

The Blumenfeld Education Letter

"My People Are Destroyed For Lack Of Knowledge" HOSEA 4:6

Vol. IV, No. 8 (Letter # 36)

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August 1989

The purpose of this newsletter is to provide knowledge for parents and educators who want to save the children of America from the destructive forces that endanger them. Our children in the public schools are at grave risk in 4 ways: academically, spiritually, morally, and physically — and only a well-informed public will be able to reduce those risks.
"Without vision, the people perish."

Let's Break Up the Public School Monopoly!

or

Why the Government Ought to Get Out of the Education Business

There, we've said it! We've mentioned the unmentionable. We've thought the unthinkable. Let's get the government out of the education business! It never belonged there in the first place. Let's privatize American education, from primary school to graduate school.

Much has been written about the privatization revolution. But the one area of our economy where privatization is needed more than in any other -- education -- has virtually been neglected by the privatizers. Why? Probably because public education is so entrenched in our society, such a sacred cow, supported by such politically powerful special interests, that the idea of privatizing public education is considered impossible, impractical, beyond the pale, or an idea before its time.

Yet, the Secretary of Education has warned us that unless our education system does better, "we may perish as the nation we know." Unless we believe the Secretary is blowing smoke, we'd better take his warning seriously.

But there is no indication whatever that the public schools will do better. In fact, the indications are that they will do worse, much worse. How do we know? We read what the educators write. We read those insufferably boring journals of education that pour out of the graduate schools like green slime, written in convoluted, professional jargon that cannot be understood by ordinary mortals. We read them, not because we want to, but because that's the only way to find out what the "educators" are really up to. And so we have no illusions about their ability or even willingness to "reform" education in a manner that will truly improve student performance.

The Only Solution

And so, after twenty years of studying this mess called public education, we've come to the conclusion that the only solution to America's perpetual education crisis is privatization. In other words, it is the government's intrusion into education which has politicized it to the point

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where it is impervious to true reform. The simple truth is that a government education system serves the government, not the children or their parents.

The idea that a government school system would serve the government is not a new idea. It was in the minds of those who envisioned public education before it was even in existence. As far back as 1826, James G. Carter, one of the leading proponents of state owned and operated schools, foresaw the importance of state controlled teachers colleges. He wrote:

"An institution for this purpose would become, by its influence on society, and particularly on the young, an engine to sway the public sentiment, the public morals, and the public religion, more powerful than any other in the possession of government. . . . It should emphatically be the State's institution."(1)

An Instrument of Government

And even earlier, in 1813, Robert Owen, the father of Socialism, wrote:

"It follows that every state, to be well governed, ought to direct its chief attention to the formation of character, and that the best governed state will be that which shall possess the best national system of education.

"Under the guidance of minds competent to its direction, a national system of training and education may be formed, to become the most safe, easy, effectual, and economical instrument of government that can be devised."(2)

It is significant that our Founding Fathers, with only a few exceptions, did not share such views. They regarded education to be a parental responsibility, best left in the hands of those morally and academically qualified to provide it. For that reason, early American education was largely private, efficient, practical, and realistic. Neither time nor money was wasted, and

the result was that Americans had the highest literacy of any people on earth.

Today, our decline in literacy is a national scandal.

A Failed Monopoly

There is no cogent reason why the government should own or operate schools, colleges, and universities. The government monopoly is costly, wasteful, inefficient, and academically deficient. As David Kearns, chairman of the Xerox corporation, has said of public education, it is "a failed monopoly," producing workers "with a 50 percent defect rate." He complained that businesses must hire workers who can't read, write or count and then spend \$25 billion a year to train them.(3)

The irony is that there are plenty of good private schools, colleges and universities in America, providing excellent education at no cost to the taxpayer and, for the most part, at moderate cost to the users.

Some people will claim that tax exemption costs the taxpayer indirectly; and it is true that government funds through student loans and research grants do help some private institutions. But the amount is infinitesimal compared to what the government schools cost the taxpayer. Moreover, private schools could do without that money if they had to.

Perhaps if the government schools were doing a decent job of teaching, taxpayers would feel that their money was being put to good use. But the public school system in America is a disaster. In fact, it is the only American institution that threatens our very future as a nation.

In addition, it is a monopoly, and monopolies are supposed to be bad. The court broke up AT&T because it was a monopoly and thwarted competition. AT&T was providing excellent service at

moderate rates, and yet the court ruled that it had to be broken up because it was a monopoly.

