



Written by [Brian Farmer](#) on August 14, 2013

New Public School Policy

“The battle for mankind’s future must be waged and won in the public school classroom. The classroom must and will become an arena of conflict between the old and the new – the rotting corpse of Christianity and the new faith of humanism.”

— John Dunphy in *The Humanist* magazine,
January-February 1983



Those who finished their formal education before the 1980s came along might very well be stunned by the opening quote to this article. The only inkling we may have that the present situation in public schools is very different from those pre-1980s days would probably come from our children who return home from school and share their experiences with us. It is becoming increasingly apparent that what our children learn in church on Sunday is being more than neutralized by what they are learning in the public schools and in college classrooms from Monday through Friday. This is particularly true if a student is a conservative who is politically active and outspoken. To be an open conservative in the world of academia nowadays is likely to invite hostility, intimidation, and abuse from teachers and professors, even if the student is at a fairly young age.

Intolerant at Any Age

One particularly shocking example is that of Benji Backer, a 15-year-old high-school student in Appleton, Wisconsin, who was featured in the local newspaper. When it was revealed that he was working the phones in support of Wisconsin Republican Governor Scott Walker during last year’s recall election, Benji found himself on the receiving end of intense verbal harassment from several angry teachers. But the bullying had been going on even before then. In a commentary he posted on the Internet, Benji described some particularly unpleasant experiences:

Just before the 2010 Midterm election, I was on the front page of the local newspaper for my political volunteer work and my teachers noticed. One of my seven teachers made it very clear that she disapproved of my civic engagement. In a period of two months, my Geography teacher frequently would take me aside after school for a few minutes and tell me how stupid, wrong and misguided I was for being Republican. The harassment with this specific teacher got so bad, I had



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to switch schools halfway through the year. At this time I was only 12 years old. To my knowledge, this teacher was not disciplined at all for her actions....

The harassment got particularly bad one day in late October [2012], about a week after I was featured in *USA Today* for my involvement in the upcoming November election. Again, this video and article was sent throughout the school and was even played in several classes. The same English teacher who had lectured to almost 30 students about a month earlier took me aside during class again. He started talking about Mitt Romney and Scott Walker and his views on them. He reiterated how much harder he worked compared to my dad, a small business owner, which he had no knowledge of. He went on to ask how much my parents made because he wanted to compare it to his salary....

In my Health class, also this year [2013], our very first homework assignment included writing down four activities you do as a person currently and four things you want to do in the future. We were also assigned to present in front of the class. In one of my four boxes, I wrote down that I was a conservative speaker. When I presented in front of the class, he asked if I supported the Tea Party. I said yes. He rolled his eyes and told me believing in the organization was "weird." He also told me he knew nothing about the Tea Party. This teacher then told me to explain, in front of the class why I supported the Tea Party, so I did. When I left the class, I thought about what had happened. Why was I being called "weird"? Why was I being questioned so much? The simple truth reveals that some teachers want to obstruct and block my personal views from looking valid. If a teacher asked why someone was homosexual, Atheist or Muslim and called what they believed "weird," there would be serious consequences. I decided not to report this to the principal because I realized it wouldn't help. I had experienced the fallout from reporting prior instances and I didn't want a repeat situation.

An incident elsewhere in Wisconsin more directly reflects the sentiment projected in the quote at the beginning of this article. During February of last year, Dexter Thielhelm, a second-grade student at James Madison Elementary School in the city of Sheboygan, had worked with his mother to create valentines for his friends at school. But school officials confiscated the valentines before Dexter could hand them out. The reason? It was because each valentine contained a note with the message "Jesus Loves You" along with the famous Bible verse from John 3:16 stating, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." The justification reported in the local media was that "the district also had concerns [in addition to the concern that the children were too young to understand the message] that the Christian content could lead others with negative messages to also distribute to fellow classmates. After all, once one person is allowed to hand out a message, any individual can then tout his or her values, [the school district's assistant superintendent, Mark] Holzman argued."

An incident in a Texas public school this year might provide a clue as to what type of values are being favored. Female students in a world geography class at Lumbarton High School were asked to wear burqas (a loose, usually black or light blue robe that is worn by Muslim women, especially in Afghanistan, and covers the body from head to toe) and refer to Muslim terrorists as "freedom fighters." The students were also given an assignment to write an essay based on an article in the *Washington Post* that blamed Egypt's political turmoil on democracy rather than on the Muslim Brotherhood (an Islamist organization that calls for implementing traditional Islamic sharia law in all aspects of life, including the organization of the government). When pictures of the incident appeared on the Facebook website, parents become upset, as the activity gave the appearance of having an anti-American message. As reported in the *Washington Times*,



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The parents contacted the principal, who defended the program required under CSCOPE, a controversial electronic curriculum system that provides online lesson plans for teachers, Fox News reports.

