



EPSSL | **EDUCATION POLICY STUDIES LABORATORY**
Education Policy Research Unit

******NEWS RELEASE******

**from the Education Policy Research Unit (EPRU)
and the Education Policy Studies Laboratory (EPSSL)
at Arizona State University**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thursday, April 1, 2004

CONTACT:

Gerald Bracey
George Mason University
(703) 317-1716
gbracey@erols.com

Susan Ohanian
(802) 425-4201
susano@gmavt.net
<http://www.susanohanian.org>

Alex Molnar, Professor and Director
Education Policy Studies Laboratory
(480) 965-1886
epsll@asu.edu
<http://edpolicylab.org>

Find the Bracey report at:
<http://www.asu.edu/educ/epsll/EPRU/documents/EPSSL-0404-118-EPRU.doc>

Find the Ohanian report at:
<http://www.asu.edu/educ/epsll/EPRU/documents/EPSSL-0404-117-EPRU.doc>

**TWO NEW REPORTS URGE THAT POLICY MAKERS CRITICALLY
EXAMINE VIRTUAL SCHOOLS AND THEIR CURRICULUM**

TEMPE, Ariz.— Two reports, each examining a company that promotes “virtual” education, were released today by the Education Policy Studies Laboratory (EPSSL) at

Arizona State University. The reports conclude that “virtual” education needs to be more carefully scrutinized by policy makers.

“*Knowledge Universe* and Virtual Schools: Educational Breakthrough or Digital Raid on the Public Treasury?” by Gerald Bracey (George Mason University), and “The K12 Virtual Primary School History Curriculum: A Participant’s-eye View” by Susan Ohanian explore the workings of Knowledge Universe, or KU, a little-known but increasingly influential investment firm that supports a number of for-profit companies involved in education; and K12 Inc., a corporation that provides curriculum and related services to “virtual” charter schools.

Knowledge Universe is headed by Michael Milken, the former junk-bond promoter who spent two years in prison on charges of insider trading. K12 Inc. is headed by William Bennett, former secretary of education under President George H. W. Bush.

The Bracey analysis of KU warns that although KU has the potential for significantly influencing the nation’s public education system through its investment in publicly funded for-profit education activities, its role has not been carefully examined by policy makers. Bracey reports that KU is subject to far less scrutiny than public education institutions.

K12 provides “virtual” curriculum at taxpayer expense to students enrolled in “virtual” charter schools. Ohanian, a former teacher, reviewed K12 Inc.’s history curriculum for grades K-2. Ohanian reports that the K12 curriculum is unimaginative and inappropriate for its target audience.

“Throughout the curriculum, the lessons had the same structure: learning presented as stimulus and response; training children to parrot phrases they do not understand; offering rote responses to horrific events,” Ohanian writes.

According to Alex Molnar, director of the Education Policy Studies Laboratory, the Bracey and Ohanian reports are timely because “virtual” education proposals are drawing increasing interest in state legislatures.

Molnar commented, “It is important for policy makers to take a long hard look at service providers and the content of the programs provided. The Bracey and Ohanian reports suggest that there is considerable potential for abuse by for-profit providers of ‘virtual’ education.”

Taken together, the Bracey and Ohanian reports raise important questions about the policy implications of companies that significantly influence public education policy and practice, but that operate with relatively little public oversight.

“The costs and the potential benefits of ‘virtual’ education have yet to be carefully calculated or considered,” Molnar says. “The time to do so is now before more states

adopt or expand virtual school legislation. This very necessary background work is essential if interests of taxpayers and students are to be protected.”

The Education Policy Research Unit (EPRU) conducts original research, provides independent analyses of research and policy documents, and facilitates educational innovation. EPRU facilitates the work of leading academic experts in a variety of disciplines to help inform the public debate about education policy issues.

Visit the EPRU website at <http://educationanalysis.org>

The Education Policy Studies Laboratory (EPSL) at Arizona State University offers high quality analyses of national education policy issues and provides an analytical resource for educators, journalists, and citizens. It includes the Commercialism in Education Research Unit (CERU), the Education Policy Analysis Archives (EPAA), the Education Policy Research Unit (EPRU), and the Language Policy Research Unit (LPRU). The EPSL is directed by Professor Alex Molnar.

Visit the EPSL website at <http://edpolicylab.org>