

# The “Choice” Charade

Report<sup>1</sup>

*He who has an ear, let him hear.*

## Introduction

The public has been misled to believe that “choice” in education means more parental freedom to determine the best educational placement for their children. This is not what “choice” means to education reformers. “Choice” to these reformers is a tool -- a tool to advance education reform from point A to point Z.

The public school system in America has maintained, until now, a representative form of government. Localities would elect a school board which had legal oversight over the curriculum, staff, budget, programming and planning of the community’s school, being directly accountable to parents, taxpayers, voters and citizens. Each new phase of education reform in the past three decades has adversely impacted this original system of accountability and oversight. But the worst is yet to come.

Parents traditionally have had the right to educate their children at a public, private, religious, parochial or home school. But this is not what the reformers mean by “choice.”. Their “choice” is a Trojan Horse entering society under the guise of vouchers, tuition tax credits, charter schools and their many hybrids. Reformers’ “choice” is not free choice. Reformers’ choice *always* places additional governmental structures between parent and child, voter and representative, citizen and state. The reformers’ “choice” will only reveal its true nature in the end, when it becomes manifest as a rigid, intrusive, and controlling plan for children, families and society.

This report will reveal what some leading education reformers have written, spoken and worked their entire lives to achieve. These reformers are change agents who intend to use “choice” to maneuver reform towards their pre-determined goals. This purposeful deception has been wildly successful. So successful, in fact, that some reformers have noted that they are well ahead of schedule in implementing their planned transformation. In a few short years this “choice” will be fully operational. *All* families with school-age children (public, private and home) will feel the brunt of this deception. Recall the title of the latest bi-partisan Washington education mega-bill, *No Child Left Behind*. *No* child will escape. *Every* child will be affected.

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It is first necessary to understand the game that is being played. Reformers employ a variety of diversions in the media which perpetuate the illusion that they are talking about a parent’s right to choose the best education for their children. They do not want the public to figure out what they really mean by “choice.”

A primary ploy is to set up artificial turf battles based on political differences. “Choice” reformers have successfully staged a polemic battle in the press. Leaders of the Conservative Republican Right and Liberal Democrat Left enter a public boxing arena and routinely engage in verbal fistfights over an assortment of contrived economic (who pays) and political (who’s in charge) issues. While this public sparring is going on, Left and Right reformers have been working closely together behind the scenes for decades.

This polarization of the Right and the Left serves as a red herring. Speakers for each side swallow the indoctrination speech and grab a microphone to lambast the other side. “Rush is right” and that’s that. Those who have genuine concerns about civil liberties, parental rights and human rights are cut off from entering the debate. This is handily accomplished by labeling critics of “choice” as “rad ical fringe” or “extremist.” It is relatively easy to smear opposition by casting inventive aspersions about political sympathies, economic leanings and religious beliefs. Another tactic questions credentials. No critic of “choice” ever has possessed sufficient academic credentials to satisfy the elite.

In these orchestrated skirmishes over “choice,” reformers regularly posit issues in convenient molds, parameters which narrowly define the debate so as to avoid the real issues. Much tweaking over insignificant and incidental matters ensues. A long and protracted dispute over whether “choice” chocolate cake should be served on a blue plate or a white plate follows. These debates are intended to distract attention away from the bigger picture, which if examined closely would reveal a poisoned cake.

A major goal of the “choice” reformers is to maintain the appearance of status quo. In order to reassure the public that nothing major is amiss, Potemkin “choice” is propped up in the public square. It looks like real local control and conveys the illusion that everything is normal, safe and sound. In order for “choice” to progress on schedule, without alarming people as to its hidden purpose, it is essential that people believe these “choice” artifices.

What is this “choice” that the education reformers are planning? What does it look like behind the façade, devoid of the accoutrements and devices of deception? The answer to these questions is startling and alarming. It is time to set aside the distortions and look at the reality. Before it is too late.