Monopolies Distort Economies

Why are monopolies bad? They are bad because (1) they rely on government force for their existence; (2) they can set prices arbitrarily, and the consumer has no choice but to pay; (3) they do not reflect market values; (4) they distort the marketplace for the services or products they offer; (5) they create vested interests in the status quo; (6) they protect the inefficient; (7) they stand in the way of any improvement or invention that would make them obsolete; (8) they attract lovers of power rather than lovers of efficiency; (9) they create artificial values the consumer is forced to pay for; (10) they resent and try to eliminate competition; (11) they become self-serving; (12) and as their productivity and usefulness decline, they are driven to gain control of the very government that created them in order to insure their continued existence and prosperity. In short, their tendency is to become the public's master rather than the public's servant.

What makes government monopoly education even more dangerous to American freedom is the fact that it is largely controlled by a second private monopoly -- the National Education Association -- the nation's largest union, with a membership of close to 2 million.

Anyone who doubts the monopolistic character of the NEA ought to read their resolutions passed at their national conventions. Their goal is total power over the teaching profession -- public and private. They are particularly hostile to private education, especially home education which they regard as a potential threat to their scheme for monopoly power. They have politicized the teachers of America in order to control the government that makes their monopoly

possible. They represent the greatest organized threat to educational freedom and parents' rights in America today.

Unions Support Monopoly Education

It is true that the American Federation of Teachers represents a rival union. But it simply is no match for the NEA. In any case, both unions provide powerful support for government monopoly education. Without that monopoly, the unions themselves would lose much of their political influence.

Thus, American education and American children have become the victims of two monopolies that clearly violate the principles of the anti-trust laws. These laws reflect the public's abhorrence of monopoly. Why aren't they being enforced? Why are these monopolies tolerated when their very existence makes educational reform impossible? Why? Because of ignorance and indifference.

But we ought not to be indifferent to a system that is costing the taxpayers \$200 billion a year and turning out functional illiterates by the million. The very existence of a growing underclass of people in our inner cities, condemned to lives of poverty and hopelessness, is proof that government monopoly education is a colossal failure, unable to perform its minimal task of educating the poor.

Thus far, all attempts to reform the system have resulted in even greater failure. The 50 billion dollars the federal government has poured into compensatory education (Title One) since 1965 has resulted in lower SAT scores and more illiteracy, not less.

Consumers Lose

Government monopoly education is no more capable of delivering the goods in America than are the failed economic monopolies in the communist countries. Economies that are not accountable to

the consumer have no incentives to produce values, for they themselves are consumers of the taxpayers' wealth rather than producers of new wealth in their own right.

Why can't the system deliver excellence? Are there not decent, dedicated teachers in the public schools? Yes, there are. But they will be the first to point out how difficult it is to produce excellence in the system. Marva Collins is a case in point.

Mrs. Collins taught in the public schools of Chicago for 14 years and found the task so frustrating that she quit the public system and created a private school of her own which has achieved national recognition and fame for the academic excellence it produces.

Is there not a lesson to be learned from Mrs. Collins' experience?

Benefits of Privatization

Privatizing American education would result in enormous benefits:

1. Taxpayers would be relieved of a huge tax burden, permitting them to use their money in more productive ways.

2. The cost of education would decline dramatically. Today the average cost per pupil in the public schools is about \$4,500. There are many private schools that charge half as much and provide better education.

3. Education would improve. There is no doubt that when educators are accountable to the consumer who pays the bills, the education they deliver must be of a quality acceptable to the customer. Free competition among private schools would force schools to strive for better quality education. Also, education would be redefined in more realistic, practical terms than in the utopian, vaguely messianic terms of statist philosophers.

4. Privatization would eliminate the cultural and religious conflicts that now plague public education. Parents should be free to obtain the kind of education they want for their children: religious, secular, special, denominational, etc. Each school would offer its philosophy of education, and parents would know what they were getting.

Privatization Promotes Freedom

5. Privatization would promote educational freedom, which in turn would promote greater appreciation of political and economic freedom, greater diversity, greater opportunity. Privatization would strengthen the principles of freedom that form the basis of America's social and political culture.

6. Privatization would open an entire new field for free enterprise and technology. Chain schools, franchises, home school networks would produce a whole new, exciting world of activity, new opportunities for economic growth. Just as the breakup of AT&T has led to an explosion of new inventions and opportunities in telecommunications, a breakup of government monopoly education would unleash the creative drive of thousands of entrepreneurs. We actually know more about how children learn than ever before, but the government schools cannot make use of this knowledge or the new technology that would enhance education.

7. Privatization would solve many of our social problems caused by poor government education. Illiteracy produces delinquency, crime, poverty. Private schools would provide individuals with the academic skills needed to function in our hi-tech economy. Social welfare costs would begin to decline instead of continuing to rise. We would stop the growth of that urban cancer known as the underclass.

8. Privatization would also improve the lives of children. Better

educated, motivated children are less likely to get into trouble than those victimized by educational malpractice, drugs, gangs, etc. Private schools are in a better position to protect children than the public schools.

