

# Letters

## Defining "Least Restrictive"

Allan Vann ("The Least Restrictive Environment," October 1989) asks if certain severely disruptive children are "truly functioning in a less restrictive environment by remaining in the public school," albeit in a special class.

This question focuses the debate about LRE precisely at its most controversial point: that LRE has been interpreted to mean placement with non-handicapped peers, irrespective of the handicapped student's needs or the needs of those non-handicapped peers.

I heartily endorse handicapped persons' access to all rights, privileges, and areas of life. At the same time, I believe actual access will vary, depending upon type and severity of handicap. There can be NO blanket statement. Self-contained classes are not always right, nor are regular classes, nor are special schools. This is the true meaning of LRE: consideration of the individual and his or her needs.

But one student's LRE should not impair or diminish the environment of another, just as my personal freedoms may not infringe on others' freedoms. Before placing a handicapped student in any classroom, administrators should decide where the student's needs can best be met and additionally analyze the effects of this placement on other learners.

The continuum of placements mandated by PL 94-142 must be available to every handicapped student, and the final selection guided by careful, unbiased consideration of the effects upon both handicapped and nonhandicapped learners. Any other action merely shoots the "L" out of LRE.

JOAN CHAMPIE  
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As a former school administrator who has spent many years as a special educator, I was particularly disappointed to read Allan Vann's comments in "The Least Restrictive Environment" (October 1989).

The example of an emotionally disturbed child who severely disrupts the school routine is *not* an example of

the least restrictive environment concept at work. This concept is commonly misinterpreted in the way that Vann has done in his article. The notion of least restrictive environment can be interpreted as placing handicapped children in the most nearly "normal" placement they are capable of handling; for some, this means *no time* spent in regular education settings. If this particular child is in need of a more restricted placement with related services but has been placed in Vann's school without the support required, then the principles of LRE and free appropriate public education have been violated by the IEP committee and the school district.

Handicapped children who are properly placed will seldom disrupt the educational process. Improper placements—not the notion of LRE—cause handicapped children to lose services they require and infringe on the rights of regular classroom children.

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## Developing Community Values

I enjoyed the interview with Douglas Heath in the September 1989 issue. What really hit home was his response to your last question: "What should a leader do who thinks this is the way a school should be?"

Last year our parents, teachers, administrators and students worked together to identify what we value as a school community. Those values are serving as our course of action, providing direction and a challenge to narrow the disparity between the ideal—what we value—and the real—our strategies to meet these values. I'm confident the commitment made to

search and work for the ideal will sustain growth and promote quality learning experiences for the children.

Douglas Heath's comments served to strengthen my feelings about the direction the Indian Grove School Community is moving.

JOSEPH J. WAWAK  
Principal, Indian Grove School  
Mount Prospect, Illinois

## Material World

Reading Alex Molnar's "Turning Children into Things" (May 1989), I find that I object to his impulse toward excessive faith in the desirability of "noncommodified relationships."

Molnar thinks that "children are treated as products," and he objects to that. I submit that the view of an individual as a material thing is not false, nor does it mean that individuals must live as slaves without options merely because they appreciate and use material goods.

The need for goods has had a civilizing influence upon the human animal. It is responsible for the system of barter and the development of friendship between nations and has contributed to the development of language, the spread of information, and health.

Molnar fails to make a distinction between material goods and the behavior complexes surrounding them. Individuals have the power to interpret the meaning and uses of goods and to assign behaviors accordingly. When the involved parties are satisfied that behaviors surrounding goods are suitable and appropriate, they may be called desirable contract behaviors, and people will be treated, and will treat others, with dignity and self-respect.

PEARL RUTH SABATH  
Long Island City, New York

## God in the Classroom?

James C. Schott ("Holy Wars in Education," October 1989) has written an excellent article exposing the intentions of groups like the National Association of Christian Educators to, as he puts it, "replace democratic institutions with theocracy."

For several years I have been aware of the workings of the groups men-

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tioned [the NACE and Citizens for Excellence in Education]. My anxiety has been increased by the total lack of awareness of public school educators.

I cannot adequately express my appreciation to you for bringing this issue out in the open.

WAYNE HOLT

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Certified Personnel  
Haysville, Kansas*

### Not Alone After All

Thank you for the guest editorial by Arthur Costa ("Re-assessing Assessment," April 1989). Your views shape so much of what the public believes about education. Please make the fourth item in the article—the re-education of legislators, parents, board members, and community—a priority. I've been fighting the "good fight" alone for so long that I'm beginning to despair that it will never be won. Thank you for being a "voice in the wilderness."

TONI L. GUGLIOTTI

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### Rural Schools Need Equal Funding

I certainly agreed with James H. VanSciver in "Let the Competition Begin" (Voices: The Superintendent, September 1989) when he wrote that competition among schools is fair only if it takes place on a level playing field—with equal funding. In most rural school districts equality of funding with suburban districts does not exist. I suspect that there is much more disparity in our schools across America because of financial imbalances than because of racial imbalances. VanSciver concluded by saying, "Give us equal resources; then let the competition begin." I, too, believe that with equal resources, rural school students would leave their suburban counterparts in the dust of their much higher academic achievement.

JOSEPH D. HUBER

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