“This is the normal answer from every school using CSCOPE,” said Janice VanCleave, the founder of Texas CSCOPE Review, which monitors what is being taught in the state’s schools. “They are definitely promoting the Islamic religion.”

The State of Society

How did our society come to this state? It certainly was not always this way. In the early, formative years of our nation, the national ethos was reflected in this passage from the *Harvard Student Guidelines* of 1636, the year that Harvard University was founded by the Massachusetts state legislature: “Let every student be plainly instructed and earnestly pressed to consider well the main end of his life and studies is to know God and Jesus Christ which is eternal life (John 17:3) and therefore to lay Christ in the bottom as the only foundation of all sound knowledge and learning. And seeing the Lord only giveth wisdom, let every one seriously set himself by prayer in secret to seek it of him (Proverbs 2, 3).” At that time, Harvard’s motto was “Veritas Christo et Ecclesiae” (Truth for Christ and the Church); it is now simply “Veritas.”

Such guiding beliefs continued well into the following century, as this passage from the *Yale Student Guidelines* of 1787 attests: “All the scholars are required to live a religious and blameless life according to the rules of God’s word, diligently reading the Holy Scriptures, that fountain of Divine light and truth, and constantly attending all the duties of religion.” Yale University, founded in 1701, thus has as its motto “Lux et veritas” (Light and truth) and it was established to train clergy *and political leaders* for the Colony of Connecticut. After all, it should go without saying that our leaders ought to be righteous and virtuous people and should therefore be so educated.

And even into the 1920s, higher education in the United States was not averse to formally acknowledging its Christian nature. When Trinity College became Duke University in 1924, the bylaws included this mission statement: “The Aims of Duke University are to assert a faith in the eternal union of knowledge and religion set forth in the teachings of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”

The commitment to a Christian education during the colonial period actually started with the youngest students. The *New England Primer* was the textbook used to teach generations of Americans how to read. The *Primer* taught the alphabet by associating each letter with a biblical character or a scriptural lesson, and then a corresponding doctrinal truth was emphasized with a rhyme. For example, A was for Adam, followed by the rhyme, “In Adam’s fall, we sinned all.” During the 19th century, the *McGuffey Reader* came into use and eventually superseded the *New England Primer*. From 1836 until 1920 approximately 120 million copies of the *McGuffey Reader* were published. The *Readers* continued to project a Christian worldview and taught many moral lessons.

At this point it should be obvious that Christianity once had an important role to play in American education. The religious-based curricula reflected the wishes of parents, who wanted to transmit their own convictions to their children through their children’s schooling. The parents could educate their children the way they wanted to because they homeschooled them or placed them in private (often church-supported) schools of their own choosing. But parental control began waning with the advent of the public (read: government) education system in the 19th century and the resulting politicization and secularization of education. A.A. Hodges perhaps summed it up best when he wrote in his *Evangelical*



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Theology, published in 1886, “If every party in the state has the right of excluding from the public school whatever he does not believe to be true, then he that believes the most must give way to him that believes least, and then he that believes least must give way to him that believes absolutely nothing.”

The changing cultural environment provided fertile ground for John Dewey, an atheist who launched the so-called “Progressive Education” movement with the publication of his *The Primary Education Fetich* in 1898. That essay provided the blueprint for a new educational agenda, which advocated shifting education away from emphasizing individual literacy to concentrating on socialization through group activities. The traditional, conservative American values of rugged individualism, self-reliance, and personal responsibility were to be rejected and children were to be educated to accept a collectivist world view. As Dewey proclaimed, “You can’t make socialists out of individualists. Children who know how to think for themselves spoil the harmony of the collective society, which is coming, where everyone is interdependent.” Professor Chester M. Pearce, M.D., professor of education and psychiatry at Harvard, has expressed the situation even more bluntly: “Every child in America entering school at the age of five is mentally ill because he comes to school with certain allegiances to our Founding Fathers, toward our elected officials, toward his parents, toward a belief in a supernatural being.”

