



An “Extreme Makeover” for U.S. Education — Can We? Should We?

Seventy-five percent is a number that gets people’s attention. It isn’t the usual trifling stuff the U.S. Department of Education puts out about math or reading scores being up by two percent one year and down by three percent the next. Add to that another finding reported in the same article: “A 2008 report by the education advocacy group Strong American Schools found that 80 percent of college students taking remedial classes had a high school GPA of 3.0 or better.”



So are we saying that even when students score well, they don’t know much? Apparently. Readers who have been following this series (see links to other articles below) may recall U.S. Commissioner of Education Statistics’ [Pascal D. Forgione](#), Jr., Ph.D., who famously admitted in a speech, “Our idea of ‘advanced’ is clearly below international standards.”

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According to the news article, “75 percent [of college freshmen] likely will spend part of their [first] year brushing up on high-school-level course work.”

Brushing up? Further on, we discover just how much these “little” refresher courses will cost: “about \$5.6 billion — \$3.6 billion in ‘direct educational costs’ such as taxpayer contributions to state universities and another \$2 billion in lost wages.” In response to this news, Education Secretary Arne Duncan regurgitated the same song everyone has heard for years: “States need to raise their academic standards and commit to education reforms.” That’s *federal* education reforms he’s talking about.

After more than four decades of worthless reform movements and worse initiatives, scores of education “advocacy” groups, and more than a 1,050 percent [tax increase since 1970](#), maybe it’s time to start thinking *way* outside the box.

The Ultimate Hostile Environment

Lawmakers know that schools have become a “hostile environment”: hostile to learning, to Western culture, to individuality, to parents, to good manners, even to the much-ballyhooed self-esteem of pupils. So even by its own “standards,” schools have failed. Juvenile crime has been linked to faulty “progressive” teaching methods, [beginning with reading and spelling](#), as per a commissioned study by Michael S. Brunner for the U.S. Department of Justice’s Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Police department and correctional statistics confirm Brunner’s thesis, yet our government



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ignores its own experts whenever they contradict leftist dogma spewing from the National Education Association and university teacher training departments.

Pupils who spend day after day in a “captive” (a.k.a. compulsory) environment in which they can’t learn become frustrated. Sustained frustration over a long enough timeframe produces one of two things: apathy (usually accompanied by withdrawal) or aggression (highlighted by either gregariousness or sudden, explosive violence). This is virtually the only issue on which educational researchers, theologians, and psychologists agree.

Severely frustrated students will, therefore, misbehave — whether it means going to sleep at their desk, truancy, drug-abuse, or [blowing up their school](#). Ongoing misconduct typically lands a pupil in Special Education, where teachers have few techniques at their disposal to correct, or even determine, the specific learning problem. Even if they had any, the make-up of most such classrooms today defies all means of creating a disciplined learning atmosphere. Consequently, Special Education teachers are taught to use group-think and peer pressure as methods of control, which makes the misbehavior even worse.

Students in these environments typically are referred to “counseling” — with child psychologists — who place them on a regimen of increasingly powerful psychiatric drugs that ruin lives and create an increasing cycle of dependency and criminality, at huge cost to society. Every year more children become “eligible” for Special Education “services,” with a higher tax bite to accommodate it. Because the term “eligible” carries a positive connotation, it minimizes the disadvantages.

Worse, today’s chaotic school day features non-stop distractions, noise and interruptions, none conducive to concentration. Youngsters flit from one activity to another, interrupting every attempt at focused learning. This contributes to the phenomenon we know as attention-deficit disorder (ADD) and attention-deficit-hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). The disorder is not in the child; it is in the classroom. Most children are by nature high-energy, easily distracted creatures. It is the rare child who sits and entertains him- or herself with some project for hours on end. Concentration is a learned skill — and the school does not provide it.

Moreover, government-subsidized education has, since the 1960s, been fostering intellectual bankruptcy and lack of self-control. Schools steeped in progressivism-*cum*-humanistic psychology are conveying the notion that there are no standards, academic or otherwise, that cannot be bent or broken. Here are the results, in ascending order:

- Brutal popularity contests that lead to school violence;
- School days spent priming and jockeying for position;
- Intractable peer pressure that trumps teacher authority;
- Lack of respect for school and for learning;
- Inability [to hire and keep](#) good teachers;
- Declining [parental interest in](#), and support for, schools and teachers;
- Ongoing parent-teacher-administrator confrontations;
- Openings for political opportunists (e.g., [university heads put out gay-friendly church list](#));
- Mixed messages to kids.



