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Another Brick In The Wall:

The Abolition of America's Current School System

“We don't need no education. We don't need no thought control (“Another..”).” The English band Pink Floyd sang about it, and America should now listen. The current state of America's education system is abysmal. Children are processed through school like clockwork, being conformed into a generic output, as are the masked children in Pink Floyd's “The Wall”. Amongst politicians, subjects like health care reform and education are merely momentary topics to boost popularity, with little ever truly being done. Also, while there are many school teachers with good intentions, most of them are lost on the details of what true education is. It is not just the teachers who are at fault, however – it is the system itself. The United States needs to completely obliterate it's educational system, and start over from the ground up. This is the children's only true chance.

To discover what is truly wrong with the American educational system, a question must be posed: Was it ever a healthy system to begin with? Before the mid 1800's, education in the United States was privately funded and tended to focus on teaching conservative morals for the benefit of society (“Great Schools”). The wealthy often afforded private tutoring, but for the more common folk “petty” schools taught children the basics of reading, writing, and simple arithmetic, and for those few who desired to progress into college, there were grammar schools, which prepared students for higher education (“Great Schools”). However, in 1837 Horace Mann became secretary for the Massachusetts State Board of Education – the first in the country.

He, along with other reformers, fought for a new system of education. They pushed for a public school system – one that would be uniform throughout the country and would provide benefits for all students evenly (Simpson). The reformers attempted to portray a nation whose children were in great despair, however according to varying details and research of old surveys, school attendance was actually on the rise, unlike what the proponents of public education often said (Simpson). Like many good ideas, however, even from its inception this concept never worked well. The goal of standardized public education was an honorable one, intending to allow children in poor areas to receive the same benefits of those in more affluent areas, however by creating the single standard, the United States had created a mediocre uniformity. In a public situation, when a single subject is controlled by the government, the general public must be served, and those above or below the “norm” are denied the services they deserve. Likewise, now that education was publicly funded, the idea of free enterprise was eroded. Before the creation of public schools, if a teacher or classroom was sub par, the families could say so by sending their children to another teacher. However, by taking that choice away, there was now less accountability or pressure for the teachers to do their best. The enactment of public education was only the first problem for this country, though.

In truth, change to America's educational was inevitable. As this country headed towards the Industrial Revolution, and the general status of the economy slid from agriculture to industry, family dynamics were changed. Children were no longer needed to work on the farms, and the constant invention of time-saving equipment began to give children more free time than had ever been before in history. Because of this, after public schools had been created, the aforementioned reformers sought to make school attendance mandatory. Starting in 1852 with Massachusetts and ending in 1918 with Mississippi, every state in the union added compulsory school attendance to their legislations (Simpson). Again, an idea that may have had honest

intentions failed horribly. The true wonders of the American Constitution and this country's founding ideas are based on an individual citizen's rights. Forcing a person to see a doctor when they are sick or get a job in a local mall conflict with these personal rights, so why should education be any different? Even if it may be for the benefit of the general public, America is not based in socialism. A man has a right to wear a bright pink Hawaiian shirt to the park if he chooses, regardless of what the general public may think. How is it, then, that children can be forced against their will to attend a school? This is a choice that would be left to the parents. Here, of course, is a slippery road of “what if” rebuttal. There is the potential that children of neglectful or abusive parents would be denied their education if school attendance was not the law, however in those situations, the lack of a public education is most likely the least of the children's problems.

As it can be seen here, the beginning of America's public education system did not lead this country down the right path. Therefore, by today the school system is so entirely faulty that the entire scope of the problems themselves could be inspected by a paper three times as long as this one and still not cover every topic. Today's public education difficulties are divided into two categories: those that have merely compounded on the original problems the system had when it was founded, and those that have come about more recently. The ethical and moral issues with the original public schools are still prevalent today – the acceptance of a mediocre uniformity and the unconstitutional idea of compulsory attendance. These issues today are even worse because they have been completely ingrained into the minds of the general public. This is what people are familiar with, so any other ideas are hard to accept. The more recent problems of the system, however, are where the details come into play and where the system's faults turn from eccentric rationale to concrete and visible reasoning.

