rewards Student Snitches

Several schools in Georgia are now paying students hard cash to turn in their classmates for theft, vandalism, weapon or drug violations, or even smoking, reports <http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2005-04-17-students-snitch_x.htm>.

Early Expulsions Worry Psychologists

At what grade level is a student most likely to be expelled from school? The surprising answer: nursery school. A nationwide study by Yale University researchers found that pre-schoolers were being expelled at three times the rate of older students. One researcher felt that such an early expulsion might cause parents to view their child as an “educational failure well before kindergarten.” Some educators, however, dispute the findings. Further discussion (including the researchers’ definition of “expulsion”) appears at <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/05/16/AR2005051601201.html>>.

School Scared By Big Burrito

On April 28, police in Clovis, New Mexico locked down and cordoned off streets around Marshall Junior High School after someone reported a student carrying a suspicious package. When the principal called students into the auditorium to explain the lockdown, 8th-grader Michael Morrissey realized that he was the culprit. The 30-inch burrito he carried into school was part of his extra credit project to write an ad for a product, says <<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/7683168>>.

Preschool Precriminals

On a U.K report recommending identifying “at risk” toddlers for early intervention, described at <<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,2-1652127,00.html>>, one writer takes issue with the concept of targeting these “potential criminals” at <<http://www.spiked-online.com/Articles/0000000CABDB.htm>>.

One More District Bans the Paddle

An article in a local newspaper mentions that the school board of Starkville, Mississippi voted to ban corporal punishment in their district; see <<http://starkvilledailynews.com/articles/2005/06/08/news/news04.txt>>.

Charter Head Jailed For Abusing Son

On April 26 Hedy Sullivan, head of the Kula Aupuni Niihau A Kahelelani Aloha charter school in Hawaii, was sentenced to a year in jail for beating her 11-year-old son with a baseball bat while he was bound by the hands and neck, reports <<http://starbulletin.com/2005/04/27/news/story3.html>>.

Sex Classes Rejected As Biased

A sex education curriculum for 8th and 10th grades promoting condom use and gay tolerance was approved last fall by the Montgomery County, Maryland school board, with classes to begin on May 9. But it wasn’t until May 3 that an “ex-gay” group and a group of parents suddenly sued to stop the new classes. Although parents had the option of keeping their kids out of the program, U.S. District Judge Alexander Williams agreed that, since it failed to present the alternative view of homosexuality as a perverse, unnatural lifestyle choice that can and should be overcome, the program was indeed biased and violated the free speech rights of the groups. The judge’s restraining order killed the classes for the year, says the article at <<http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org/news.aspx?id=15228>>.

Bible Classes Approved in Texas

On April 26, the school board of Odessa, Texas voted unanimously to add a Bible studies class as an elective at its two high schools. Other Texas schools already offer Bible studies classes, and in Big Springs, Texas, the class has been continuously taught without controversy for over 60 years, according to <<http://msnbc.msn.com/id/7656551>>.

Kansas Hearings Scorned By Scientists

Scientists around the country declined invitations to present testimony on evolution before the Kansas Board of Education. The decision to include “Intelligent Design” in school science classes, they said, was already made, and the hearings were no more than an empty formality; see <<http://www.commondreams.org/headlines05/0509-03.htm>>. The lone scientist who agreed to testify, Pedro Luis Irigonegaray, posted a statement in support of the scientists’ boycott at <http://www.kcfs.org/cgi-bin/ultimatebb.cgi?ubb=get_topic;f=2;t=000032>.

School Agrees to Stop Preaching

Ashlee Nicole Smith, in fifth grade at Sunnyside Elementary School in Fayetteville, North Carolina, knew something wasn’t right when her school lessons explained God’s “niche for every creature He has created” and said that only Christians emit “the fragrance of Christ.” Principal Deborah Anderson agreed to stop the religious content, but didn’t see why Ashlee’s parents were so upset. Then, in February, Ashlee showed her parents her “wrong” answer on a worksheet asking why many animals match their surroundings. The “right” answer? “God’s master design.” In a district court on March 18, the Smith’s suit against the school was rapidly settled, as the school pledged to stop using religious materials once and for all, according to <<http://newsobserver.com/news/story/2233207p-8613419c.html>>.

