

# COMMERCIALISM@SCHOOL.COM

## **UW–Milwaukee Center for the Analysis of Commercialism in Education releases THIRD ANNUAL REPORT ON SCHOOLHOUSE COMMERCIALISM**

**Issued by: Beth Stafford, bstaff@uwm.edu 9/12/00  
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MILWAUKEE — Evidence of spreading schoolhouse commercialism continues to mount, according to "COMMERCIALISM@SCHOOL.COM," the third annual report on schoolhouse commercialism issued by the Center for the Analysis of Commercialism in Education (CACE) at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee School of Education. The report was issued Thursday, Sept. 14.

The report traces the number of citations related to schoolhouse commercialism in individual categories. The trends identified in the report are based on analysis of the number of articles published on each activity in four bodies of literature: 1) the popular press, 2) the education press, 3) the business press, and 4) the advertising/marketing press.

Overall, the report shows an overall increase over the last decade of 395% in the number of press citations discussing seven categories of commercializing activity in schools. The study is available on the Center for the Analysis of Commercialism in Education Web site by going to [www.schoolcommercialism.org](http://www.schoolcommercialism.org) and clicking on the "What's New" button. Data tables and a detailed description of the methodology used are available at the Web site as well.

The study is being released amid evidence of a growing backlash against schoolhouse commercialism. On the same day as the CACE report is being issued, Sept. 14,

- the General Accounting Office is releasing its first examination of commercial activity in public schools;
- a coalition of educators, psychologists, and physicians will demonstrate at the advertising industry's "Golden Marble Awards" ceremony in New York City to raise public awareness about marketing campaigns aimed at children and their harmful effects; and
- the Center for Commercial-Free Education, based in Oakland, Cal., is releasing sample policies for school boards to consider in reducing or eliminating commercialism in schools.

"School commercialism doesn't occur in a vacuum," says Alex Molnar, director of the center and UWM professor of education. "We are surrounded by commercial messages in and out of school, which serve to reinforce and amplify each other. Commercial activity in schools is increasing and raises serious questions about the role of schools in our society."

CACE's newest report finds that technology is broadening the opportunities for businesses to engage in commercial activities in school, and is increasing the reach of school-based commercial activities to the home. For instance, some companies are offering schools free Web sites to increase parental awareness of school activities, but which also include advertising aimed at parents for products such as financial services or real estate.

The report also finds evidence of rising attempts to regulate commercialism in schools. Madison, Wis. recently declined to renew an exclusive contract with Coca-Cola because of community concerns over the limitations that contract placed on the schools, for example.

At the same time, however, businesses engaging in other forms of commercialism, such as for-profit institutions moving into public education through the opening of charter schools, are increasingly using sophisticated ways to get around the regulatory systems governments attempt to construct.

Each of the categories of commercialism is described below, with the percent change in number of citations from 1990 to 2000 indicated in parentheses after the category's title. The seven categories tracked by CACE between 1990 and 2000 are:

- 1) Sponsorship of Programs and Activities. (Increased by 248 % between 1990 and 1999-2000.) Corporations paying for or subsidizing school events and/or one-time activities in return for the right to associate their name with the events and activities. This may also include school contests.
- 2) Exclusive Agreements. (Increased by 1,384%.) Agreements between schools and corporations that give corporations the exclusive right to sell and promote their goods and/or services in the school or school district. In return the district or school receives a percentage of the profits derived from the arrangement. Exclusive agreements may also entail granting a corporation the right to be the sole supplier of a product or service and thus associate its products with activities such as high school basketball programs.
- 3) Incentive Programs. (Increased by 231%.) Corporate programs that provide awards, goods, or services to a school or school district when its students, parents, or staff engage in a specified activity or demonstrate particular behaviors. The scope of this category's definition was reduced in this year's report because revenue-generating programs such as Campbell's Labels for Education are now included in the new Fundraising category.
- 4) Appropriation of Space. (Increased by 539%.) The allocation of school space such as scoreboards, rooftops, bulletin boards, walls, and textbooks on which corporations may place corporate logos and/or advertising messages.
- 5) Sponsored Educational Materials. (Increased by 1,875%.) Materials supplied by corporations and/or trade associations that claim to have an instructional content.
- 6) Electronic Marketing. (Increased by 139%.) The provision of electronic programming and/or equipment in return for the right to advertise to students and/or their families and community members in school or when they contact the school or district.
- 7) Privatization. (Increased by 3,206%.) Management of schools or school programs by private for-profit corporations or other non-public entities.

In this 1999-2000 report, CACE has added an eighth category, Fundraising.

- 7) Fundraising. (Because this is the first year in which database searches were conducted on the topic, the data for Fundraising were not included in the total number of citations for the year or used for comparison between years.) The Fundraising category incorporates some elements formerly included in the Incentive Programs category, as described above, such as collecting particular product labels or cash register receipts from particular stores. Any activity conducted or program participated in to raise money for school operations or extracurricular programs is considered fundraising.

"Commercial activities now shape the structure of the school day, influence the content of the school curriculum, and determine whether children have access to a variety of technologies. Moreover, it appears from a number of citations that there is an emerging trend for marketers to attempt to bundle together advertising and marketing programs in schools across a variety of media and thus gain a dominant position in the schoolhouse market," says Molnar.

He continues, "The effort to more fully integrate the schoolhouse into corporate marketing plans by securing control over as many school-based advertising media as possible may well be the trend to watch over the next decade. If so, we can expect schools to serve as launch pads for

marketing campaigns that resemble high profile movie releases complete with multiple tie-ins for a variety of products and services aimed at children and their families."

CACE, which was established with support from Consumers Union (publisher of "Consumer Reports"), serves as an informational resource on issues pertaining to the nature, scope, and impact of commercial activities in schools.

Located at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, it is the only academic center in the world devoted exclusively to the study of schoolhouse commercialism.

"Through its activities and projects the Center for the Analysis of Commercialism in Education seeks to help promote thoughtful educational practice and sound public policy," says Molnar.

CACE conducts activities in five core areas: the identification and analysis of trends in commercialism based on systematic reviews of articles appearing in the popular, education, business, and marketing press; the analysis of corporate documents and materials relevant to commercial activities in schools; the dissemination of center findings; collaboration and information sharing with organizations and individuals working on the issue of commercialism in schools or related topics; and providing a course on commercialism in schools at UWM for educators and other interested parties.

Center Director Alex Molnar is an expert in the area of school commercialism and author of numerous articles and books on the subject, including "Giving Kids the Business: The Commercialism of America's Schools" (Westview, 1996).

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(FOR MORE INFORMATION: Alex Molnar, 414-229-4592. Molnar has discussed educational topics on NPR's "Market Place" and "Talk of the Nation," and has been featured on "60 Minutes," "The NewsHour," CNN reports, and the "TODAY Show," among many others.) OTHER CONTACTS: Beth Stafford, 414-229-4452, bstaff@csd.uwm.edu; Jennifer Morales, 414-229-2716, jmorales@uwm.edu