Early schools were used to teach children basic knowledge and societal manners. As technology grew, this basic knowledge grew as well. In the 1950's, as America's focus turned to space, math and science were deemed to be of great national importance, and so school curriculum increased in these subjects. With these continual gains and additions, today's children are studying far more subjects than are necessary, but, again, this has just come to be accepted by the public. Often children will ask, perhaps when studying cryptic algebra equations or chemistry, "Why do I need to know this?" The correct answer is – most don't. A common rebuttal is that the function of these subjects is to prepare children for high school, which in turn prepares them for college, but what is college preparing these young adults for? The idea that America is preparing it's children by cramming so many useless subjects down their throats is ludicrous and circular reasoning. America is preparing it's children to be prepared. If the ultimate goal is to prepare for college, then college should prepare the children for something – yet it doesn't. Many college graduates do not even end up with careers in their major's field. Another rebuttal is that school, college especially, teaches children to learn and how to manage their time. These are very worthwhile attributes for children to have, but by forcing children to study subjects that mean nothing to them, the skill they are truly learning is how to shirk as much responsibility as they can while still getting by. This is where the case of street-smarts versus book-smarts comes into play. If a child follows the school system perfectly by doing their homework, studying for all of the tests, and excelling in every subject, how well prepared for life will they be on the day after graduating college? The proposition of this paper is not that education itself is detrimental to children, but rather how it is supplied. If the same child that followed the system perfectly, had instead been home schooled by a parent as they traveled the world, would the child be worse off because they had not attended public school? Secondly, the workload that children have to endure today is painful. Much like the argument of what subjects

a school teaches, the amount of homework children have to do is said to be to prepare them for future education, and much like the previous argument, this one is just as erroneous. Again, by stockpiling hours and hours of homework onto children, a huge emphasis is placed on the importance of school. Note that it's school, not education, that is emphasized. Schooling is held in such high regard by this country, that people forget just how little is actually retained during the 12 years that children are forced through the system. Teaching a child to be interested in the world and to want to educate themselves is far more important – a task that is often forgotten in the classroom in lieu of higher test scores or “going to a good school.”

Another major problem of today's public educational system, is the bureaucracy of the system itself. Because schools are now run by the government, the system is bloated in useless areas and neglected in important ones. In order for a school to re-allocate it's budgetary sources, there is a system of officials and boards that need to run through the information first. Public education is also looked upon as a national savior. Politicians like to remind the public that America's children are the future, and that, as Raymond Scheppach, executive director of the National Governors Association, falsely stated, “Our students' performance today is the best indicator of our competitiveness tomorrow (Bracey).” School is looked at by the United States government as it's insurance of America's continued status as a super-power, not as a place for personal growth and preparation for life. Likewise, public officials, especially when elections are near, are prone to heaving big ideas and concepts onto public schools for the good of the nation. The “No Child Left Behind Act” may be one of the most well known examples of such an idea. This is a broad spectrum approach to what politicians say is an atrocity of children's reading abilities. However, “In...a 2004 paper...Bella Rosenberg of the American Federation of Teachers...found that it could take 166 years for 12th-graders to reach proficiency in reading - not the 12 years that the law required (Smith).” This is an unrealistic program that is simply shoved

into place like a piece of gum into a crack in the Hoover Dam. Again, the intentions may be honorable, but the execution is miserable. Teachers and school administrations may become so concerned with teaching these children to pass the proficiency tests, that the general education the tests are meant to ensure will be ignored (Jones). By focusing on these numerical results and graphs of data, the public school system is not fixed, but merely bandaged up to appear as if it's fixed. That, though, is how government tends to run things – which is all the more reason not to leave it in charge of public education.

So, with a collapsing system built on a shaky foundation, what is the solution? Policy after policy has been applied to the public school system, but none of these are a true fix. The inherent problem in the system will always be the fact that the system even exists. It is a wild idea, one most people would find uncomfortable to even mention, but the only way to fix America's educational system is to obliterate it completely and therefor it's compulsory attendance as well. The existence of school is not the problem, it is the fact that it is a mandatory and uniform event. What needs to be done is a return to simplicity. The “petty” schools from America's past should replace modern elementary schools. In these institutions, children would learn basic reading, writing, and mathematic skills, along with the normal social interaction that school naturally teaches. In addition, there could be elective courses offered for those who are interested in varying subjects, but these subjects would be not be a part of the main curriculum. From here, the children's options would be based more individually than just a generic high school program. From early civilizations through modern times, learning a trade has been an important aspect for a society, and therefore an alternative option to high school would be a trade school or apprenticeship. There would also be continuing schools, in many ways like a modern high school, that would prepare students for college. The two most important factors in this educational transition, though, would be the lack of government control and freedom of choice.

The people of what is now the United States of America first came to this land to escape oppression of their government. America today is by no means an oppressive kingdom, regardless of what some extremists may say, but by returning education to a privately controlled affair, this country would be doing itself a justice. A local community would cover the costs of educating it's own children, not the federal or state governments. For more impoverished areas, Federal grants might be available, but these would be applied for by the individual communities. The highest concept in America is freedom – the freedom to speak, to think freely, for people to be who they wish to be. Yet, our educational system is not free. It promotes uniformity, demands equality in performance, and does not allow for any deviation from the rules – all by law. That very sentence is reminiscent of one that might have been used to describe the communist U.S.S.R., and this oppression of freedom is exactly what America was founded to avoid. The subject of public education is deep – one that demands a long hard look. Here is only the tip of the iceberg, but hopefully Americans can find the courage to question what they have come to know as normal, and to seek out what is best for themselves, not just what the government tells them - because, after all, that's how America came to be in the first place.

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