## **PART 1: William Bennett’s Cyber Charter Express**

Several years ago William J. Bennett, esteemed “Virtues Czar” and former Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education, launched his own curriculum (*K12*) with great fanfare in the homeschooling community. Once his curriculum was firmly established, Bennett then launched a cyberschool charter concept which he called “virtual academies.” Cyberschools, or “e-schools” as they are sometimes called, are the latest manifestation of “choice” to enter the private education realm. Cyberschools hook children up to a

computer with internet access, thus enabling them to become part of a “virtual” classroom. Bennett began his marketing effort by targeting homeschoolers.

Homeschoolers in key states across the nation were inundated with a lengthy series of advertising pieces. Sophisticated state-of-the-art direct mailing solicitations revealed that homeschool names were obtained through government databases, homeschool curriculum companies, and other unknown sources. Some homeschoolers were identified with names they only use on official government records. This minute tracking down of homeschoolers was the first red flag for a community that by and large seeks to protect its own privacy. This was not to be Bennett’s only blunder.

Bennett’s initial literature advertised that families would receive curriculum, computer, materials, “Placement, Planning, Progress, and Assessment Tools,” a teacher and outings (field trips or group activities). Pennsylvania homeschoolers received a mailing in May 2001 which stated: “As part of this comprehensive program, you receive – at no cost to you – a computer system....” Only later did mailings reveal that the computer was a loaner. A few rumblings could be heard within the homeschool community about Bennett’s apparent lapse in integrity, evidenced by his use of this common deceptive marketing technique.

Many homeschoolers had purchased or were familiar with *The Book of Virtues: A Treasure of Great Moral Stories*, edited by Bennett in 1993. The letters to homeschoolers built upon Bennett’s reputation as the country’s “Virtues Czar.” In the Pennsylvania letter, Bennett says, “I have devoted my professional life to improving education and writing books like *The Book of Virtues* and *The Educated Child*. This experience has influenced the development of K12’s curriculum every step of the way.” An Ohio letter to homeschoolers states, “As Chairman of K12, he has been personally involved in the development of the school’s curriculum.” The implication here is that the curriculum will be “classic,” religious, or philosophically and politically conservative, an obvious marketing appeal to homeschoolers who tend to be religiously and politically conservative.

In actuality K12 is based on a curriculum that was at the centerpiece of many education reform initiatives around the country this past decade, a curriculum aligned with the new national and state reform standards. K12 is based on University of Virginia Professor E.D. Hirsch’s “Core Knowledge” curriculum. Bennett had previously used Hirsch’s *Cultural Literacy* as part of the “core curriculum” for his Modern Red Schoolhouse Design Team. As background, in 1992 the New American Schools Development Corporation (NASDC) funded school reform experiments, which they called “design teams.” These experiments were to demonstrate by example how schools would meet the goals outlined in President Bush’s *America 2000* education reform strategy. An emphasis was placed on creating “fundamental institutional change,” meeting “new national standards in five core subjects,” preparing “students for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment.” Bennett’s Modern Red Schoolhouse project was composed of individuals associated with the Hudson Institute, a policy institute committed to investing its resources into the transformation of education. Claims were

made that this was “classic education.” The project was selected, however, because it so excellently fulfilled all of the requirements of radical education reform.

Bennett placed E.D. Hirsch’s curriculum as one of three curricular pillars in the Modern Red School House Design Team. In the mid 1990s debates over outcome-based education (OBE), Hirsch carefully positioned his curriculum as a “conservative” alternative, emphasizing academics and minimizing “outrageous” outcomes. Hirsch’s ideas about cultural literacy, however, bear much evidence of OBE philosophy.

The Core Knowledge Foundation is a non-profit organization founded by Hirsch in 1986. It is based on the idea that children need to share a common core of knowledge, which “makes up the common ground for communication and cooperation in society.” This “core knowledge” was arrived at through the process of “consensus” with “diverse groups and interests,” according to a Core Knowledge Foundation paper. (Some readers will recognize the managed consensus dialectic process in this description.) Hirsch’s “common knowledge” philosophy is based upon a communitarian ideal that “all” children should drink from one democratic cistern, and that without this inculcation of universal “truths” and “values” children will not be prepared for the global workforce community of the future.