Louisiana Abstinence Site Okayed

A federal court ordered the state of Louisiana not to use public funds to promote religion, and the ACLU thought it was pretty clear that Governor Kathleen Blanco’s sexual abstinence web site violated the order, with references to God’s condemnation of non-marital sex. But District Judge G. Thomas Porteous Jr. ruled on June 23 that the site’s content was *not* a violation. A disappointed ACLU now turns its attention to a federally-funded abstinence program called the Silver Ring Thing, which urges students to commit themselves to Christ, according to <<http://washingtontimes.com/national/20050625-104915-8744r.htm>>.

Challenge to Virginity Pledge Study

The downside to abstinence-only sex education, which often encourages kids to pledge to be chaste until marriage, is that they teach nothing about *safe* sex, increasing the risk that those breaking the vow will get a sexually-transmitted disease (STD). And that’s just what was found in a study of the pledgers last year (see *Youth Truth*, 5:1 p.8, “True Love Waits—For Awhile”)—sex postponed, but more STDs. Now researchers from the Heritage Foundation released a study of their own, challenging the earlier findings and boosting the value of chastity vows. But the new study relied on participants to *tell* researchers if they had an STD—even though the earlier study found that many who were infected didn’t *know* it. See <http://www.kaiser-network.org/daily_reports/rep_index.cfm?DR_ID=30755>.

Teen Pamphlet Rouses Anti-Gay Sentiment

A pamphlet with resources for teenagers with questions about their sexuality, part of a Tampa, Florida library display on Gay and Lesbian Pride Month, prompted county commissioners to approve, on June 15, a new policy banning county facilities from “acknowledging, promoting, or participating” in gay pride recognition or events, according to <http://seattletimes.nwsource.com/html/nationworld/2002348625_gay26.html>.

Gay Foster Families Still OK in Texas

State Representative Robert Talton once said he’d rather see a child in an institution than in a gay household; he’s repeatedly introduced legislation to ban gay foster care. Talton came closer to succeeding this year, managing to attach his proposal as an amendment to a child protection reform bill, certain to pass. But in the end, the controversial section was dropped from the bill, says <<http://www.gay.com/news/article.html?2005/05/31/2>>.

Homeschoolers Want In

On June 22, the Pennsylvania Senate passed a bill allowing homeschooled kids to participate in extracurricular activities in public schools, without enrolling in regular classes. The bill’s supporters say that homeschooling families support public schools through taxes, and should be allowed to share in the benefits. Opponents say that’s not really true—since their funding is based on their student population enrolled in regular classes, schools don’t receive tax dollars from homeschooling families. More arguments are at <<http://www.phillyburbs.com/pb-dyn/news/113-06232005-506240.html>>.

Vouchers Go Astray

On April 5, the U.S. Education Department released a report on Washington, D.C.’s school voucher program, which revealed that nearly half of voucher applications come from families whose kids are already enrolled in private schools. A voucher plan spokesman said that students trying to transfer out of schools deemed “in need of improvement” received over 30% of the vouchers—but from the figures cited in the article, it looks like it’s really only 25.2%. See <http://www.philly.com/mld/philly/news/breaking_news/11318754.htm>.

More Poor Districts to Get Less Money

An recent analysis of federal education money by the Center for Education Policy says that because of “population shifts, growing numbers of poor children, newer census data and complex formulas,” more schools in high-poverty areas will receive less money in the coming academic year. The report is described at <<http://www.contracostatimes.com/mld/cctimes/living/education/12051708.htm>>.

News Links

No Child Challenges Go Forward

On April 20, the National Education Association and school districts in Vermont, Texas and Michigan filed its lawsuit against the U.S. Department of Education over “unfunded mandates” in the No Child Left Behind Act; the NEA’s press release is at <<http://www.nea.org/newsreleases/2005/nr050420.html>>. On June 29, the Department of Education fired back with a motion to dismiss the lawsuit, on the grounds that the plaintiffs have “no standing” to sue, and that the case has “no merit” anyway, according to <http://www.freep.com/news/statewire/sw117834_20050630.htm>. Meanwhile, the state of Utah continues to defy the law and is preparing for legal battles ahead, says <<http://deseretnews.com/dn/view/0,1249,600142869,00.html>>.

