

Improving Public Schools

There are many public schools doing a fine job. Unfortunately, there are too many that are not. To help those that are not, politicians often disrupt those that are. Society has to ask itself a serious question about their public schools. Do we want “quality schools” or do we want schools that just “look good?” They are not one in the same. Educators are getting the message, if we look good, hopefully they will leave us alone.

Not long ago, I submitted two articles concerning aspects of school safety to a major educational magazine and they were returned to me. One article was “Fights in Schools: Education’s Dark Little Secret and the second “Why Schools Are Likely to See More Riots in the Future.” Was it returned because neither of these topics are a serious concern? I doubt it. Will these problems disappear if the educational community ignores them? Did the drug or gang problem go away because we ignored them? Everyone knows the answer to this. Fights in school are both a common and serious problem in today’s public schools. There is almost no one in a public school that is trained to physically break up a fight. Most security guards are not even trained to physically break up fights. This is why I recently wrote and published an article “Is there a need for police presence in schools?” I have written and taught much on the topic of fights in the schools. Almost 98% of the teachers participating in my unofficial survey, roughly 500-600 in total, declared they were never trained in college, education classes, by their school district or union to physically break up a fight. This places both the teachers and students in any building at risk.

It appears educators, in their effort to satisfy the public’s concern for better performing schools, are coming up with catch phrases, catch tunes, “political correctness” and magic bullets and are ignoring many of the major issues that contribute to poor academic performance, school drop outs and school violence. “Drilling and grilling” students to raise test scores isn’t quality education but it “looks good” when scores go up a few points. Requiring a student to attend extra help in the afternoon, after he/she refused to pay attention in class, doesn’t seem like the correct answer to me either. Does the student consider this help or punishment? Will the student pay more attention at the end of a long and tiring day than he/she did in class earlier in the day? Maybe we ought to find out why he/she is not paying attention. Some equally distressing solutions that some districts have attempted with the goal of improving test scores include cutting music, art, home economics, parenting classes, shop or even physical education out of their curriculum. Many teacher contracts now require additional staff development hours. However, in too many cases, the districts provide inane and nonsensical programs just to keep teachers busy. This antagonizes teachers and the entire process becomes counterproductive. Education has many goals and having high test scores might only be

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one. Motivating students to want to learn should be more important than test scores and can't be measured on a test. Additionally, civilizing and socializing young people to get along, work together and respect each other is surely another goal and once again you won't see this in any test score.

Here are just a number of additional issues that need to be addressed. Better training for educators and administrators to recognize and defuse covert and overt school violence. The removal of violent and threatening students who are dangerous to other students and staff and placing them in a safer environment i.e. alternative school. This would also include providing them with the appropriate counseling and help they need. Before putting students on medication, maybe we should take a closer look at their diet and sleeping habits. Many students are being medicated for hyperactivity and maybe it is just the high level of sugar they consume in both candy and drinks. If we monitored their diet and removed or controlled some of the sugar and candy they consume, this might solve the hyperactivity problem. Studies seem to show that about fifteen percent of the student population suffers from some form of mental illness. In a vast majority of cases, these issues go untreated. If more money was available at the elementary and junior high school level for additional social workers, guidance counselors and psychologists, many of these children might be helped. For those that question where the money will come from, it will come from the money saved from building new prisons and juvenile facilities to house the young people we didn't help. I read some time ago that California spends more on juvenile detention than higher education. Here is a classic case of "Pay Now or Pay Dearly Later." As Dr. Joyce Brothers says, "Now go do the right thing."