

from our viewpoint...

Is ACT a measure of what they learn?

Watching the students heading off to school brought up the question of what we expect them to learn, and the ways we have devised to measure their success — or lack of it.

Having an educated population is important in today's competitive world. It is important to have informed citizens who are involved in the democratic process, either voting or taking a leadership role.

Testing the knowledge of students has always been a measure of whether the schools are doing a good job. As the new school year starts, the latest ACT college entrance test scores have been released showing students in the current graduating class in Kansas scored an average of 21.9 on the four-part test, with a perfect score being 36. Kansas was a little ahead of the national average of 21.2.

The American College Test began in 1959 as an alternative to the older Scholastic Aptitude Test — now known as the SAT — first administered in 1926. The senior test was required by more colleges and universities years ago than the ACT, but that has been changing.

Today Colorado and Illinois require all high school juniors to take the ACT. The average score in Colorado was 20.4 and in Illinois 20.5, both below the national average.

Some people say having all high school students take the ACT lowers the overall average by adding in those won't do well on the test and don't intend to go to college.

A report from Colorado Springs this week indicated three high school students in that part of Colorado had perfect 36 scores. There is no report of any perfect scores in Kansas. Nebraska had seven and Illinois reported 68 this year — up from 33 last year.

Nationally, 42 percent of the high school graduating class took the ACT. In Kansas, 76 percent of the students took the test, and in Nebraska 77 percent (the statewide average was 22.1, slightly better than Kansas).

States with the top averages appear to bear out the theory that those planning on going to college have better scores on the ACT.

Massachusetts was the top state, with an average of 23.5, but only 15 percent of the high school students statewide took the test. Connecticut was a close second at 23.2 and 16 percent taking the test. In Washington, 16 percent took the test and scored an average of 23.1. In New York, 21 percent took the test for an average of 22.9.

States with percentage of students taking the test in the 80 to 96 percent range had average scores more like Colorado and Illinois. Alabama, 81 percent, 20.3 average; North Dakota 82 percent, 21.6 average; and Mississippi 96 percent, 18.9 average.

The ACT and SAT are used to rank those wanting to go to college, but states like Colorado and Illinois are using them to determine the educational success of all students.

Today there are plenty of standardized tests we expect our students to take, and some educators believe we are dumbing down our educational system by teaching "to the test" rather than allowing a student to just learn. That is the focus of the "No Child Left Behind" law with its unfunded mandates of educational performance.

Testing is one measure of success, but it should not become our only focus. The smiling young faces in their second week in school should find an opportunity to expand their individual knowledge and have fun, for once they leave that behind, there are plenty of daily pressures to test them in the adult world. — *Tom Betz*

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Danger: Democrats at work

When the Democrats took control of Congress they couldn't wait to tell America how much they were going to accomplish.

That was seven months ago, and all they've done since is rant about the war in Iraq, talk about raising taxes, and go on a witch hunt in an attempt to find something — anything — illegal in the firing of a handful of U. S. Attorneys who got the boot from the Justice Department when the president exercised his constitutional right to right to fire them without explanation. This provides a glimpse into their utter incompetence as lawmakers.

Consider:

The recent speech of Louisiana Democrat Sen. Mary Landrieu gave us a prime example of the Democrats' inability to get anything straight, including geography.

This week, she introduced an amendment to the Defense Authorization Bill stating that the foremost objective of the U.S. Government is to capture or kill Osama bin Laden and to dismantle the al Qaeda terrorist network.

Her amendment would move troops from Iraq where they're locked in a battle with al Qaeda terrorists, and send them to Afghanistan to launch a hunt for bin Laden.

That would be some hunt.

Does Mary Landrieu have any idea what she's doing? After all, if you are going to hunt for Osama bin Laden wouldn't it be a good idea for hunt for him where we know he is? And where his is, is not Afghanistan.



michael reagan

● making sense

Somebody with a better idea of geography should inform Mary Landrieu that bin Laden is holed up in Pakistan, a country she may not know is next door to Afghanistan.

Sending troops to Afghanistan to search for bin Laden would make as much sense as sending a geography student to Mary Landrieu to find out where Beluchistan is located. They'd probably end up in Flatbush.

Then we have the promises Nancy Pelosi made — often with Rep. John Murtha at her side — to clean up the alleged mess in Congress, taking aim at such slimy practices as so-called earmarks, billions of pork slipped into appropriations bills in the dead of night to benefit a member of Congress.