Data Doctored?

Among all the criticisms of the No Child Left Behind Act, an article at <<http://washingtontimes.com/national/20050531-110036-6372r.htm>> quotes one supporter who credits the law with “empowering people with more information than they’ve ever had before,” and praises the “sunshine elements” of the law. True, there is tons of new data, but how much of it is honest? A study by an advocacy organization called The Education Trust found that schools around the country were grossly underreporting their dropout rates, according to <<http://www.newsmax.com/archives/articles/2005/6/23/135219.shtml>>. Another article tells us that doctored dropout data is the tip of a giant iceberg, which also includes: failure to report school violence, cheating on or “renorming” standardized test scores, holding back and then “skipping ahead” 9th-grade students to exempt them from mandated 10th-grade exams, and transferring kids or dropping their enrollment. “How Schools Cheat” is found at <<http://www.reason.com/0506/fe.1s.how.shtml>>.

Student Press Clobbered By Court

On June 20, a federal appellate court ruled 7-4 that colleges may exercise the same amount of control over student publications that high schools do, saying that “universities should not be required to fund publications containing messages that the school does not ideologically support.” See <<http://www.rcfp.org/news/2005/0623-prr-colleg.html>>.

Colleges Approaching Limits of Prohibition

Drinking among college kids—didn’t we solve that problem by raising the drinking age in the 80s? Apparently not, but many colleges are still responding in the same old ways: by imposing censorship, new rules, and new crackdowns, says <<http://www.tallahassee.com/mld/tallahassee/11765897.htm>> ... as accidents, overdoses, and deaths continue to occur. When, oh when will we all come to our senses?

Fewer Choices for Students

The state of Illinois apparently wants to reduce high-school students’ opportunity to choose classes that will most benefit them as individuals. The state legislature has passed a bill requiring an additional year of English, math and science to be required for graduation. Funding the new mandate, as well as its impact on students who want to focus on art, music, foreign languages, or vocational programs are discussed at <<http://www.daily-chronicle.com/articles/2005/06/05/news/news03.txt>>.

Child Labor Issue Used By Both Sides

The Illinois legislature has also passed a bill forbidding the state to buy any product made with child labor. Democrat Mike Boland spoke of the “terrible working conditions” of many children around the world; Republican Don Moffitt cited low-cost imports that put Americans out of work. But *adults* around the world are exploited in lousy jobs too. *Their* labor also contributes to American unemployment. Why focus on kids? The story appears at <http://www.register-mail.com/stories/062405/LOC_B6PQG241.GID.shtml>.

Online Schools Take Off

An interesting overview of the problems and virtues of virtual schools appears at <<http://news.enquirer.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20050630/NEWS0102/506300401/1058>>.

Meddling Bad For Parents?

A study presented on April 7 claims that hovering over one’s children and interfering in their lives is damaging to parent’s emotional well-being and sense of self-worth—even when the children are successful and meet their parents’ expectations. Much as we might like to believe this theory, it sounds like the study doesn’t prove that meddling *causes* the parent’s mental health problems—just that the two phenomena go together. See <<http://www.fortwayne.com/mld/journalgazette/living/11423870.htm>> and judge for yourself.

Judging By Appearances

A June 10 study found that, when shown photos of obscure local political rivals, subjects judged those with round faces, high foreheads, large eyes, and small chins—features found in the faces of most babies—to be less “competent” than their rivals. Participants’ choices matched actual election outcomes about 70% of the time, says <<http://politics.guardian.co.uk/backbench/story/0,14158,1503546,00.html>>.

Promoting International Understanding

Ready for a story that gives you hope for a future of peace and brotherhood? Take a look at the comments of participants in the State Department’s Youth Exchange and Study Program, at <<http://www.iht.com/articles/2005/06/23/news/teens.php>>. Seriously—this article may give you a warm feeling.

News Links

America Tops In Child Poverty

A UNICEF study on child poverty released March 2 ranked the United States, with 21.9% of its children living on less than half of the country's median family income, as the *second worst* nation in the developed world. (Mexico beat us with 27.7%.) See <http://www.healthinschools.org/2005/March2_alert.asp>.

