

Planning a technical meeting or exhibit?

If so, the American Institute of Physics (AIP) offers comprehensive and cost effective exhibit management services to professional societies and other organizations. With more than 30 years experience, our staff can customize these services to meet your needs.

We provide:

- ◆ Site evaluations
- ◆ Hotel and contractor negotiations
- ◆ Booth sales and promotion
- ◆ Customer Service
- ◆ Meeting publicity
- ◆ Comprehensive on-site services
- ◆ Complete accountability

For additional information, contact:

Bob Finnegan, Exhibits Manager
American Institute of Physics
500 Sunnyside Blvd.
Woodbury, N.Y. 11797
1-800-247-2242
Tel: 516-576-2433
Fax: 516-576-2481
email: rgf@aip.org

AMERICAN
INSTITUTE
OF PHYSICS

ation in which ninth-grade physics would be based on "a reasonable level of eighth-grade algebra."

Unfortunately, even this minimal level of skill is, in too many places, the exception rather than the rule. The reasons for this are complex and probably poorly understood, but if the remedy were as simple as to require "all students" to take algebra, the problem would have been solved long ago.

As Lederman's piece implies, the current educational fad is to require academic mathematics classes of all students. This sounds wonderful on paper, but the "all students" philosophy bandied about these days is too often interpreted to mean all students in the same class, doing the same things. Good math teachers have always known that there are prerequisite skills necessary to learn algebra, most crucially the ability to do and have a feel for simple arithmetic. Nowadays the idea is that everybody takes algebra, ready or not. Many are simply not ready, for any one of a number of reasons. And they can't all be allowed to fail for that would not be politically correct! The net result is that if everybody takes algebra, it has to be watered down so severely that there is nothing much left to it—except the title. When everybody takes algebra, nobody gets algebra—at least not algebra as we know it. It's the same with physics.

Many of the current educational reform movements sound wonderful and egalitarian on paper, but the net result is an almost inevitable dumbing down of the entire curriculum. Educational restructuring can and does create schools in which mediocre students are happy because they are getting easy credit for high-sounding classes, but in which any potential future reader of PHYSICS TODAY would be bored and miserable.

Many educational reform theories creating such havoc today have come from the research efforts of the faculty and students of university schools and departments of education. Please, scientists, before you buy into or advocate the implementation of these "proven" and "research driven" schemes, get a few of your colleagues' papers and theses. Read them, and evaluate them according to the same standards you would use to evaluate any research. It is possible to make an already bad situation a whole lot worse.

MARTHA SCHWARTZ
San Pedro, California

LEDERMAN REPLIES: I disagree with everything Martha Schwartz says, except her passing comment about my

smile being "sweet" (and my credentials being "impressive").

Her letter illuminates the problem of what can happen when obviously intelligent and dedicated teachers oppose change they find uncomfortable. They seem to feel the old system sometimes works and change may make it worse; anyway, what do scientists know about the real world? But Schwartz should know that there do exist very successful, very real-world schools, such as Central Park East in Harlem and Whitney Young on the South Side of Chicago, not to mention comparable high schools in many other places. Students will respond to high standards if what they are doing makes sense. In fairness, however, one cannot overemphasize the need for continuous professional training of teachers.

LEON M. LEDERMAN

Illinois Institute of Technology
Chicago, Illinois

Einstein a Red? The Response Was Verse

Edgar Villchur's comment (April, page 110) about Einstein's being suspected in the 1950s of having Communist sympathies brings to mind an amusing response to anti-Communist opposition to Einstein's being admitted into the US two decades earlier. A popular newspaper columnist, H. I. Phillips, was moved to address Einstein in verse, as follows (if memory serves faithfully):

Doctor with the bushy head
Tell us that you're not a Red.
Tell us that you do not eat
Capitalists in the street.
Say to us it isn't true
You devour their children too.
Speak, oh speak, and say you're
notsky

Just a bent-space type of Trotsky.

NORMAN F. STANLEY
Rockland, Maine

Correction

October, page 41—In the photograph the person on the far right in the back row is Donald Kerst. *

Letters submitted for publication should be addressed to Letters, PHYSICS TODAY, American Center for Physics, One Physics Ellipse, College Park, MD 20740-3843. Please include affiliation, mailing address and daytime telephone number. We reserve the right to edit letters.