

PUBLIC EDUCATION

by John Stiefer

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I decided to wait until after Thanksgiving Day to compose this. Please allow me a moment to qualify the statements I'm about to present. I have been an educator for over 30 years. During that time, I've been a public school administrator, coach, classroom educator, education researcher, public education reformer, and public education advocate. I have a Master's with an emphasis on curriculum development. I have a Ph.D. in Educational Leadership & Policy Studies.

In short (and, please know it's a lot more detailed and complicated), these are the generalized sources for many of the shortcomings associated with public education in America. First and foremost, there is little to absolutely nothing in the way of parent accountability as it pertains to common education. Those of you who have responded to the original and subsequent posts are not the norm. You are the antithesis to the parents who have school-aged children. You have a vested interest in the education of your own child(ren) and you have voluntarily taken on the responsibility of doing beyond what is expected in order to take care of the educational needs of other children. You and classroom teachers often times meet the needs of children who have parents/guardians that do not involve themselves unless there is something personal to gain from the involvement e.g. a frivolous lawsuit against a school district. These particular parent types have left the "parenting" to schools and teachers. They expect everything for nothing using the "I'm a taxpayer" as an excuse to abstain from parenting.

Second, public education as an institution has somehow been swayed to treat itself like an entirely different institution called business. Business is business. Capitalism is what it is and has no place in in common education. In business based on capitalism, competition is expected because it improves the product available to consumers. Now, before you let your thoughts get the best of you, please read "The Blueberry Story" by Jamie Vollmer at jamienvollmer.com. After reading, you must come to realize that private/charter schools are generally "for profit" business ventures that commonly remove via expulsion or invitation to leave procedures for low performing students. In other words, these enterprises can pick and choose their clientele. Public education isn't afforded this practice. It gets what it gets and has to keep them all. Indeed, competition yields winners and losers! Public ed isn't about competition. It's about providing opportunities for young people to find a pathway that leads them to a lifetime of maximizing potentials.

Third, Global comparisons have foolishly be used as a false standard for measuring success. The U.S.A. is different. We believe in a "free and appropriate" education for all students. Appropriate means "of the highest standard" and "All means all!" Ours is the only system that offers such a huge variety of extracurricular programs for such a diverse student population. In other nations, such opportunities are the responsibility of the local community or local organizations. In America, we teach them all!

In many other nations, students reach a point in the process when they are tested to determine whether or not they get to continue with their education or go to a trade school. If you do well on the test, then you get to pursue the educational pathway of personal choice. If you don't fair so well on the test, then you go to trade school. If you want to know some of the possible results of such a system simply examine the sadly high rate of teen suicide or the formation of the Hikikomori in Japan. As a researcher, I am interested in the correlation that might exist between prolonged "high stakes testing" and the rate of suicide among youngsters or their withdrawal from society. No further comments on this. BTW, classroom teachers have very strong negative feelings about just such a system and high stakes testing. Neither are good for children!

And, stop blaming school administrators and classroom teachers! They have been burdened with continuous unfunded (and unfun) mandates that are contrary to just about everything that improves public education. And, these mandates do not benefit children. When we say things like "fire lazy incompetent teachers," are we issuing an indictment on universities who prepare these teachers? The problem is this! American universities produce highly-qualified teachers and administrators. These educators simply are not given the chance to do their jobs. Teachers who may be deficient early in their careers should be afforded to opportunity to improve under the tutelage of a "master" teacher and a supervisory administrator. More experienced teachers who may not be "up to speed" on newer 21st Century pedagogy should be given an opportunity to learn and implement these newer practices. Administrators and teachers no longer have the time to help one another improve professionally due to non-useful mandates that require endless amounts of documentation and time. The bottom line is this. America has a wealth of great teachers and administrators who simply do not get the opportunity to do the job. Instead, they get to do what legislators tell them to do. Wanting to be re-elected, legislators carry out the directives of uninformed constituents. The directives lead to poor policy. This is that endless cycle of "Fire-Ready-Aim." All of which negatively impacts children.

I've said this before and I'll keep saying it until someone listens. There's an old adage that says, "Show me someones financial statements and I'll show you what he or she values." We put our money where our interest are found. Look at the athletic facilities at public schools across our nation. Many of them are much nicer than some university, minor league, or semi-pro facilities! We don't invest in the many. We invest in the few who can entertain us. My gosh! Our nations public schools should be hallowed palaces of learning and development for all young people. Each school should be technologically well-supplied with classroom & lab facilities that are state of the art! No child or teacher should want for anything that improves learning for students!

The education of a young person requires good schools staffed with highly effective teachers and visionary servant leaders. It requires the commitment of a citizenry that stops viewing young people as a resource. We need to somehow start viewing our children as the National Treasures they are and will always be! We need to invest in their future.

Biographical Note: John Stiefer is an educator with the Lawton Public Schools, Lawton, OK