AMA to the Rescue!

If the American Medical Association addressed our shocking level of child poverty during their June annual meeting, it wasn't widely reported. But the doctors *did* adopt policies to combat the childhood scourges of video games and tanning salons, says <<http://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory?id=873609>>.

New Jersey Puts Kids On Diet

By Fall 2007, all New Jersey public schools must serve only low-fat, "healthy" foods to kids and start teaching nutrition classes. The new regulations, announced in June, are described at <http://www.ediets.com/news/article.cfm/cmi_1225614>.

Illinois Bans Toy

With its elastic cord that can unexpectedly wrap around one's neck, the yo-yo ball may soon be a collector's item. The Illinois legislature just passed a bill banning the toy, says <http://www.pantagraph.com/stories/060805/new_20050608022.shtml>.

Study Supports Mercury-Autism Link

Many parents blame thimerosal, a mercury-based preservative used in vaccines, for their children's autism. The response of the scientific community has been varied: some call the parents' belief "plausible," others consider them desperate and irrational. Now a Texas study has found a correlation between diagnoses of autism and *environmental* levels of mercury; see <http://seattletimes.nwsource.com/html/health/2002210097_autism17.html>. A general article on the controversy appears at <<http://msnbc.msn.com/id/8336821/>>.

Cancer Risk From Ritalin?

If you take Ritalin, take a look at this article. The Texas study it describes is hardly definitive, including just 12 kids on Ritalin and no control group. Even so, it made the FDA sit up and take notice, since all 12 had "significant chromosome abnormalities associated with increased risks of cancer." See <<http://www.chron.com/cs/CDA/ssistory.mpl/metropolitan/3250025>>.

"Adverse Events" Prompt Action On Concerta

The FDA has decided to require new labels for Concerta, a long-acting form of Ritalin, warning that the drug may cause hallucinations or suicidal tendencies. The agency's action is based on an unusually high number of "adverse event reports," says the article at <http://money.cnn.com/2005/07/01/news/fortune500/fda_panel.dj/>.

Judge Overrules Parents' Decision

Parents have the right to make decisions about their children's medical care—but only if they make the "right" decision. That's what Edward and Michele Wernecke of Texas learned when their 13-year-old daughter Katie was taken from their custody, to force her to receive radiation therapy for Hodgkins disease. Katie had already received chemotherapy for the disease, and they all believed her cancer was in remission when she and her parents declined the radiation treatments, says <<http://www.nbc5i.com/news/4616873/detail.htm>>.

Abortion Allowed

A 13-year-old Florida girl in state custody finally terminated her pregnancy on May 3, after a battle which pitted the American Civil Liberties Union against the state's Department of Children and Families and Governor Jeb Bush. The story, including the girl's own testimony before the judge, appears at <<http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/medicalnews.php?newsid=23827>>.

Old "Teen Endangerment Act" Rises Again

On April 27, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the "Child Interstate Abortion Notification Act," which outlaws transporting a minor across state lines to get an abortion in a state not requiring parental notification, and prohibits doctors from performing an abortion on a minor from a state with such a law without notifying parents or guardians. The House has passed similar bills twice before, which subsequently failed in the Senate. A pretty good article on the bill can be found at <<http://www.csmonitor.com/2005/0427/p01s02-uspo.html>>.

Teen Abortion Issue Reaches Top Court

On May 23, the Supreme Court agreed to hear a challenge to New Hampshire's law requiring parents to be notified before a minor can get an abortion. Their ruling will have far-reaching consequences, since 44 states have enacted such laws. Recent developments and issues involved are discussed at <<http://www.healthinschools.org/ejournal/2005/june1.htm>> and <<http://www.csmonitor.com/2005/0613/p01s03-uspo.html>>.

Researchers Skirted Law With Foster Kids

Reporters with *Newsday* and the *San Francisco Chronicle*, reviewing data on AIDS drugs that had been tested over the past twenty years, noticed that hundreds of foster children around the country had been enrolled in these clinical trials without the "independent advocates" required by federal law. Does such an "advocate" really benefit kids in drug studies? Different answers are at <http://www.kaisernetwork.org/daily_reports/rep_index.cfm?DR_ID=29843>; see also <<http://www.detnews.com/2005/health/0505/05/A07-171984.htm>>.