Dewey was the first honorary president of the National Education Association (NEA) and had a major influence on public school curricula and on the programs that trained teachers, thanks to generous grants from the Carnegie Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation. As John D. Rockefeller put it, “I don’t want a nation of thinkers. I want a nation of workers.” According to John Taylor Gatto, three-time New York City Teacher of the Year and 1991 New York State Teacher of the Year, the records of those foundations reveal seven distinct goals, which line up perfectly with Dewey’s agenda:

- 1) There appears a clear intention to mold people through schooling.
- 2) There is a clear intention to eliminate tradition and scholarship.
- 3) The net effect of various projects is to create a strong class system verging on caste.
- 4) There is a clear intention to reduce mass critical intelligence while supporting infinite specialization.
- 5) There is clear intention to weaken parental influence.
- 6) There is clear intention to overthrow accepted custom.
- 7) There is striking congruency between the cumulative purposes of GEB [General Education Board] projects and ... Perfectionism, a secular religion aimed at making the perfection of human nature, not salvation or happiness, the purpose of existence.

An interesting example of what can happen when several of those objectives are combined was displayed on the website of the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) earlier this year. The DPI was conducting a program that encouraged white students to wear a white wristband, in order to remind them that they lead a life of privilege because they are white. You see, any personal achievement that you may have experienced is not due to your own personal talent, personal effort, or personal sacrifice. You have achieved success simply because you are white and therefore are privileged in our unfair American society. Professor Robert Jensen, School of Journalism, University of Texas at Austin, explained the general idea in personal terms in a commentary that appeared in the *Baltimore Sun*:

All through my life, I have soaked up benefits for being white. I grew up in fertile farm country



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taken by force from non-white indigenous people. I was educated in a well-funded, virtually all-white public school system in which I learned that white people like me made this country great. There I also was taught a variety of skills, including how to take standardized tests written by and for white people. All of my life I have been hired for jobs by white people. I was accepted for graduate school by white people. And I was hired for a teaching position at the predominantly white University of Texas, which had a white president, in a college headed by a white dean, and in a department with a white chairman.

Conveniently glossed over are the so-called “affirmative action” programs that give preferential treatment to minorities that are deemed to be victimized by our allegedly racist society!

The NEA Notwithstanding

The aforementioned NEA is the largest labor union in the United States and has been instrumental in implementing John Dewey’s humanist agenda in the public schools through the increasing federal control over the American educational system. The NEA has 3.2 million members and represents public school teachers, faculty and staff at colleges and universities, and retired educators. Robert Chanin, the NEA’s top lawyer, retired in 2009 and let the cat out of the bag in a fiery farewell speech at the NEA’s annual national convention, which was held in San Diego that year:

Why are these conservative and right-wing bastards picking on NEA and its affiliates? I will tell you why: It is the price we pay for success. NEA and its affiliates have been singled out because they are the most effective unions in the United States. And they are the nation’s leading advocates for public education and the type of liberal, social, and economic agenda that these groups find unacceptable....

And that brings me to my final and most important point, which is why, at least in my opinion, NEA and its affiliates are such effective advocates. Despite what some among us would like to believe, it is not because of our creative ideas. It is not because of the merit of our positions. It is not because we care about children. And it is not because we have a vision of a great public school for every child. NEA and its affiliates are effective advocates because we have power. And we have power because there are more than 3.2 million people who are willing to pay us hundreds of millions of dollars in dues each year.

The NEA has become the most powerful special interest group in the United States, using its power, and its money, to lobby for ever more federal education spending. Unfortunately, instead of using its influence to improve the quality of education in American schools, the NEA has pursued policies that have resulted in just the opposite.

So, what can be done about the current state of affairs? The answer begins with the recognition that the public — very much including the parents themselves — are often unaware of what happens inside the tax-supported public school classrooms. Obviously, there needs to be greater scrutiny of the public schools and insistence that the abuses be ended. Parents must be as active as possible in their children’s education process, and it is vitally important that concerned citizens combat the misuse of public schools by getting involved in their community. Specifically, that means attending meetings and speaking up, volunteering to be an activist for change, and letting the local school board, school district administrators, and politicians know that you are paying attention to what is going on.

But the answer also entails recognizing that the rise of public (government) education has weakened parental control and has not improved education. Parents should look at private schooling, including homeschooling, as a viable and superior alternative to public schooling. It is not as difficult as one



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might imagine, as now there are online schools such as [FreedomProject Education](#) that offer a classical curriculum for homeschoolers. Finally, consider what the aforementioned John Taylor Gatto has said about the situation: “Is there an idea more radical in the history of the human race than turning your children over to complete strangers and having those strangers work on your child’s mind — out of your sight — for a period of twelve years? Could there be a more radical idea than that? Back in colonial days in America if you proposed that as an idea they’d burn you at the stake.... It’s a mad idea.”



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