Another curricular pillar for Bennett’s Modern Red Schoolhouse came directly from Bennett himself. As Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education, Bennett authored the *James Madison High School: A Curriculum for American Schools* (Dec. 1987). While admitting that the “authority to mandate a secondary school curriculum for American students does not belong to the federal government,” Bennett acknowledged that he did use his position as a “bully pulpit.”<sup>2</sup> Bennett wrote that “every American child has an equal claim to a common future under common laws, enjoying common rights and charged with common responsibilities. And there follows the need for a common basic education” (cover letter, dated January 1988). The introduction to *James Madison High School* states that

We want our students – whatever their plans for the future – to take from high school a shared body of knowledge and skills, a common language of ideas, a common moral and intellectual discipline.... And we want them to be prepared for entry into the community of responsible adults. (p. 4)

One can readily see the compatibility of the philosophies of Hirsch and Bennett in these statements. It is this inoculation of “classic academics” that misleads the public into thinking that these are conservative curricula. But both men believe there is a need for a “common” knowledge and “community” values. These beliefs have far more to do with the doctrines of communitarianism than conservatism, as shall be explained in depth later.

In 1992 the Bush Administration’s U.S. Department of Labor issued *Learning A Living: A Blueprint for High Performance: A SCANS Report for America 2000*. This controversial bi-partisan report became the third pillar of curriculum used in The Modern

Red Schoolhouse. Skills for the workplace would become the major focus of education -- preparing children for lifelong labor and culminating in a "certificate of mastery." A Hudson Institute brochure promoting The Modern Red Schoolhouse stated: "A distinguishing feature of the [SCANS] curriculum is its reliance on performance as the measure of student progress...." The other distinguishing characteristic of SCANS was a switch from traditional academic content to a workplace skills-oriented education. Current state and federal standards and assessments track back to this important SCANS report.

Bennett's description of the K12 curriculum, in a document prepared for the Department of Education in Ohio, reveals that his curriculum must be aligned with the state's academic content standards, which are aligned to the state's assessment test. Ohio's proficiency tests have been the source of widespread contention across the state for years. Constructed from the old "outrageous" outcomes of OBE (now called state "performance standards"), these tests delve into a child's private attitudes and values. The Ohio state standards, from which the tests are derived, incorporate evolution, another hot button for religiously conservative homeschoolers. Bennett's Ohio charter application lists five academic goals, three goals for "higher order thinking skills," preparation for college, and music and art. Five additional "non-academic" goals to help "students develop into active, thoughtful and responsible citizens" and "build commonly shared values" are added. All of these goals effectively align Bennett's curriculum to the state's tests.

### **This New "Choice" Entity**

The launch of Bennett's K12 "virtual academies" was accompanied by controversy over misrepresentation. An August 2002 issue of *Better Homes and Gardens* magazine featured a typical article about homeschooling, mentioning Bennett's K12 "for-profit online service for homeschoolers." The article featured a prominent picture of William Bennett, which gave the impression that he was a national spokesperson for homeschooling. A March 2002 curriculum review on *The Old Schoolhouse* magazine erroneously reported: "Some people mistakenly believe K12 is a charter school." Letters and brochures sent to Ohio homeschooling parents failed to mention that the Ohio Virtual Academy was a charter school, saying only, "Because the Ohio Virtual Academy is publicly funded, there is no tuition." Fearing that further serious misinformation could be disseminated at the dozens of public K12 open houses around the state, Ohio Home Education Coalition issued an alert:

Serious questions were asked of Bennett during his afternoon presentation on June 13 in Columbus, Ohio. Challenged to answer whether K12 was purposely trying to confuse the public that enrollment in OVA was homeschooling, he specifically said that OVA is a charter school and, therefore, students would be in a public school.