Sue's Review

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I was eager to read *Huck's Raft* after I saw Joyce Carol Oates' review praising it as "a book that deconstructs ... prejudices". Well I guess it does, but those parts are buried inside page after page of tedious recitations of just about every known fact about American youth, individually and collectively, from the 1600s to the present day.

The book is only 384 pages, but it took me about three weeks to slog through it, each attempt ending in an unintended nap. The legal textbooks I reviewed (in the last issue) were easier to read than this book. There's no shortage of boring passages to cite:

Toward the end of the seventeenth century, however, rapid population growth, increasing geographic mobility, and the emergence of a more commercial economy combined to erode patriarchal authority. While many sons continued to live in their parents' household into their twenties, a growing number began to leave home intermittently during their teens to attend school, undertake an apprenticeship, or perform seasonal labor. Some moved permanently to fresh lands in western or northern New England, and an increasing number took their inheritance in the form of education or property instead of waiting to inherit land, further diminishing fathers' economic leverage over their offspring. Meanwhile, daughters as well as sons gained greater independence from parental oversight ... (p.13-14)

This paragraph goes on awhile longer in this vein. Seldom did I get a good idea of how American kids lived in various times. Without such a wealth of information as we rely upon today, the author draws from any sources available—letters, diaries, child-rearing manuals—often presenting contradictory and possibly distorted information. The most vivid descriptions, in the lengthy section on growing up in slavery, still ended up presenting an ambiguous picture—amidst the deprivation, hard labor and brutality, how could a child have freedom and fun?

... slave children played with homemade marbles, dolls, jump ropes, and hobbyhorses. They roamed the woods and fields, hunting and trapping small game, fishing, and gathering nuts and berries. Ring games, hopscotch, and ball games were especially popular. In the winter many slave children slid across the ice Many games prepared children for adult roles, such as cooking or

Mintz, Steven. *Huck's raft : a history of American childhood*. Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Press, 2004.

caring for babies role playing games were specially popular, as children acted out baptisms, funerals, and weddings, and dressed up like adults. (p. 107)

It seems that the biggest differences between a childhood in slavery and any other childhood were that as a slave child, one's status as "property" and as an "inferior" was likely to be permanent rather than temporary, and that parents were not able to protest, let alone put a stop to, their child's mistreatment—or their own. Still, I'd say that many children today use some of the slaves' methods of adapting to their situation:

... to separate one's outward demeanor from one's inner feelings was crucial if a child was to preserve a sense of self-worth. Henry Bibb explained: "The only weapon of self defence that I could use successfully was that of deception." Another ex-slave emphasized the importance of deception, trickery, and role-playing even more bluntly: "Got one mind for the boss to see; got another for what I know is me." (p. 106)

In the later sections, the coverage becomes less thorough, as the subject matter becomes more familiar:

Generally ... conservatives favored parents' authority to raise their families without government interference. But in two of the highest-profile public controversies of the 1980s and 1990s—involving twelve-year-old Ukrainian immigrant Walter Polovchak and six-year-old Cuban Elian Gonzalez—conservatives took the lead in arguing that children should be allowed to decide where to live, even if this conflicted with their parents' wishes. Conversely, liberal Democrats, who generally emphasized the ideals of free expression, choice, and questioning authority, took the lead in advocating school dress codes, curfews, and other restrictions ... (p. 365)

The author doesn't describe the two asylum cases mentioned, even in his notes, and his source is just a general article in the *Los Angeles Times*. In ten years, if anyone manages to get to page 365 of this book, they're going to wonder just what was the deal with Walter Polovchak and Elian Gonzalez.

Buy it? Sure, if you've got \$30 to throw around. Stash it on the shelf. Don't try to read it. It's all been done better elsewhere.

Sue's Review

Sealand, Judith. *The failed century of the child : governing America's young in the twentieth century.*
Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2003.

