

Readin', Ritin' & Recruitin'

LOCAL PARENTS, STUDENTS, EDUCATORS ANGRY AT FEDERAL EDUCATION ACT.

BY KELLY O'BRIEN

With school districts all over the country at risk of going under for lack of funding, President Bush's No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act was supposed to throw them a line. Problem is, with all the strings attached, it's really more of a net.

The NCLB Act is full of stringent academic requirements which make eligibility for federal funding much more difficult to achieve. In fact, some Democrats have taken to calling it the "No School Board Left Standing Act."

Another prominent nickname the NCLB Act has acquired is the "No Child Left Unrecruited Act." This one refers to an unassuming little clause toward the end of the legislation.

Designed to reel in more military recruits fresh out of high school, section 9528 of the NCLB Act states that "each local educational agency receiving assistance under this Act shall provide, on request made by military recruiters or an institution of higher education, access to secondary school students' names, addresses and telephone listings."

The Committee for Countering Military Recruitment (CCMR) is a collaborative effort between Eugene PeaceWorks and the Community Alliance of Lane County (CALC) that was formed in order to protest schools' compliance with the military recruitment clause.

"I'm very frustrated by the way the law was written in the first place," says Phil Weaver, who helped found the CCMR last December. The CCMR – as well as parents, students and teach-

ers – have been urging the school district to adopt a policy that counters the recruitment clause.

The 4j District's current policy on the disclosure of student information states that, "the parent or eligible student shall provide signed and dated written consent before a school or the district releases personally identifiable information from the student's records."

The articles of that policy do provide a list of very specific circumstances in which students' records may be released without written consent, and nowhere among them are military recruiters mentioned.

4j's policy is not that unusual. Codified in 1974, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act also lays out scenarios in which the school may release student information without parental consent. FERPA, like 4j, does not include military recruiters on its approved list. Moreover, it states that a school must "effectively inform" parents and students of their right to privacy, or risk losing their federal funding.

Today, however, the NCLB Act has superceded FERPA and now threatens withdrawal of funding if a school does not concede to a military recruiter's request for student information.

When asked about the effect of the NCLB Act on local recruitment, the Eugene Navy recruitment station was reluctant to comment, as was their public affairs officer in Portland, a man only identified as Ken: "Our guidance on the No Child Left Behind Act goes all the way to

the Department of Defense and the Pentagon, and we don't comment on it," he says.

The local Army recruiters had to receive permission from their public affairs official, also in Portland. Unlike his Navy counterpart, however, he was happy to give it.

Army Sgt. Stripling spoke about the effect the Act has had on military recruitment. "I wouldn't say it's boosted recruitment," he says. "But it definitely has helped us in terms of getting in touch with people."

Not everyone is indifferent to the requirements of the military recruitment clause. The Santa Cruz City School District and the San Francisco Unified School District have both chosen simply not to comply with the Act and risk the withdrawal of federal funding. Despite wording in the legislation that discourages such tactics, these schools have adopted a policy in which students or parents must opt-in if they want their information released to recruiters. The Santa Cruz district alone risks as much as \$500,000 by not complying fully.

"It is going to take some schools to step forward and challenge [the NCLB Act]," Weaver says, before more schools will risk their funding.

So far, the Bay Area districts have not been punished for their policy, which could encourage other districts. "The question is," says Carol Van Houten, another CCMR member, "are the feds going to do something about this or not?"

Junction City High School counselor Becky Caswell said in a CCMR survey that she feels releasing student records is a breach of their privacy. She told the CCMR that she would not release any records to recruiters until all the students had been informed of their rights.

Informing parents and students of their rights has been the primary focus of the CCMR's efforts here in Eugene.

"I never expected the district to adopt an opt-in policy, to go out on a limb," says Van Houten. Instead, she, the rest of the CCMR, parents, teachers, and 4j students have been pushing the district to adopt policy that will inform

students of the military recruitment clause and their rights.

"The issue is privacy," said Van Houten at a school board meeting. Indeed the bright red button she wore pinned to her shirt read in part: "Student Privacy???"

After months of school board meetings and discussions with Jim Slempp, the assistant superintendent, Van Houten and the CCMR realized they were in for a harder time than they'd thought. "We never expected Eugene to be as difficult as it was," she says.

Only in the last month, in fact, have Slempp and the School Board finally arrived at a decision.

At a meeting with Slempp and board member Virginia Thompson, two members of the CCMR, teachers, parents, and a 4j high school student met together and arrived at a solution.

Rather than adopt an official policy, the school board will issue an administrative directive that has 4j high schools provide a bilingual flier to parents and students in various mailings and during the registration process. They also plan to include on the flier a statement by the district saying that it does not support or endorse the release of student information to military recruiters.

Weaver was present at the final meeting. "It felt like a really good, collaborative effort," he says. "I am encouraged by the steps that they are taking." However Weaver, as well as Van Houten, expressed disappointment at the school board's reluctance so far to make a permanent change in policy. The district has promised to keep working on a military recruitment policy in the fall.

Disappointed though he may be, Weaver says the decision was not unexpected. "I am not surprised that they took a more conservative route," he says.

Nor was Van Houten. She says, "Given the financial crunch Oregon is in, it's as good as it's going to get at this point." **EW**



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