According to The Politico Web site, Arizona Republican Jeff Flake — a watchdog on the alert for earmarks — spotted one which aroused his curiosity.

Flake was questioning Indiana Democrat Peter J. Visclosky, who chairs the subcommittee recommending the appropriation, about whether there was really something called the Center for Instrumental Critical Infrastructure which was slated in an earmark to collect a cool

one million dollars courtesy of the U.S. taxpayers. He said his staff couldn't find a web site for it.

He was asked by Flake, "Does the Center currently exist?" Visclosky admitted he didn't have a clue.

His shocking admission: "At this time, I do not know." He then added that if it doesn't exist "the monies could not go to it."

According to The Politico, it then later developed that the \$1 million earmark was for the benefit of Mrs. Pelosi's bosom buddy, and fellow crusader against congressional corruption, one Rep. John Murtha, D-Pa.

It later turned out that the Center is a non-profit technological consulting firm. The Politico noted that "A brief search of campaign finance records shows CTC President and CEO Daniel R. DeVos, of alternately Central City and Johnstown, Pa. has contributed \$7,000 to Murtha's reelection campaign since April 2002."

Flake moved to eliminate the funds destined for a group nobody could be sure existed, but the House rejected his attempt to strike the funds, 326-98. The Visclosky bill also breezed through, 312-112.

So much for Mrs. Pelosi's crusade against congressional corruption.

Mike Reagan, the eldest son of the late President Ronald Reagan, is heard on talk radio stations nationally. E-mail comments to Reagan@caglecartoons.com.

On sailboats and Women's Equality Day

I had a bad feeling as soon as I got onto the boat.

It was a small rented sailboat that was piloted by two women. The women had taken a few sailing lessons and wanted to try out their nautical prowess on the Potomac River. I and two other fellows went along for the ride.

And what a ride it was. Shortly after we boarded, one of the women, a lawyer, began lecturing us on sailing techniques. She told us about the jib, the small sail up front, and how to move it from one side to another by releasing one jib rope and pulling the other.

She explained what it meant to "tack," or shift the sails from one side to another to catch the wind and change direction. She lectured us with a seriousness you'd encounter at a sexual-harassment seminar.

No sooner did her lecture conclude than the winds whipped up and grabbed the sails. We were yanked out to the great unknown at the neck-snapping speed of two miles per hour.

"Let go of the jib!" she shouted to one of the men, who, being a man, felt the need to do something, so he grabbed the jib rope. I later learned he was her ex-husband and they still lived together.

"But if I pull the jib tighter, it will catch more wind," he speculated. Men speculate. A lack of actual knowledge never interferes with our perpetual quest to resolve problems.

"Release the jib now!"

"But if I..."



tom purcell

● commentary

"I said let go of the damn jib!"

He let go of the damn jib. His surrender, and the embarrassment we felt for him, set the tone for the rest of the torturous outing.

No matter where you sit on a sailboat piloted by women, you are in the way. Your head is perpetually getting struck by ropes, pulleys and sail rods. If you attempt to do nothing, the women yell at you to pull the damn jib. If you pull the damn jib, they demand you release it. If you release it, they demand you pull it tighter.

I got to thinking about this episode after reading about Women's Equality Day, celebrated on Aug. 26. Congress established it in 1971 to spotlight women's efforts at achieving equality. It is celebrated every Aug. 26 because that's the day women won the right to vote back in 1920.

Things sure have changed since 1920.

It used to be that women were held back in this country. They had few options but to marry and become mothers, and they were then expected to stay home while the men went off to run the country.

Today, the potential of women has been un-

leashed and we're all better off. Women are excelling in every profession. More women than men are enrolling in college and more are earning advanced degrees. Nearly 40 percent of all businesses in America are owned by women.

It's true that women have not yet achieved parity at the top levels of corporate America. It's also true that women earn 75 percent of what men do, though doesn't this have more to do with the choices women can now make than discrimination?

Women can stay single and climb the corporate ladder. Women can marry, have a family and hire a nanny to watch the kids. They can suspend their careers to stay home with the kids, which will reduce their earning potential when they return to work. There are a million choices available and women are choosing every variation under the sun.

And they're piloting sailboats.

It used to be that when five people got onto a sailboat, the men sat in the back barking orders. They'd soon get to bickering and turn an otherwise delightful outing into a miserable affair.

Now women are doing that. While they focus intensely on their piloting duties, it's the men who are adrift at sea.

We're not sure whether we should pull or release the damn jib.

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