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I was not anxious to read *The Failed Century of the Child*. Amazon kept recommending to me and I kept ignoring it. When I finally did give in and acquire it, reading it felt like my last priority. I was sure I knew what it would say. Failed century—right, because too many kids still drop out of school or graduate without having learned the basics. Too many kids doing drugs, school shootings, teen pregnancies, and so on.

Well, what a pleasant surprise was in store for me. Nearly as long as *Huck's Raft* at 364 pages (but covering a time period only a quarter as long), I found myself breezing through this book and liking what I was reading. A lot.

The “failures” to which author Judith Sealand refers are the failures of increasing government intervention to protect kids from poverty and parental abuse, to ensure health and fitness, to offer educational options that would actually benefit kids, to allow youth to prepare for and gain employment, to treat young people fairly and appropriately in courts and penal systems.

Wow, this woman can write. She had me excited and ready for more in her introductory chapter:

Twentieth-century Americans fancied themselves the planet's most ardent individualists but marched through life in age-graded ranks. They said they opposed intrusive government but accepted “help” for children that increased intrusive government. (p. 3)

The introductory chapter by itself, with its overview “A Brief History of Children and Childhood,” was more informative than *Huck's Raft* in its entirety. Sealand captures the lives of early American children working, learning and playing alongside adults in their families and communities, until, with scientific advancement and lawyers on the side of modern “child savers” and reformers, “the sentimentalized nineteenth-century child became a twentieth-century publicly regulated one” (p. 10).

Starting with the young, American public policy transformed individuals into strings of measurable characteristics. People became statistics—points on a normal distribution, deviations from a standard mean But children proved hard to quantify Definitions changed ... and good intentions foundered ... (p. 2)

... children increasingly led separate lives from adults, a trend furthered by age-graded public policy. Visitors to the nineteenth-century United States were surprised by the speed with which children struck out on their own By the end of the twentieth century ... youngsters became invisible to greater proportions of people. Children, for most of human history the demographic majority, became an isolated minority, banned from many workplaces and residential communities. (p. 11)

... the legal profession in the twentieth century intersected in profound ways with government programs that made new demands of childhood ... litigation was a powerful weapon that Americans treated with insufficient caution. Once a dispute moved into a courtroom, both sides adopted more extreme positions. Advocacy groups ... demanded that immunizations against polio or diphtheria be guaranteed absolutely risk free—although most scientists thought that impossible. Parents of disabled kids argued that ... “appropriate” public education meant that their offspring should be sent at state expense to private boarding schools. (p. 14-15)

Especially interesting to me was the chapter on child labor, and the comparison between FDR's Civilian Conservation Corps, in which youth did truly productive work they could be proud of, and its disastrous imitator of the 1960s, the Job Corps, which offered busywork tasks and mandated attendance in classes similar to those the kids had dropped out of. Rarely-mentioned data on the drive to institute compulsory education and child protection efforts make history come alive. For example:

By 1993, the mean age of American foster mothers was fifty-two, fathers fifty-eight. In most homes, neither foster parent was employed, and in three quarters, one or both adults was too sick to look for another job. This was not exactly an ideal safe haven for any child, much less a frightened, confused, abused one. (p.86)

I apologize to the author for quoting so extensively and shortening her perfect paragraphs. I wish I could quote even more—I'd like to share the entire book with everyone. Please read this book. Get your parents and teachers to read it too. If you can't afford the \$28 for this paperback, ask for it at your library.

Here's Looking At You

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Spam, like distracting noises, people who stand too close, and guests that won't leave, can be considered an invasion of our privacy. But when we think of privacy, we commonly think of confidentiality, secrecy, and security of personal information.

As high-schoolers all over the country approached graduation this year, they began to notice a provision in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001—the one requiring schools to hand over students' contact information to military recruiters, unless the kids or their parents ask the schools not to. Legislators, so eager to protect kids' privacy from online marketers, even at the expense of their freedom of information and association, were willing to compromise that privacy when it came to military recruitment. In 2002, with the prospect of a second front in the war on terror little more than a rumor, this provision of the law was easy to overlook, but in 2005, the eager recruiters were hard to miss. Parents began complaining of recruiters bombarding their “impressionable” kids with phone calls urging them to sign up.⁵ Their concerns prompted U.S. Representative Mike Honda to introduce his “Student Privacy Protection Act,” to reverse the situation by *forbidding* military access to student information unless its release is explicitly *authorized* by students or parents.⁶ The bill seems unlikely to pass. If it does, recruiters will have to fall back on class presentations and school job fairs to meet those “impressionable” youth.