During the evening session, Bennett did not wait for the questions to arise on the distinction.... He made things perfectly clear right from the start.... Bennett said: "Make no mistake. If you enroll in the Ohio Virtual Academy, you will no longer be a homeschooled. You will be enrolling in a public charter school." (August 2002)

Bennett originally planned to take his K12 show on the road to homeschool conventions. It was reported that he waived his customary speaking fees. The Christian Home Educators Association of California (CHEA) cancelled Bennett's speaking appearance at their state convention. K12's requests to be included in homeschooling conferences as a curriculum vender were denied in Ohio, California, and Illinois. In an interview with the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* (8/25/02), Bennett stated, "I will not stop being a defender of home schoolers, even if they are being unfair to me," in speaking about being "disinvited" to these three state conventions.

Then Bennett changed his strategy. He set up K12 open houses simultaneous with state homeschool conferences at competing locations in a obvious attempt to pull away homeschoolers. An alert from Christian Home Educators of Ohio last summer warns:

The CHEO Convention, as well as many other state conventions, have been declining K12 an opportunity to participate in their Exhibit Halls. However, in a visit to the K12 website, many people are finding that K12 will be in Columbus the same weekend as the CHEO convention. This is because they are piggybacking off of our convention and having an open house in a nearby hotel. However, they are NOT in any way associated with our convention.

Why would Bennett employ such an aggressive marketing strategy to recruit homeschoolers? Why would he risk his reputation as a man of "virtue" by purposefully using deceptive marketing strategies and techniques? This is not a situation where he could "pass the buck" and claim that someone else in his organization was acting without his authority. Rather, Bennett placed himself in the spotlight, promoting his virtual academy idea to the homeschooling community in person, live, at scheduled open houses.

Why would the homeschooling community go to such great lengths to distance themselves from Bennett, who asserts he is their friend? For one significant reason: Bennett's K12 cyberschools are in actuality *charter* schools. Charter schools are *public* schools. Homeschoolers who enroll in Bennett's program effectually give up their legal status as homeschoolers. Under the law they become public schoolers. Public moneys mean mandatory state testing, vaccinations, attendance records, and following state curriculum guidelines. No religious instruction is permitted, a fact which runs contrary to one of the few widely shared beliefs among religiously-motivated homeschoolers, that leaving God out of the curricula is a denial of Deuteronomy 6.

An article by Chris Moran in the *San Diego Union Tribune* ("Cyber Classrooms," 11/10/02) explains some homeschoolers' concerns:

Some home-school leaders see in K12 and other cybercharters a threat to the academic freedom that motivates people to home-school in the first place... If too many homeschoolers are seduced by K12's free computers, textbooks, art supplies and science equipment, "a lot of home-school freedom could be in jeopardy," said Tom Washburne of the Home School Legal Defense Association. "What has made

home schooling as successful as it is today is its wide freedom to do what's successful for your children." And if too many families are co-opted by the public schools, he said, there will be no constituency left to defend home-schoolers' rights.

The confusion over charter, public and homeschooling arises in part because of the nature of Bennett's virtual academies. Charter schools are publicly funded schools that operate outside of many normal boundaries and constraints. Bennett's virtual academies are "cyber" charters. They represent a new breed of public charter schools that is unencumbered by "bricks and mortar" (buildings) and other traditional classroom expenses. Cyberschools, as the name implies, link children to a computer and the internet to join a "virtual classroom," spanning distance barriers.

Cyberschools are not necessarily cybercharters. There are many private "virtual" classroom options available for homeschoolers. One can sign up for a *cyberschool* and still technically and legally remain as a homeschooler; however, one cannot sign up for a *cybercharter* without changing their legal status and becoming part of the public system.

