much of the mathematics education community that the new state standards were purveying mindless rituals as mathematics, to the destruction of students’ “higher order thinking skills.”

Those already familiar with the politics surrounding the controversial 1997 adoption of the new California mathematics standards can doubtless tease out of Wilson’s rather bland account, for she duly notes the various commissions, frameworks, surveys, and reports as they succeeded one other during the stormy period from 1980 to 2000. But it is all set in deliberately neutral terms, implying that this debate is always an honest one, which it is not.

Wilson’s account fails to describe the enormous budget of deception, charlatanry, careerism, ill will, and ignorance that underlies much of the politics in question. Had she been able to have amplified her story immeasurably beyond her diary of their public pronouncements. The unpublicized infighting of such people has had as much practical consequence at the schoolroom level as all the theoretical apparatus of the schools of education.

All told, California Dreaming gave me the feeling of reading a history of the Protestant Reformation that did not mention the genuine death-dealing armies in the fields of central Europe, as if the battalions were engaged in a learned dispute concerning interpretation of the Gospels. For the reader who wishes to understand the fundamentals of today’s math wars and the baleful progressivist influence on American schools in general, a history such as Wilson’s, though an excellent straightforward chronology, is both too much and too little. As a helpful supplement I should like to recommend an earlier, polemical view of the major problem that confronts us in education: Albert Lynd’s Quackery in the Public Schools, a neglected 1953 book whose title is not yet out of date.

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### Just the Facts

*A guide for school researchers*

**School Figures: The Data Behind the Debate**

by Hanna Skandera and Richard Sousa

*Hoover Institution, 2003, $15; 342 pp.*

**Reviewed by Chester E. Finn Jr.**

The education field sometimes seems flooded with numbers, but all too often they’re numbing, obscure, of uncertain accuracy, and hard to track down. How often have you found yourself fumbling for an apt datum to illustrate a point, or wondering what’s the truth about (say) school spending, teacher salaries, or math achievement scores over recent years or decades? You can, of course, rummage around on innumerable websites or try to heft the bulky compilations of the National Center for Education Statistics, but such exercises are often painful and frustrating and sometimes just plain fruitless.

To the rescue come Hoover research fellows Hanna Skandera and Richard Sousa with a wonderfully manageable and well chosen volume of data. It’s organized under six big headings—schools, teachers, achievement, expenditures, “school reform” and “students and their families.” Better still, under each heading the authors offer a handful of “propositions” that, in their judgment, support the data, such as “Across-the-board teacher salary increases may not stand alone as an education reform solution”; or “Summer school gives clear evidence that accountability is changing the way we educate.” Each proposition is followed by a mini-essay, then by a few well selected and nicely presented charts, graphs, tables, and maps that supply the supporting data.

You may well encounter propositions that you yearn to debate. Did you know, for example, that the share of GDP spent on K–12 education has hardly budged since 1970? That teachers’ salaries are but 40 percent of school expenditures today (compared with 51 percent in 1961)? That the average elementary school has more than tripled in size in the past 50 years? That school violence is declining? Find these facts and more in School Figures, a reference work that all school reformers should keep readily at hand.