Can Utah parents who place their kids' phone numbers on the “do not contact” registry could charge military recruiters who call them with violating Utah's Child Protection Registry law?



Even if you “opted out” of the list your school is required to give military recruiters, that information—and much more—is already in the hands of the Pentagon. On May 23 of this year, a notice in the *Federal Register* announced the existence of a Defense Department database of information on 16- to 18-year-olds. The department later revealed that the database had been operational since 2003, and already contained information on 12 million young people—not just contact information, but grade point averages, fields of study, Social Security numbers, and “other data,” obtained with the help of a marketing company. The department says the database is “nothing sinister,” that it was created for the same purpose as the provision in the No Child Left Behind Act—as a military recruitment tool—but the *Federal Register* notice noted that its contents could be given to “law enforcement agencies, taxation authorities, and others.”⁷

The decreasing privacy of all U.S. citizens is a trend that has worried civil liberties groups for the past decade or more. Americans of all ages are asked more personal questions, watched by security cameras, and searched and screened when entering buildings.

But youth have been hit the hardest by the surveillance trend. Capitalizing on parents' desire to supervise their children more closely, spy technology companies now offer their wares in the cell phones kids use and the cars they drive.⁸ Software to monitor kids' online activities, once used only by parents, is now installed on school computers.⁹ DNA and fingerprints are collected from toddlers;¹⁰ urine tests for drugs are required for school extracurricular activities.¹¹ Global-positioning devices or radio-frequency ID chips hidden in badges, backpacks, or school uniforms¹² enable adults to track kids' movements, their activities, even the food they eat.¹³ It is all done in the name of ensuring kids' safety—but the information collected can also be used to trap and punish kids.

News Links

British Seek Future Criminals in Preschool

A report by the British government said that out-of-control three-year-olds were four times more likely to commit crimes later in life, and recommended that aggressive children or those with a “family background of criminality” be “singled out” for early intervention. The report, which was leaked (rather than officially released) to the press, also called for schools in general to get tougher on bullying and truancy. <<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,2-1652127,00.html>>.

Underage Sex Interests London Agencies

The Pan-London Protocol for Sexually Active Under-18s is a new code which encourages police and other professionals to share information about teens who are likely to be sexually active. The plan, drawn up in May by the Association of London Government and the London Child Protection Committee, is intended to allow child professionals to “monitor” sexually active youth. But some child professionals don't like the idea, according to <http://www.ypnmagazine.com/news/index.cfm?fuseaction=full_news&ID=7557>.

Educators collect data on students for research and reporting purposes, to measure their own effectiveness and progress. In June, the National Governors Association gave its support to a uniform system of student ID numbers, to facilitate tracking the enrollment and performance of each student from first grade through college.¹⁴ The U.S. Department of Education recently proposed a similar plan just for college and university students.¹⁵

Information for research purposes may also be collected by government agencies. Some public schools virtually force kids to respond to government-issued questionnaires, intended to give lawmakers and others a picture of the state of the nation's youth. One survey, from the Centers for Disease Control's Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System, asks kids very specific, personal questions about their drug use, sexual activity, and illegal acts.¹⁶ Even if individual responses remain anonymous and confidential—can such assurances really be trusted?—the results may well be used to justify new laws that punish youth in general.

People—perhaps especially young people—are sometimes embarrassed or afraid to ask about certain subjects, fearing they will seem ignorant or that the topic is too controversial. A public library is a place that can often give safe and confidential answers to questions, a place where people can explore any topic that interests them, without criticism or judgment.