The idea behind a cyberschool first came to the attention of the nation's homeschoolers in another NASDC Design Team experiment, The New West Learning Community Project, which was funded concurrently with Bill Bennett's Modern Red Schoolhouse. The New West Design Team proposal included a plan and diagram showing how homeschools, alternative schools and private schools could be linked to the government school system through computers. The New West Design Team was the brainchild of William Spady, known around the country as the "father of OBE."

### **Following the Money Trail**

Cybercharters, like homeschools, take students off of the public school rolls. Homeschoolers don't show up in the public coffers unless they are part of a hybrid public plan such as "dual enrollment." Cybercharter schools, however, because they are public schools by definition, *take* existing public monies out of the public schools and pocket this money in the charter organization's bank accounts.

At issue is the very definition of homeschooling itself. Homeschooling is traditionally defined as a parent educating their child(ren). Some homeschoolers point back to Biblical foundations, church creeds and Scriptures which speak plainly to a parent's direct responsibility, authority, oversight and accountability to God in this matter. Other homeschoolers point to Constitutional foundations and historical legal provisions in parental rights. Other "options," fashioned in the last decade or so, have not been true homeschooling, but rather hybridized public school models. Cybercharters, while superficially appearing to be homeschooling are, in reality, public schools in the home.

One might think that traditional homeschoolers would be naturally wary of a plan that sucks them back into a public system, which most of them have fled or sought to avoid. In reality, cybercharters are very enticing to homeschoolers. A recent letter published in

the Private and Home Educators of California's *Legal-Legislative Update* newsletter (Jan./Feb. 2003) explains:

[Related to your questions about] ...'Charter Schools' and Public Schools ISP' s, it is a staggering trend if the home educators in our church are any indicator. We feel helpless against the onslaught as most of our closest home educating friends are involved in one of these two governmental control options. It has been pointless to try to discuss the mater with them once they find out that they will be "given" money. There are always a variety of excuses why they have chosen this option.

We struggle financially every single month. So we understand. We see that many in our affluent culture just aren' t used to not being able to give little Johnny and Suzie every class and activity that is available! But the Government will pay for it, so now they can. "All things are lawful," Paul said, "but not all things are expedient." Just because it is available doesn' t mean we should be involved. The question when it comes to Charters and Public School ISP' s (and now "Virtual" Charters i.e. K12) is not CAN we -- it isn' t spelled out in Scripture- but SHOULD we. And, why would we?

In a classic "carrot and stick" approach, cybercharters promise one -income, financially strapped families an easy way out with free curriculum, "free" computers, and professional assistance. The downside is that all of the state restrictions and requirements have to be met. Privately, K12 mothers have complained about the amount of time required on-line, the inability to have flexibility with the schedule and the curriculum, the lack of creativity, and the pressures to conform to rigid requirements. Many have regretted they didn't ask the right questions before they signed on the contract.

The aggressive recruitment of homeschoolers into charter schools also poses challenges to public school officials. An article posted at [www.rethinkingschools.org](http://www.rethinkingschools.org), referring to cybercharters, explains that

These cyberschools take advantage of charter school laws. However, by appealing largely to homeschoolers, the cyberschools present unique funding problems and special concerns over whether tax dollars are being used for religiously based education.

Because homeschooled students are not counted in a public school district's budget or oversight, critics charge that the cyberschools have become a new way to funnel public dollars into what is essentially a private education. The cyberschools increase the number of children receiving public dollars for education without necessarily increasing overall funding: in the process decreasing the amount of money available for existing public school students. ("Coming Your Way: Cyberschools" by Stacie Williams, Summer 2002)

Cybercharters are also lucrative for public schools. So lucrative, in fact, that public schools are jumping into the act wherever they can legally set up their own charters

schools. School officials have begun to recruit the homeschoolers in their local district. By doing this, superintendents ensure that the monies stay “in house” and don’t go into the pockets of an outside corporate firm such as K12. An article from Pennsylvania, appearing in the *Gazette News* (“CASD to offer younger students online courses” by Terry Talbert, 1/22/03) demonstrates how this works:

The Chambersburg Area School District hopes by this fall to be able to offer at least some basic elementary/middle level courses online to parents of students in the district who are being homeschooled or are considering cyber school.

