

Contacts: Beth Stafford
414-229-4452
bstaff@csd.uwm.edu
Jennifer Morales
414-229-2716
jmorales@uwm.edu

Released: Sept. 13, 1999
**Embargoed until Sept. 13,
1999**

COMMERCIALISM IN AMERICA'S SCHOOLS CONTINUES UPWARD TREND

UW-Milwaukee Center for the Analysis of Commercialism in Education releases SECOND ANNUAL REPORT ON SCHOOLHOUSE COMMERCIALISM

MILWAUKEE—"Cashing In On Kids," the second annual report on schoolhouse commercialism issued by the Center for the Analysis of Commercialism in Education (CACE) at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM) School of Education was released today. The report finds an **increase of 11 percent** in the number of citations related to schoolhouse commercialism between 1997-98 and 1998-99. Overall, the report found that **between 1990 and 1998-99 the number of citations relating to schoolhouse commercialism showed an increase of 303 percent.** "These findings suggest that, to an unprecedented degree, commercial activities now help shape the structure of the school day, influence the content of the curriculum, and may determine whether or not a child will have access to a variety of advanced learning technologies." says Alex Molnar, director of the center and UWM professor of education.

Molnar acknowledges that commercial activities may seem like a good deal to both businesses and to school administrators desperate to find extra money to respond to the needs of their school. However, according to Molnar, "mixing commercial activities with public education raises fundamental issues of public policy, curriculum content, the proper relationship of educators to the students entrusted to them, and the values that the schools embody." "Furthermore, very few educators are trained to assess the impact of commercializing activities in their schools." He notes that **there is little discussion of schoolhouse commercialism among educators in professional publications.**

"Cashing In On Kids" is the result of database searches on seven categories of schoolhouse commercialism covering the period 1990 to 1998-99. "Although the number of

citations that relate to commercializing activities can provide only a rough approximation of the scope and development of the phenomenon the results are, nevertheless, sobering," says Molnar. The study is available on the Center for the Analysis of Commercialism in Education web site (www.uwm.edu/Dept/CACE).

(MORE)

Other key points are:

- **The largest area of schoolhouse commercialism appears to be sponsorship of programs and activities.** In the 1998-99 period 1,614 citations were found in this category accounting for **41 percent of all citations for 1998-99**. This suggests that activities such as Canon's National Envirothon and Coke in Education Day are now common in America's schools.
- **The fastest growing commercial activity appears to be electronic marketing**, which includes television, radio, and the Internet/World Wide Web, is a relatively new development in schoolhouse commercial activity. The number of **citations in this category jumped 59 percent between 1997-98 and 1998-99**. Electronic marketing citations amount to 17 percent of all citations for 1998-99. To a considerable degree the reason for the sharp increase in references to electronic marketing activities is probably the result of the development of marketing programs the offer Internet/World Wide Web services to schools in return for access to students.
- **The number of citations reporting on exclusive arrangements increased 21 percent between 1997-98 and 1998-99**. This category consists almost entirely of reports of agreements between school districts and soft drink bottling companies. The idea of earning money by allowing one company the exclusive right to sell products to students has proven to be both attractive to many school districts and very controversial.
- Although the **privatization** category grew only 2 percent between 1997-98 and 1998-99 **in 1998-99 this category accounted for 25 percent of all citations**. In the first annual trends report only four firms were tracked "Cashing In On Kids" tracks eleven firms. The increase in the number of firms running five or more schools suggests that this category may experience substantial growth over the next several years. However, it is important to note that while the controversy surrounding for-profit schools may generate a large number of press citations this does not necessarily reflect the significance of this category. It will take more time to assess the significance of privatization as a commercializing activity.

- **Other commercialism categories.** The categories of **and incentive programs** (such as General Mills Box Tops for Education) and **appropriation of space** (such as in-school billboards and advertisements on lunchroom menus) **are well-established** commercial categories. Each

(MORE)

of these categories has shown growth over the past year. The number of **citations related to incentive programs increased 15 percent between 1997-98 and 1998-99. For the appropriation of space category the increase was 9 percent in the same period.**

- One category of commercial activity, sponsored educational materials, showed a decrease in the number of citations reported between 1997-98 and 1998-99. **The sponsored educational materials category showed a 14 percent decrease in the number of citations reported during this period.** It is hard to interpret a one-year decrease in the number of citations. It is possible that the producers of these materials try to keep them out of public view and thus avoid the kind of controversy engendered by materials such as the Prego Spaghetti Sauce science lesson.

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. "Through its activities and projects the center 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).

###

(CONTACT: Alex Molnar will be available after 1pm CST Monday, Sept. 13 at 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.)