Until recently, most libraries had confidentiality policies that covered patrons of all ages. Unless a court order was obtained, no one had the right to find out what books a library patron was reading. But a few years ago, some parents around the country began challenging these library policies. In April 2004 the Wisconsin legislature passed AB 169, the Parental Access to Library Records Law, allowing parents to see what their kids (under the age of 16) had checked out.¹⁷ This year, a similar bill was introduced in Maine, covering kids up to 18.¹⁸ Seeing



which way the wind was blowing, many libraries in other states have changed their policies themselves, without being forced to do so.¹⁹ Now kids who are curious about certain subjects (for example, the life of Hitler, or religions other than their own) have to worry that, if they check out books from the library, their parents will misinterpret or overreact to their interest. Fast readers can avoid checking out books by doing all their reading in the library. Kids with enough money can photocopy whatever interests them. Others will confine their reading to what is available online (which may be severely limited by filtering systems), or just quit reading altogether.

Family doctors and hospital staff usually make kids' medical information available to parents, but many local clinics, which treat sexually-transmitted diseases and prescribe and dispense birth control, have policies keeping their records confidential.

Due to parental notification laws, many girls can't obtain abortions in privacy any longer, but they are able to receive contraceptives and treatment without fear of exposure. But now the Attorneys General of Indiana and Kansas are attempting to seize the records of Planned Parenthood clinics to get information on the sexual activities of minors.²⁰ Since having sex with anyone under 14 is legally considered molestation, the prosecutors want the clinics' records as "evidence." (There are no *existing* criminal cases, but they are anticipating that

the medical records will *give* them reasons to press charges, against some unknown people, for "crimes" as yet unreported.) Whether charges are filed or not, the young patients' parents will probably be informed. If the clinics can no longer assure confidentiality, it's a good bet kids won't use them any more.²¹ How does that protect youth, or keep them safe?

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News Links

Bay Area Keeps Stripping

County officials have been sued for this before, but still haven't gotten the message, so yet another class action lawsuit has been filed against a juvenile detention facility in Contra Costa county, California, for "routinely and illegally" strip searching thousands of kids over the past two years. California law prohibits routine strip searches of people arrested for misdemeanors not involving violence or drugs, says <http://www.mercurynews.com/mld/mercurynews/news/local/states/california/northern_california/11873687.htm>.

Petition Nixed By School

In May, a Texas high school ordered two students to stop circulating a petition against its planned drug testing program. The administrators' obnoxious remarks are quoted at <<http://www.southeasttexaslive.com/site/news.cfm?newsid=14602202>>. The petition found a home in a local business and got over 900 signatures, but on June 20 the school board approved the news drug testing policy 5-1, according to <<http://www.orangeleader.com/articles/2005/06/22/news/news2.txt>>.

Here's Looking At You

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It is hard to believe that there is any child left in America whose “mental illness” remains undiagnosed and untreated, but our government—and our pharmaceutical industry—want to make sure.²² In 43 school districts around the country, students are now given a questionnaire called TeenScreen, designed to identify mental disorders, to fill out in class. The surveys are often administered without parental knowledge or consent. Although some states have introduced bills to ban this mental health screening in public schools, the TeenScreen program anticipates that even more districts will distribute its survey next year.²³

Once a student receives his or her diagnosis, then the state's Department of Mental Health can take over. President Bush's commission on mental health, the New Freedom Commission, recommends that state psychiatrists follow the example of the Texas Medication Algorithm Project (TMAP) in prescribing medications for all these new patients. Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Illinois, have adopted versions of TMAP. TMAP requires brand name pharmaceuticals to be prescribed for particular diagnoses, and forbids the substitution of generic versions.²⁴

Parents have long had the authority to make decisions about their children's medical treatment. So won't parents decide if their children will be treated for these supposed disorders, and what type of treatment it should be? Can't parents reject a “TeenScreen” diagnosis or a “TMAP” prescription?

That will be a question for the courts to answer. We know that students have been expelled from schools because their parents refused to make them take psychotropic drugs. We know that parents have, at times, lost custody of children for deciding against what a judge believed to be essential medical treatment. So it is certainly possible that children will be removed from their families to be forcibly drugged by the state.

People under surveillance—for instance, celebrities stalked by photographers—have been known to crack under the pressure, even responding with violence. It is maddening, to be constantly watched. Even worse, to feel that others know secrets about you, that you cannot trust them, that they are keeping information from you or using information about you for their own purposes. Such feelings are not uncommon among people suffering from psychoses such as schizophrenia. For youth, these feelings are maddening, but not illusory. It is all too true.

Sources and Notes

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