Improving Literacy

9. Literacy would improve, for private schools would use reading instruction programs that work. Today, reading instruction in public schools is provided by professionals who are more interested in "theories" about how children learn to read than in how they actually learn to read. Privatization would solve our literacy problem in a very short time.

10. Privatization would permit schools to teach religion and thereby improve the moral behavior of American children.

11. Privatization would represent a sharp rebuke to the philosophy of statism, the idea that the state owns the children and therefore can compel them to attend government schools for indoctrination. A government school system implies the existence of a government sanctioned philosophy of education. It is not the business of government to devise a philosophy of education which all must accept. But since it is impossible to conduct education without a philosophy behind it, the government has no choice but to become a philosopher -- which it is not fitted to be.

Depoliticizing Education

12. Privatization would depoliticize education and make it a consumer value subject to market forces rather than political influences. It would return educators to the business of education.

13. Privatization would end the battles and schemes of different groups contending to control the system for

the purpose of advancing their own social and political agendas.

14. Privatization would reduce the size and cost of government by eliminating all of the bureaucracies that presently run the government schools.

15. Privatization would liberate American education from the clutches of self-styled experts and professionals who have turned the present system into the academic swamp it has become.

16. Privatization would force a thorough shake up of all that we call education and eventually result in an education system brought down to earth, manageable in its private increments, subject to all the improvements that human ingenuity in freedom can devise.

17. Privatization of teacher training would liberate the profession from the heavy hand of bureaucratic control and artificial requirements. Private education would make teaching once more a joy instead of a nightmare.

It is obvious that only through privatization could American education once more become rational, workable, accountable, cost efficient, academically sound, and user friendly. Instead of being the intellectual crippler it is today, American education would become a dynamic, exciting, diverse, open, responsive institution, accommodating the needs of children in a free society.

What About the Poor?

The question is always asked: how would the poor be educated in a totally private system? The answer is quite simple. There would be more than enough resources available from foundations, philanthropies and communities to pay the tuition of poor children. Let us make it possible for poor children to get as good an education in a private school as their parents want.

How can privatization take place?

First, there would have to be a consensus among business leaders and enlightened citizens that privatization is the only solution that will work, the only way to end our endless educational crisis. When that happens, the unthinkable will then become thinkable, and ways will be devised to privatize the system. State constitutions may have to be amended. Bureaucracies will have to be closed down, school buildings sold, new private schools built, etc. Union resistance will have to be overcome. A very tall order.

Can it be done? Only if the American people will it.

And if they don't will it, they will continue to suffer the agonies, the costs, the indignities of a system that doesn't work and, as the Secretary has warned, could cause the destruction of America as we have known it.

Sources

(1) James G. Carter, "Outline of an Institution for the Education of Teachers," Essays on Popular Education (Boston, 1826), pp. 47-51.

(2) Robert Owen, A New View of Society or Essays on the Formation of the Human Character (London, 1816).

(3) USA Today, October 27, 1987.

Whole Language Produces Disastrous Results in Maine

In 1986 the Rockport (Maine) Elementary School adopted a Whole Language reading program in its second grade. The program was heralded by educators as the newest improvement in reading pedagogy. But since Whole Language virtually eliminates any systematic instruction in phonics, critics warned that the children would not learn to read and that Whole Language was simply a new version of look-say.

The critics have been vindicated by the release of the reading scores of that class -- now fourth grade -- who were tested last spring. The results were published in the Camden (Maine) Herald of June 8, 1989, as follows:

"Rockport Elementary School principal Marvin Higgins said Tuesday that he was 'disappointed' with the recently released Maine Educational Assessment scores for the fourth grade. Higgins said that while the class's performance on earlier standardized tests had indicated that the MEA scores would be low, they were in fact lower than had been expected.

". . . The reading score was 215, compared with a state average of 250 and a comparison band of 250-305.

"Higgins added that he was sure 'the scores would be an issue of concern, as they should be,' but cautioned against laying the blame for the poor performance on school programs. . . .

"Higgins attributed the low scores to a combination of factors, including large class sizes. . . . Furthermore, the proportion of special-education students in the fourth grade, some 13 percent, is three to four times previous ratios of 3 or 4 percent, Higgins said.

"This was the first class to be taught whole language,' Higgins said, adding that the class began the program in the second grade, and that the class's second- and third-grade teachers were working with the program for the first time as well.

"Higgins said that he planned a swift response to the scores."

Comment:

It is obvious that the educators will blame the low reading scores on everything but Whole Language, which is now sweeping the primary schools of America and producing the same results

as in Rockport, Maine. And we have no doubt that most parents will accept the diagnosis that there is something wrong with their children, not the reading program.

After all, Mr. Higgins attributed the low reading scores to large class size and the unusually large proportion of students in special ed. Of course, he did not reveal that the reason why so many more students were in special ed was precisely because of Whole Language instruction, which causes reading disability. It will be interesting to see what changes are made in September when a new class of six-year-olds will enter the Rockport Elementary School to be "educated."

