



**Excellence, Equity & Expectations**

October 4, 2005

Dr. Kent King, Commissioner  
Department of Elementary and Secondary Education  
P.O. Box 480  
Jefferson City, MO 65102

Dear Kent,

I have attached a copy of a recent article from the St. Louis Argus as well as a copy of a letter I recently sent to Bennetta Slaughter, Chief Executive Officer of Applied Scholastics. The comments of your staff on the second page of the article are particularly disturbing.

First, as background, I need to explain that we are very familiar with Applied Scholastics. They opened their "world headquarters" in the Hazelwood School District about three years ago to great fanfare. They approached the district many, many times to try to get us to send teachers to their training, to get us to use their "instructional materials," or to otherwise connect themselves to our children and families. We investigated them thoroughly at the time and found that they were closely connected to the Church of Scientology. We made the decision that this connection was not in the interests of our children and refused all efforts to "partner" with the District.

Since then, they have gotten much more careful about their materials and their website. It is not so easy to track their connection to the Church of Scientology any longer. They deny that Applied Scholastics is connected to the Church of Scientology. They continue to use the materials and philosophy of Ron Hubbard, the founder of the Church.

As the Department reviews renewal applications from potential providers for Supplemental Educational Services this year, I hope that you will evaluate those programs which have already been approved and establish some criteria for their approval.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Chris L. Wright  
Superintendent

Cc: Board of Education

Chris L. Wright, Ph.D.  
Superintendent

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# Scientology in the Public Schools

By PETER DOWNS  
St. Louis Argus Contributor

A controversy over sending St. Louis Public School teachers to a training program connected to the Church of Scientology — and members of the Black Leadership Roundtable — underscores a major flaw in the federal No Child Left Behind Act: rigorous performance standards for public schools, but none for private companies that are supposed to repair the failures.

The controversy began to simmer before Labor Day when approximately two dozen teachers from Fanning and Long middle schools were sent for training to the Spanish Lake headquarters of Applied Scholastics International.

Some of the teachers complained to their union — the St. Louis Teachers and School-Related Personnel Union, American Federation of Teachers Local 420 — that the program is run by the Church of Scientology. Local



PHOTO BY BOB WILLIAMS, IPVA

SLPS Superintendent Creg Williams

420 President Mary Armstrong and First Vice President Byron Clemons took the complaints about the workshops, Clemons called them "Church of Scientology workshops," to school board member Bill Purdy. On September 13, Purdy asked Superintendent Creg Williams to look into the complaints and report back to the school board at its regular meeting on September 20.

At the school board meeting Williams concluded the discussion on Applied Scholastics with the declaration "lesson learned." He said he would instruct principals to stop sending teachers to the organization for training.

Meanwhile, Applied Scholastics is gearing up for a partnership with Hazelwood Public Schools as an approved provider of tutoring services to children, who attend underperforming schools in that north county school district.

In an interview with the Argus, Applied Scholastics Chief Executive Officer Bennetta Slaughter denied that her organization has any connection to Scientology, a 35-year-old religion that holds that humans are made of clusters of extraterrestrial spirits called "thetans", who were banished to Earth million years ago by a cruel galactic ruler named Xenu. Through an extensive series of

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costly "auditing" sessions by church "conductors," individuals can supposedly "clear" the bad thietans away from the good thietans and achieve a higher level of understanding and a better life.

Slaughter said the confusion about Applied Scholastics comes from the fact that it is based on the educational writings and "study technology" of the man who founded Scientology, L. Ron Hubbard, but, she said, the church is not involved in any way. Applied Scholastics licenses the right to use Hubbard's educational writings from his estate, she said, not from the church. She also said that she has no connection with Scientology.

Hubbard is everywhere in evidence at Applied Scholastic. His picture adorns walls, every book carries his name, and the curriculum talks about how Hubbard discovered "the barriers to learning" and the actual psychological states students enter when they come up against one of those barriers.

The connections to Scientology are stronger than just a common reverence of Hubbard, however. The promotional material and testimonials for Applied

Scientologists as Tom Cruise, Isaac Hayes, and John Travolta. The "What is Scientology" web site of the Church of Scientology discusses Applied Scholastics and Hubbard's "study technology" under the heading "Scientology Helping Students to Study."

The web site says that Scientologists have made "programmes using Mr. Hubbard's educational discoveries . . . available to the public through Applied Scholastics International." The web site devotes several pages to Applied Scholastics.

The church's magazine, "Freedom," has featured Slaughter and Applied Scholastics, and the web version links to the Applied Scholastics web site. On her own web page, Slaughter attributes her success to Scientology: "Through Scientology counseling and courses I was able to gradually dissolve away all those things that were stopping me," she wrote.

Slaughter's lack of forthrightness about the Scientology connections to Applied Scholastics raises a red flag about the group's "study technology." As Clemons said, "if there is a wall, it is a very thin wall, so thin you can

near the Scientologists talking on the other side."