“Our home schooling population is our target group,” [District Superintendent Eric Michael] said.

It’s hoped that parents will opt to take the online courses offered by the district, rather than use other source materials, or enroll their children in a cyber school, according to Michael.

The confusion over “cyber,” “charter” and “home” schools is exacerbated by the growing list of hybridized, nontraditional schooling. These include a mixed bag of homeschool co-ops and private dual enrollment options. Wherever the door has opened for charter expansion, some of these alternatives have jumped on board the cybercharter express, seeking funding help to underwrite their programs and cut back on expenses. Many of the most innovative schools, which started out as private ventures, have now submitted themselves to state oversight and regulations. A pot of gold lies gleaming at the end of the cybercharter rainbow -- or so they think.

In truth, cybercharters will come back to bite not only homeschoolers, but also the public schools that feed them.

### **K12 and Michael Milken**

William Bennett is chairman of K12, a company which markets curriculum packages to private purchasers as well as his growing virtual academy empire. K12 began with \$10 million in start-up money from Knowledge Universe. K12 is a majority shareholder in Knowledge Universe. Remember Michael Milken, the former “junk bond” whiz who spent time in prison? A *Forbes Magazine* account revealed Milken is now “sitting on the throne of a \$1.75 billion private education empire” known as Knowledge Universe which “oversees nearly 50 companies, many of them interlocking. Employing over 14,000 persons worldwide, Knowledge Universe is already on the brink of dominating several sectors of what is being called the Internet’s next killer app: e-learning.” According to *Forbes* (“Master of the Knowledge Universe” by Stephen P. Pizzo, 9/10/01) “Knowledge Universe was born in 1996 with a \$250 million investment from Milken and his brother Lowell and another \$250 million from Oracle Chairman and CEO Larry Ellison.” *Business Week* tells the next part of the story:

When Lowell Milken and Ron Packard, executives at education investment company Knowledge Universe, approached Bennett in November, 1999, about heading up K12, Bennett insisted that he would chair the company only if Yale computer-science professor David Gelernter, a fellow computer-in-the-classroom skeptic, signed on as the company's technical advisor.

.. K12 was formed in February of last year, when Bennett signed up as chairman and Packard became CEO. ('Bill Bennett: The Education of an E-School Skeptic' by Alexandra Starr, 2/14/01)

The previously cited *San Diego Union Tribune* article credits Bennett's "star power" and Packard's determination to put Bennett's name and philosophy behind the endeavor. Packard read Bennett's book, *The Educated Child* and became enamored of its concepts. *Business Week's* account of the arrangement notes:

Some industry analysts...caution that Bennett's high profile will not be an unalloyed asset. "Having a prominent personality at the helm can have a downside," says EduVentures.com's Stokes. "When the conversation ends up focusing on Bennett, it can eclipse the business."

Milken's philosophy of "cradle to grave" education is the driving force behind his current business ventures. *Forbes* relates

It is in early childhood development and K-12 that Milken has made some of his most daring and visionary acquisitions. Knowledge Universe has either started, acquired, or invested in an array of preschool through middle school companies that provide online curricula, testing, test preparation, tutoring, and even management of schools. The companies also share databases and resources and contract among themselves for value-added services. While providing education services for its companies, Knowledge Universe is also amassing what could become one of its most valuable assets: a data bank on childhood learning, skill levels, and online learning behavior.

A sidebar to the *Forbes* account details questionable ethics in several of Milken's business dealings, especially in the acquisition of an on-line accredited university. It seems strange that William Bennett would associate himself with a man of such dubious integrity. Again, why would he risk his own excellent "virtuous" reputation by becoming part of an empire formed by a man whose name is so tainted?

