



Written by [Dr. Duke Pesta](#) on June 7, 2021

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Former Public Education Reformer Speaks Out ... Against the Futility of Saving Public Education

As the leader of the Arizona Department of Education, former Superintendent Diane Douglas was devoted to improving education in Arizona so that all of Arizona's children could have the opportunity to achieve their goals in life and contribute as successful American citizens. She believes the only way to accomplish this goal is to return education to its original purpose — the acquisition of knowledge. To this end, she attempted during her 2015-2019 tenure to bring the Hillsdale Barney Charter School standards to all the schools in Arizona. She has now turned her efforts to sounding the alarm about the government-controlled, politically correct indoctrination of public schools and helping parents find true educational alternatives for their children. To that end, Douglas now serves on the educational advisory board of Public School Exit.



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The New American: *You were elected Arizona superintendent of public instruction with the desire to make a difference in the public schools. What did you realize about public education after being in this position?*

Diane Douglas: In Arizona, the superintendent of public instruction (SPI) is an *elected* office (and one of five executive officers in the state) but not in charge of education by any stretch of the imagination. The Arizona State Board of Education (SBE) is an *appointed* constitutional board. They are the education policymakers. In a nutshell, the SPI implements SBE adopted policies and any direct statutory mandates. The SPI does have executive authority over the operations of the Arizona Department of Education (ADE), which oversees the allocation of over \$10 billion of funding. Finally, the SPI has a bully pulpit.

Nevertheless, I fully expected that the Republican candidates of 2014 who campaigned as “conservatives” — the governor, the attorney general, and legislative candidates — would help me rid the state of Common Core. But once elected — not so much. The governor had his own agenda. When legal battles began between me and the SBE, the attorney general recused his office. And the legislators were afraid to challenge the governor on Common Core lest he refuse to sign their (useless) bills. I was told this was “knowing how the game is played.”

Ultimately, all obstacles to my efforts to repeal and replace the Common Core Standards with true



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classical education standards were created by our “Republican” governor, his Chamber of Commerce cronies, and the SBE.

While I was in Washington, D.C., attending the Council of Chief State School Officers meeting to secure a release from the Common Core copyright on behalf of Arizona, the governor attended the March 2015 meeting of the State Board of Education. He mandated that the SBE not replace, but rather only “review and revise,” the Common Core standards. With very few exceptions, Governor Ducey never discussed his education “policies” or budget recommendations with me. As a matter of fact, if I am not mistaken, we only met in person three times in four years.

TNA: *What were some of the most concerning things you saw as superintendent?*

Douglas: The single most disconcerting thing I learned as superintendent is that neither side of the aisle truly wants to change the government system of education. The “Left” clearly wants to use the system to indoctrinate our children against Christianity, free markets, and Western Civilization, forcing secular humanism on them and introducing them to dangerous sexual practices at very young ages, thus turning them against their very own families and nation.



Grading on a curve: Public-school students are now being graded on things such as their attitudes and how well they conform. Academic performance is often averaged to give the illusion of better grades for more kids. *(Photo credit: Filmwork/iStock/GettyImagesPlus)*

Meanwhile the “Right” has abandoned classical education — logic, critical thinking, and individualized learning — replacing it with what amounts to little more than soulless and mindless exercises in “career readiness,” a fancy way of saying “drone work” and utilitarian job training to fit the needs of industry. Many on the Right believe in longer school hours and extended calendars to “help” the working parents they’ve sent into the workforce to pay taxes to fund the government schools.

Naïvely, I once thought that when educrats used the term “lifelong learning,” they meant it as a noble goal: to instill in our young a desire for greater and greater knowledge. I have since come to realize the true meaning of the term. The “system” will give our children just enough job training to meet the needs of industry and our corporate oligarchies. And then, when the demand for particular skills and professions wanes, they will return to the classroom for more government-issued certification. It is an endless, cynical, self-perpetuating model of futility.



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TNA: *What finally convinced you that reforming public schools was no longer a serious option?*

Douglas: That conclusion was 30 years in the making. I had three epiphany moments very early in my daughter's public education. The first was before she started kindergarten when a friend reached out to me, wondering if I could help her understand why her daughter, who earned "B's" and "C's" all year, was being held back. This was my first encounter with Outcome Based Education. After hearing the district administrator's justification, I still recall blurting out "that's the stupidest thing I've ever heard!" I had a lot to learn.

The next moment of clarity occurred as a volunteer in my daughter's kindergarten class observing phonics instruction, which was still being taught at the time. I immediately understood why I, who had been taught to read with sight words, struggled with reading throughout my own K-12 schooling. That day I became an unrelenting advocate for explicit phonics instruction, something still not practiced in our government schools.

The final epiphany came during a Parent-Teacher-Student Association (PTSA) meeting when my daughter was in second grade. The principal was bragging that 80 percent or so of all students between grades 5 and 8 received a "Certificate of Merit" for that marking period. This certificate was awarded for receiving all "B's" or higher on report cards. As a former finance person, my immediate thought was "holy cow, they're cooking the books!" I knew it was very unlikely that so many students could be getting A's and B's. From that day forward I never paid any attention to my daughter's grades, but focused on what she could demonstrate to me about what she had learned.

