

SIX FLAWS IN P-16 THAT POSE THREATS TO PRIVATE SCHOOL FREEDOM

September 12, 2003

For more than two years, a public advisory group called the "Education Roundtable" has been meeting and planning education recommendations for the legislature. The group includes many members who are influential elected and appointed officials. It has received little public attention.

Their plan is called "P-16." Some of their recommendations include radical changes to college admissions and financial aid practices. Their recommendations will influence policy in many state agencies, and could influence the legislature to pursue new legislation. It is vital that their final recommendations be sound.

The most current version of the plan (August 26, 2003) contains six significant flaws. The flaws can be repaired. If not repaired, however, these flaws could present a significant threat to the freedom of non-accredited private schools, including home-based private schools, or home schools as they are sometimes known.

Flaw 1. The plan fails to state that it is a recommendation for polices that would apply only to public schools. If not repaired, this flaw could encourage an effort to apply the recommendations to non-accredited, non-public schools. This could result in unconstitutional policies.

The draft should clearly state the students to whom its recommendations are intended to apply.

Suggested repair language:

“The recommendations in this plan do not apply to any non-accredited, non-public private elementary, secondary, or post-secondary school or institution. The words “student” and “pupil” mean students or pupils enrolled in Indiana public schools. The word “school” means an Indiana public school. The word “college” or “university” means one that is operated by the State of Indiana or one of its agencies, branches, or departments. ”

Flaw 2. The plan calls for the replacement of “placement exams” with Core 40 end-of-course assessments, but does not define “placement exams.” If it means an exam taken to gain admission into college, this represents a significant threat to home school freedom.

The plan must define the phrase “placement exam.” It usually means a test an entering college student takes to determine what courses he is eligible to take. If the plan is

repaired to define “placement exam” like this, it will no longer be a threat. However, “placement exam” is sometimes used to mean the test a high school graduate takes, like the SAT or ACT, to try to gain admission to college (usually called “admissions tests”). If the plan defines “placement exam” like this, it is a very significant threat to home school freedom.

For generations, the SAT and ACT have provided an objective method for comparing college hopefuls from all educational backgrounds. If public school graduates could take “end of course assessments” and thereby avoid the SAT or ACT, there would be no way to fairly compare these hopefuls with home school graduates. This would create an opportunity for home school graduates to be treated unfairly.

Home school graduates might feel pressure to take Core 40 “end of course assessments” to avoid the risk of unfair treatment. This would severely undermine the freedom of parents to choose their own curriculum.

Suggested repair language:

“The phrase “placement exam” means a test given to students who have already been admitted to the particular post-secondary school or institution for the purpose of assessing what courses they should be enrolled in. It is not an “admissions test.””

Flaw 3. The Plan encourages financial aid policies that could discriminate against home schooled students.

On page 24, paragraph 5, the plan recommends that policy makers:

“Align state college financial aid policies to maximize the potential for college degree completion. Endorse Core 40 and Academic Honors as the best preparation for success by providing incentives for persistence and completion and disincentives for dropping out.”

This language encourages discriminatory, preferential financial treatment for students taking the state’s Core 40 curriculum. This is discriminatory because non-accredited, non-public schools may use curricula equal to or more challenging than the Core 40.

Suggested repair language:

“Any financial incentives available to public school graduates who have taken the Core 40 or Academic Honors program should be equally available to non-accredited, non-public school students who have been taught a different curriculum, but one that is comparably challenging.”

Flaw 4. The plan encourages college admission policies that discriminate against home school students.

On page 24, paragraph 6 of the plan encourages policy makers to:

“Align college and university admissions standards ... to support Core 40 as Indiana’s high school graduation requirement.”

On page 24, paragraph 2 of the plan encourages policy makers to:

“Align college and university admissions standards ... to support Core 40 and Academic Honors as outlined in the *Ensuring College and Workforce Success* section of this plan.”

On page 22, paragraph 5, the draft complains that:

“To date, completion of the Core 40 curriculum has been recommended by the state, but not required. Indiana colleges continue to accept students who have not completed this important college preparatory curriculum.”

This language encourages policy makers to give preferential, discriminatory admissions treatment to public school students who were taught with the Core 40 curriculum, even though private school students may have been taught using a different, but comparably challenging curriculum.

Suggested repair language:

“College and University admissions policies should ensure that graduates of non-accredited, non-public schools who have not been taught the Core 40 curriculum, but one that is comparably challenging, do not receive less favorable consideration for admission.”

Flaw 5. The plan seems to encourage policy makers to require private school students who have not been taught the Core 40 to be required to take remedial level courses upon entering college.

On page 31, paragraph 2 of the plan says:

“Align college and university ... remediation policies to support Core 40 and Academic Honors as outlined in the *Ensuring College and Workforce Success* section of this plan.”

Although not at all clear, this language appears to encourage colleges and universities to adopt policies that would force private school students who were

not taught the Core 40 to take remedial classes. The vague language of the plan permits policy makers to hear this message. This would be irrational and discriminatory.

Perhaps the intention here was simply to exempt students from placement exams or remedial courses if they score high on Core 40 end of course assessments. If so, this would not be objectionable.

Suggested repair language:

“College and university course placement and remediation policies should not discriminate against graduates of non-accredited, non-public schools who were taught a curriculum other than the Core 40.”

Flaw 6. Declaring Core 40 as the “best” curriculum automatically relegates all other curricula to an inferior status, with consequences that could be detrimental to students who are taught a different, but equally challenging curriculum.

Page 24, paragraph 5 of the plan encourages policy makers to:

“Endorse Core 40 and Academic Honors as the *best* preparation for success by providing incentives for persistence and completion and disincentives for dropping out.”

Page 22 paragraph 5 of the plan refers to Core 40 as: “...the *best* foundation for success in college and the workforce.”

Page 24 paragraph 5 refers to Core 40 as “...the *best* preparation for success... .”

Anointing Core 40 as the “best” curriculum either ignores or demeans the many other high quality curricula that are used in non-accredited, non-public schools. Calling Core 40 the “best” may have been intended as mere hyperbole, but it still does grave injustice to other quality curricula. It substitutes characterization for analysis. Such proclamation automatically relegates every other curriculum—even those that are superior-- to an inferior status.

This could cause harmful consequences relating to college admission, financial aid, and remediation. It creates an atmosphere hostile to students taught with any other curriculum, even one that is superior. “Best” leaves no room for a superior or even a peer.

Suggested repair language:

Eliminate the phrase “the best” in all of the locations above. Replace it with either “one of the best” or “an excellent” or “the best public school” or similar language that does not imply that all other curricula are inferior.