Applied Scholastics claims to use only the "educational discoveries" of L. Ron Hubbard, who died in 1986, and no one else, because Hubbard discovered the barriers to learning and the ten rules for effective teaching.

According to Applied Scholastics, the first barrier to study is "lack of mass," or "not having the real thing there that you are studying about." Slaughter admitted that that is neither new nor profound, but said that what Hubbard did, "through hundreds of case studies," was determine "the actual mental states and physical reactions" of students who bump up against this barrier. "They feel squashed, bent, sort of spiny, sort of lifeless, bored, or angry," she said, reading from one of Applied Scholastics' texts. "They can wind up with their stomach feeling funny, with headaches, feeling dizzy, and very often their eyes will hurt."

The solution, according to Hubbard and Applied Scholastics, is to put the real thing that students are studying about right in front of them in the classroom. If teachers can't do that - the Moon, for example, might not fit - "pictures help. Movies would help

too."

Applied Scholastics teaches its methods with large comic books and cartoon posters mounted on the wall. The principals of Fanning and Lon middle schools spent their professional development budgets on sending teachers to Applied Scholastics to study those comic books.

Applied Scholastics is an approved provider in Missouri for supplemental education services under Title I of No Child Left Behind. That law requires that public schools that are labeled as "need improvement" have to set aside 20 percent of their Title I money for tutoring or transportation to tutoring from approved providers of supplemental education services.

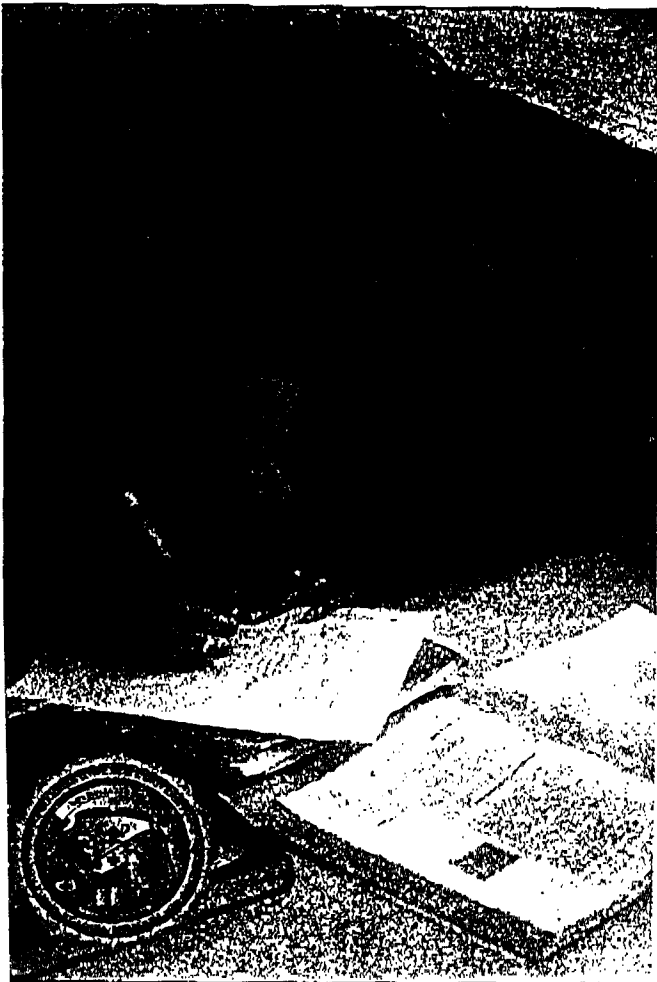
Kaye Bartles, who is in charge of supplemental education services at Missouri's Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), said Applied Scholastics is a new provider, so we don't know much about it. She said organizations apply for approval by submitting an application, which gets read and graded by three people. There are no site visits to evaluate the organization, no review of the organization's texts, because DESE does not have the staff to do those things.

Randy Rook, director of federal grant management at DESE, said that when President George W. Bush signed No Child Left Behind four years ago, "a lot of people saw this as a great way to get into real money." Most of those people have dropped by the side, he said, but, he admitted, as of yet there has been no evaluation of those private tutoring programs. "There will be," he added. He said he does not know anything about Applied Scholastics.

Slaughter credited Rev. Sammie Jones and school board member Ron Jackson with spreading positive words about her organization. Applied Scholastics trains tutors for a tutoring program at Jones' church, and Slaughter has Jones' photo on her office wall. She said Jones also has introduced the program to other ministers, including Rev. C. Jessell Strong, and that through them schools heard about the program.

Slaughter said that Jackson is mentoring one of Applied Scholastics' certified trainers, Nathalie Means, to become a principal. Last year, Means taught ninth grade at Summer High School. She said she used the Applied Scholastics methods in her class. This year she is at Beaumont High School as part of her administrator training.

Slaughter said it was through another friend of Jackson, the St. Louis leader of Urban Futures, that, the principal of Fanning Middle School, was introduced to Applied Scholastics.



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