Those incidents motivated me to study the history of what we now refer to as public education. I volunteered in my daughter's schools throughout her education: in the classroom, on the PTSA, on the Site Councils of her schools, and ultimately as a two-term member (and two-year president) of the local governing board, before serving as Arizona SPI. I served from the bottom rung to the top of the ladder in Arizona education, but never as an employee of the system in any capacity. All this experience gave me understanding and a very close look at the philosophies undermining the education of our children. I studied Horace Mann, sight reading, compulsory attendance, John Dewey, the Frankfurt School, Alfred Kinsey, Planned Parenthood, and the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS). I became familiar with their agendas to use education as the means to change our country and our culture.

I witnessed the downward spiral of our children's performance in all core subject areas. I observed the implementation of radical, anti-science, comprehensive sex education and the scourge that is Critical Race Theory. I've watched the government education system become more radical with each passing year. I've heard firsthand the nasty, behind-the-scenes attacks from teachers and administrators who demean parents and their rightful role in the education of their children. So many of them believe that parents should butt out and leave all education decisions to them. As long as we continue to train our teachers according to Dewey's system, there is no hope of change. If I had been given the proverbial magic wand, and was only allowed to change one thing about government education, there is no doubt in my mind it would be to abolish the Colleges of Education.

Many believe if we just close down the (unconstitutional) Department of Education and get the Feds out of education, all will be fixed. And while that is certainly a step in the right direction, people must realize that the system is controlled top to bottom by the government. I've seen as much, if not more,



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damage done to children's education at the state and local levels. I once worked toward "fixing" the system, if for no other reason than the sheer number of students within "public education." But I think the final straw for me came in 2018 when Arizona teachers conducted an illegal strike, even after our governor had promised them a 20-percent wage increase! I knew in my heart there was no fixing the system. It was doing exactly what it was designed to do, and it served exactly those it was designed to serve: government employees.

TNA: *Do you think it is still worthwhile for people to run for school board?*

Douglas: As long as the government education monopoly is capable of confiscating tax dollars to fund itself, it is imperative that parents and taxpayers continue to run for positions on their local school boards. That being said, what I have found over the years is that even some of the most conservative school-board members, once elected, fall into the clutches of the educrats and blindly support the system rather than ask the tough questions they were put on the board to ask.

It is equally important that community members attend school-board meetings. When I was on the school board, it seemed the only time we got any significant number of parents to attend was if we had large-scale student recognitions and awards to distribute, or if budget cuts threatened extracurricular activities. And even then, parents never stayed for the actual meeting. Ours is a representative form of government, but that doesn't mean "elect them, then forget them." We always need to be watching our elected officials very closely. Parents need to ensure that administrators and teachers aren't the only voices and opinions that school board members hear.

TNA: *What are your views on charter schools and vouchers?*

Douglas: Charter schools *may* be a step in the right direction for parents wanting out of government schools. But parents must remember that charter schools *are* government schools nonetheless — just playing under different rules. The latitude that legislatures give charter schools can just as easily be taken away as a result of one election.

Conceptually, I love vouchers. Give parents funding and allow them to use it for the school of their choice, or to buy education resources that are best for their children. In Arizona, we have Empowerment Scholarship Accounts (ESAs) for qualifying students: students with disabilities, children of active military, or kids who attend failing schools. Parents are awarded 90 percent of the funding that the student's attendance district would have received for that child. Parents can use those funds to pay tuition to a private school, purchase education services, or homeschool. We also have School Tuition Organizations (STOs) to which people can donate their tax liability. From this money, scholarships are awarded for private-school tuition. The downside is that the ESAs and, to a lesser degree STOs, are still controlled by government, and therein lies the rub with voucher programs.

The reason there is so much money in education is because government confiscates the funding for its system through property, sales, and other kinds of taxes at the local, county, state, and federal levels. If somehow our elected officials had the fortitude to defund the government education system, and the accompanying taxes that support the system no longer existed, would people — all the retirees, all those without children, all those with more children than their personal tax liability would pay to educate — still voluntarily provide that money for children's private education? How do we get adequate funding — this is the *only* time I will use the term "adequate funding" with regard to education — directly to the parents without government collecting and controlling those funds? Those



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are the critical questions of education funding. If we can resolve that conundrum, I believe we can break the back of the government schooling monopoly. Then, we won't have to save our precious children one by one.

I pray for the sake of our children, our parents, our country, and our God that we find an answer to these questions.

TNA: *Given your extensive experience in education and educational reform, what do you recommend for parents who want an actual education for their children?*

Douglas: It's simple. Parents must get their children out of the government school monopoly. I realize that many parents can't imagine life without public schools, but if this past year and the arbitrary and self-serving closure of the schools teaches us anything, it is that we can survive and our kids can thrive outside the public-school complex.

Meanwhile, I was honored to join the advisory board of Public School Exit (PSE). For parents who don't know how to begin accessing non-public school options, PSE is the resource you have been praying to find! Please take time *today* and visit PublicSchoolExit.com.



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