Whole Language Proponents Call for New Reading Tests

In an effort to offset the low scores whole-language students are getting in standardized reading tests, whole-language proponents are devising new reading tests that will enable their students to do better.

According to Dr. Marie Carbo of Antioch, a leading teacher of whole language, if students taught to read by whole language don't do well in reading tests, the fault is with the tests, not the teaching methods.

New tests, better suited to whole-language teaching methods, are being introduced into the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), Princeton, N.J. This news was given to reading teachers attending the New England Reading Association convention in Portland, Maine, in October 1988.

Dr. Carbo revealed that state tests in Michigan and Illinois will be adapted to whole language. These new tests will "focus on students' overall understanding of the critical concepts and ideas in a text." (American Journal (Portland, Maine), 10/12/88)

Comment:

This is probably the most flagrant, outrageous attempt by "educators" to deceive and defraud the American people. By changing the tests the educators hope to hide from public view the reading deficiencies caused by whole-language instruction. On the basis of these phony tests, parents will assume their children know how to read.

Dr. Carbo is one of the nation's leading opponents of systematic phonics instruction. Her article, "Debunking the Great Phonics Myth," published in Phi Delta Kappan of November 1988, provoked Dr. Jeanne Chall to respond in another round of the never-ending debate between advocates of intensive phonics and look-say. (See BEL, March '89.)

That whole-language educators can get away with such obvious treachery and fraud in 1989, 34 years after the publication of Why Johnny Can't Read and 60 years after Dr. Samuel T. Orton's dire warnings about the sight method, indicates how deeply entrenched are the forces determined to destroy literacy in America. And the fact that so many young teachers are taken in by this quackery is indicative of the kind of abysmal training they are getting in the teachers colleges.

If you think public education is a disaster now, just give it five more years.

Champion of Phonics Dies

Dr. Charles C. Walcutt, co-author of the well-known Lippincott "Basic Reading" program, died on 4/11/89 at his home in Great Neck, Long Island. He was 80.

Dr. Walcutt, who campaigned against the "look-say" method of reading instruction, was a strong advocate of intensive phonics. Long associated with the Reading Reform Foundation, Walcutt

became concerned about what he saw as the misteaching of reading in the 1940's. He feared such teaching would lead to growing functional illiteracy.

Dr. Walcutt's Lippincott books were his answer to Scott Foresman's "Dick and Jane." He also authored "Reading: Chaos and Cure" (1958), and "Tomorrow's Illiterates" (1961). (N.Y. Times, 4/13/89)

PURE Holds Second Annual Convention in Grand Prairie, TX

A successful second annual convention was held by Parents for Unalienable Rights in Education in Grand Prairie, Texas, on July 14-15. The convention was held in conjunction with a Home Education Book Fair and drew about 800 attendees. Speakers at the convention included PURE chairman Sam Blumenfeld, vice-chairman Sharon Pangelinan, editor Owen Haney, and pastor Karl Reed. Audio tapes of the talks are available through the Blumenfeld Education Letter.

Also present at the convention was board member Rosiland Kress Haley, who is in the process of establishing a permanent home for her library in Colleyville, Texas, a rural community between Dallas and Fort Worth. The library will also house collections on home-schooling and reading instruction. It is scheduled to be completed in 1990.

PURE's third annual convention will be held in Boise, Idaho, next summer.

Top Corporate Heads Rip Public Schools

Nearly all of America's largest corporations are contributing time, money or materials to local schools, but most don't think their efforts have improved a troubled system, according to a study.

Top executives at 404 of the country's largest companies gave public schools an average grade of C-minus. Not a single one rated the schools excellent and only eight called them very good.

The project was sponsored by Fortune magazine and Allstate Insurance Co.

According to the survey, 64 percent of the executives believe the system has deteriorated in the past decade and nearly half say business productivity is down because of poor basic education. More than a third of the companies offer remedial classes to employees and nearly that many more say they are willing to do so in the future.

Asked to identify causes of public education problems, the executives cited poorly disciplined and poorly motivated students, uninvolved parents, undermotivated and undertrained teachers, and low academic standards. Their suggested solutions included better training and salaries for teachers, a longer school year and more parental involvement.

Some corporations are taking broader action, such as supporting tax increases for education and lobbying their state legislatures for changes. (Idaho Statesman, 4/24/89)

Comment:

As usual, our business leaders mean well. Unfortunately, they still believe that public schools can be "reformed" and that American educators are truly interested in excellence. The simple truth is that they are being conned by America's cleverest con artists: the education establishment. Until our business leaders make an effort to find out what is really going on, they will be taken to the cleaners by experts who know how to bilk billions, not just millions, from the taxpayer.