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Outcome: delinquency, cynicism, unemployability, alienation, resentment, cultural decline, entitlement surges — all leading inevitably to national security breakdown and economic crises that “require” imposition of a police-state.

Can We Fix It?

The short answer is yes — with political will and the mightiest backlash ever.

Readers who have been following this seven-part education series are familiar with the tortured route that took us to where we are. If government at any level is really prepared to commit to meaningful education reform, it needs to rethink the goals of schooling. *The State isn't going to do that — not with so many vested interests. The flip side is that if it doesn't change education, nothing else can change.*

Priority one: The Education Department must be shuttered as a failed agency — all of it, including its data-collection systems (all 17 of them). That means privatization. This is not wishful thinking; major cities already have it. Successful ones could, if they were smart, franchise their operations, much like the Montessori schools and the Catholic schools have done. This is not to imply that either of those choices is wildly successful for all kids. It simply means that franchising is an option. Success or failure would rest with parents. The money spent on tax-supported “warehouses” would be in family pockets instead — *providing citizens insist on it*. Failure to insist means the enormous sums now collected would continue and be put to other uses.

Second: One size does not fit all. Parents who send their youngsters to private schools select them on the basis of their own values and how their kids learn — a highly structured approach, creative approach, hands-on approach, etc.

Third: Educational priorities must be built around just four things:

- Creating a literate citizenry (i.e., basic subject-area proficiency), capable of self-government;
- Ensuring financial independence for that free citizenry (because doing so aids political stability);
- Enhancing the level of general culture, especially Western culture (via “basics” that include artworks, music, sculpture, and philosophy, as doing so channels “emotional overload” by focusing the complex interplay of our five senses);
- Bolstering moral standards consistent with the Founders’ unique concepts about our Republic (life, pursuit of happiness, national sovereignty, property rights, free speech, and sovereignty of the family unit).

Any activity or expenditure that does not accommodate one of these four goals should be shelved or made into electives for which *additional* payment in excess of basic tuition is expected. So, if a child wants to enroll in ballet instead of soccer, maybe that’s possible if Physical Education becomes an elective.

Fourth: A considerable body of valid research exists concerning how people learn, mostly ignored by the education establishment. Only nine things can go wrong: spatial and abstract reasoning, visual identification, visual and auditory memory, perceptual speed, mental stamina (i.e., concentration and focus capability), hand-eye coordination, and thought-expression synchronization. Determining which area may be problematic requires no psychological or personality profiling, surveys, hypothetical (“what-would-you-do-if”) questions, invasions of privacy, or politically sensitive questions.



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The entire revamping process, then, should be predicated on early, *meaningful* diagnostics for entering schoolchildren, at whatever age *parents* decide their children should enter a school. This process would bear no resemblance to an IQ test, to the [National Assessment](#), or to its clones at the state level. There's nothing in these revamped diagnostics that would stigmatize a child, as nearly every kid is going to be weak in at least one of the nine areas.

Which brings up Number Five: A complete retooling of teacher education, together with the ousting of today's psychology-laden "progressive" approach. The present system, being heavily endowed with vested interests, is pushing progressivism. To circumvent this means that new teacher training institutions must be created. (Conservative philanthropists, listen up.)

Once young people interested in a teaching career realize there's an alternative to endless child psychology courses, university departments of education will see empty chairs. From there, various approaches to teaching basic subjects can re-establish themselves. For example, today's educators generally have no idea how to teach intensive, systematic phonics. As for children who learn differently — say, do not naturally acclimate to a left-to-right reading format (a "perceptual" problem) — may be directed to classrooms with elementary teachers specializing in that, not to "Special Education."

Government, of course, will battle all this tooth and nail. Here's how: *accreditation*. A college or school simply won't be "accredited." But what good has accreditation done? It's time to give government its marching orders, reminding bureaucrats that they work for citizens — not the other way around.

The other tack the State will use is *compelling state interest*. That's how it took over curriculum. Federal law forbade its involvement in curriculum in [Public Law 96-88, Section 103b](#), so the Education Department first went after "special" issues it thought people would accept — physical education ("fitness" and "obesity"), sex education (sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancy), multiculturalism (racial injustice), and so on, until it had a foot in just about everywhere.

Society must take back its prerogatives and decide what they wish to subsidize. That means selecting representatives and national leaders who will push these issues all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court if necessary.

So, can we fix education? Absolutely. Should we try, given the daunting task ahead?

There's no longer an alternative.

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