The *Forbes* article, with accompanying graph, describes how Milken's acquisitions are intended to work together to form a seamless lifelong education system, including college and workforce training. Beginning at the pre-school level, LeapFrog, a Knowledge Universe company, makes programmable interactive tutorial toys that link to online resources. This toy then feeds information to the company's database "where the child's skill level and progress are assessed and tracked." The ultimate goal "is to engage children in lifetime learning provided by Knowledge Universe – even through their careers and into retirement."

This brings to mind some serious questions. Will the children enrolled in Bill Bennett's K12 virtual academies become part of Knowledge Universe's "most valuable assets." Will these children be in a databank with Michael Milken holding the key? Will a K12 student's online learning behavior be monitored and tracked? Will this personal information be sold to outside vendors for other uses? The Ohio Virtual Academy charter application states that the "school will use technology in conjunction with traditional assessment techniques to assess student achievement." In addition to participating in the Ohio Proficiency Tests, "a unique component of our on-line student learning system is its ability to generate detailed and ongoing data on academic achievement... Data from the assessments will be collected and regularly analyzed and reported to parents, teachers, the school administration, and the board." The online system "tracks the number of minutes logged each day in each school subject." No guarantees of student privacy in Bennett's proposal could be found.

### **Techno-Future Cyber Charters**

It is no accident that K12 signed on David Gelernter as technical advisor. Gelernter may not be a household name to many, but he's a big fish in the high tech computer pond. In 1996 Gelernter was the target of one of the Unabomber's attacks and was seriously injured when a package exploded. The Unabomber addressed a letter to Gelernter which explained the reason for this personal attack: "...there are a lot of people out there who resent bitterly the way techno-nerds like you are changing the world..." How was Gelernter changing the world? He had just published a futurist book, *Mirror Worlds* (1991), which envisioned the internet as a collective stream of human consciousness, evoking the idea of a global, human community. He is considered to be "a leader figure in the third generation of artificial intelligence (AI) scientists." (<http://www.edge.org/documents/digerati/Gelernter/html>)

Gelernter's pioneering work has been in the area of storing and retrieving information, both independently and collectively, i.e. databanking. He has called for a new paradigm in computer usage which will permit one to index *all* (meaning every shred) of a person's life data on what he calls "lifestreams," entities which float in cyberspace and can be retrievable at any computer in the world when beckoned by a person with a proper ID. Gelernter describes his vision in an internet interview:

The Net is going to matter when I can rely on it to store the information I now keep in disk, and the computer is a completely transparent object. ...I have my entire information life online, in chronological order, searchable from my electronic birth certificate onward. All the documents and pieces of information important to me are maintained by the Net... (ibid)

Gelernter's ideas are being implemented by Michael Milken's Knowledge Universe and William Bennett's K12. Press accounts bill Gelernter as one who hates computers for use in education. But within the high tech world his critics note a marked discrepancy between his public persona as a "reluctant computer nerd" and his cutting -edge software

innovations which he is marketing on the internet. His critics also raise disturbing issues about the potential loss of freedom should Gelernter's utopian ideas become widely implemented. If all the databases in the world were "indexed" using Gelernter's technology, there would be a gargantuan storehouse of data, including every computer keystroke, archived in internet hyperspace for future access.

"Gelernter is a guy I listen to on these things. I read his stuff – even understand some of it," Mr. Bennett said. "Gelernter told me that what has been done in online education is a scandal, and what could be done might just be the salvation of many kids." ("A New Enterprise Joins Growing Community of Online Schools" by Margaret W. Goldsborough, *New York Times*, 1/24/01)

## **NEXT: Part 2: Databanking Devices: The Accountability and Standards Movement**

### Endnotes:

1. 3D Research Company distributes *the deliberate dumbing down of America* by Charlotte T. Iserbyt. This book is available at major online booksellers, or can be accessed on the web at: [www.deliberatedumbingdown.com](http://www.deliberatedumbingdown.com). A full text of this report can be viewed on this website.
2. Bennett, William J. *The De-Valuing of America*, p. 69.

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