

SCHOOLS

"Whom are you?" said he, for
he had been to night school."

— George Ade

SHAVINGS

by

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The longer the system has the kid . . . the dumber the kid!

BOSTON — Parents can only pray that Frank Haydu, III, the state's interim commissioner of education, will be extremely interim.

His orientation remarks on day one of the Mass. Comprehensive Assessment System tests administered to fourth-, eighth- and tenth-graders identified public school administrators as the first barrier to learning.

We figured that out when Mr. Haydu told the world, "If there is blame, the first blame starts with parents." By blame, he means where to assess responsibility if half the kids taking the tests fail them.

The interim commissioner believes, apparently, that parents who were too busy or too uncaring to read "Ivanhoe" and Shakespeare's sonnets to their offspring while they were in the cradle should be held accountable for his government's mass production of little dim-wits.

Attorney General and Democratic candidate for Governor L. Scott Harshbarger gave his evaluation the same day: if the results are terrible, it will be Acting Governor Paul Cellucci's fault.

How so? Because, Harshbarger answered himself, the Weld-Cellucci administration didn't complete the curriculum frameworks on time, and because Cellucci failed to prepare the teachers, students and parents for the tests; and because "our schools are riddled with asbestos" and are rife with health and safety hazards that are mowing down our treasured urchins.

Mostly, he said, Paul Cellucci is to blame. As Governor, he said he will be "personally accountable for the improvement of our public schools. If I am elected Governor, the buck will stop with me on education."

Harshbarger's earlier threat to double as both the governor and chief poohbah of the board of education shows how sincerely he is committed.

(The fact that he would entertain the idea of schooling a million kids in his spare time shows how desperately he should be committed.)

But Commissioner Haydu, anticipating that the rigorous testing will reveal a pattern of ignorance the public school system has managed to hide since the hippies conquered co-ed lawn 35 years ago, says he's worried because the teachers are worried. "We really have a wonderful group of teachers that work very hard. And they certainly are not solely responsible for where we're at educationally," he said. Interim Haydu says that parents should take the lion's share of the blame because they neglect their kids.

The commissioner might have been more right 50 years ago.

Fifty years ago, the public school system couldn't snatch the child until it turned five. There was no kindergarten. The kid went directly from mom's apron strings to the first grade. By the end of that first year, the kid could read. "Dick and Jane see Spot. Run, Spot, run." After the second grade, Dick and Jane had acquired a hydrant. "Go, Spot, go."

By the third grade, most of the kids knew enough geography to match countries to their continents. At least they knew where the continents were.

Snortly, the social engineers decided they weren't laying their clutches on the kids early enough. They invented kindergarten so that mom's incompetence wouldn't have that extra year to grow roots.

That was still too great a risk, they decided, so they came up with Nursery School — snatch the kid at three, while it's still malleable.

Here we are, two generations later, and our Doctor Mengeles are standing hip-deep in the carnage, blaming it on the parents.

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May we remind Commissioner Interim that Harvard College did not have a remedial reading curriculum 50 years ago because it didn't NEED one.

No college in the country had one or needed one. Students had conquered that discipline a dozen years earlier.

All we know from the demographics is that the sooner the public school system grabbed the kid, the dumber the kid got.

Against that painful truth, Mr. Haydu's thesis doesn't wash. The longer the system has the kid, the dumber the kid produced by the system. To be more precise, the longer the child is exposed to the social engineering that scooped it from its mother, the less knowledge and self-discipline the child has to show for all that time it languished in the public schools.

Between the arrogance of state-supervised children's services and day care by Uncle Sam and Mother Massachusetts, the nineties kid gets snatched from its mother's breast and three squares a day of strained peas and strained pears before it's started to cut its first tooth.

Uncle Sam is pleased to announce, "We have a hot lunch program and the sooner Baby gets started on government-approved nutrition, the sooner Baby will be able to master integrated calculus and ebonics."

Fifteen years later, when Harvard comes collecting an extra \$5,000 fee to help Baby learn to read, mom and dad are finally given a glimpse into the Great Experiment gone berserk. Baby is a zombie!

The Boston school department, once the envy of the civilized world, is an utter failure. It's hard to believe that something so admired in our society could have disintegrated so completely. Did it happen by accident?

Probably not. It probably began its rocket ride into the dumpster when the School Committee stopped buying text books. Instead of shoving money into mathematics books or instructionals on English composition and usage, why not spend the money for a Third Assistant Vocational Guidance Counsellor at \$75,000 a year because he carried somebody's sign last election day?

It is the height of arrogance to blame the sad state of public education on the parents of the kids the state kidnaped when they were three.

If the students score better on the tests than the state expects, it will not be the fault of the public school system. Anthropologists would have to ascribe that kind of surprise to some old, errant genetic residue.

