



## American Education Fails Because It Isn't Education

The debate over public education grows more heated. Regularly, reports are released showing that the academic abilities of American students continue to fall when compared to those in other countries.

Twenty years ago, the United States ranked first in the world in the number of young adults who had high school diplomas and college degrees. Today, we rank ninth and seventh, respectively, among industrialized nations. Compared to Europe and Asia, 15-year-olds in the United States are below average in applying math skills to real-life tasks. The United States ranks 18 out of 24 industrialized nations in terms of relative effectiveness of its education system.

Knowledge in history, geography, grammar, civics, and literature are all in decline in terms of academic understanding and achievement.

To solve the crisis, politicians, community leaders, and the education community all preach the same mantra. Students fail, they tell us, because “expectations haven’t been set high enough.” We need more “accountability,” they say. And every education leader and nearly every politician presents the same “solution” to the education crisis: more money, better pay for teachers, and smaller classroom numbers so the children get enough attention from the teachers.

Consequently, there are two specific categories in which the United States excels, compared to the rest of the world. First, the U.S. ranks second in the world in the amount we spend per student per year on education — \$11,152. The United States is also a leader in having some of the smallest classroom numbers in the world. Yet the slide continues. American students grow more illiterate by the year. How can that be? We’re doing everything the “experts” tell us to do. We’re spending the money. We’re building more and more schools. We’re raising teacher’s pay.

Every American should understand that these three items: higher pay, smaller classrooms, and more money for schools are the specific agenda of the National Education Association (NEA). The NEA is not a professional organization for teachers. It is a labor union, and its sole job is to get more money into the education system and more pay for its members. It also seeks to make work easier for its members — smaller classrooms. Clearly the NEA is not about education — it’s about money and a political agenda.

Clearly, the nation’s education system is not teaching the children. They can’t read or work math problems without a calculator. They can’t spell, find their own country on a map, name the President of the United States, or quote a single Founding Father. America’s children are becoming just plain dumb. Yet we have been focusing on a massive national campaign to “fix” the schools for the past two decades





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or more. Now we have ultra high-tech, carpeted, air-conditioned school buildings with computers and television sets. We have education programs full of new ideas, new methods, and new directions. In the 1990s, we set “national standards,” accountability through “national testing” through Goals 2000. Through that program, we declared that every child would come to school “ready to learn” and that “no child would be left behind,” and we pledged that our kids would be “second to none” in the world. Above all, we’ve spent money, money, and more money. The result: American students have fallen further behind, placing 19th out of 21 nations in math, 16th in science, and dead last in physics.

With all the programs and attention on education, how can that be? To coin a well-worn cliché — “it’s the programs, stupid.” More precisely, it’s the federal programs and the education bureaucracy that run them. It is simply a fact that over the past 20 years America’s education system has been completely restructured to deliberately move away from teaching basic academics to a system that focuses on little more than training students for menial jobs. The fact is, the restructured education system has been designed to deliberately dumb-down the children. (Note: the NEA hates that phrase!)

Most Americans find that statement to be astonishing and, in fact, to be beyond belief. Parents don’t want to let go of their child-like faith that the American education system is the best in the world, designed to give their children the academic strength to make them the smartest in the world. Politicians continue to offer old solutions of more money and more federal attention, almost stamping their feet, demanding that kids learn something. Programs are being proposed that call for teacher testing to hold them accountable for producing educated children. More programs call for annual tests to find out if children have learned anything. The nation is in panic. But none of these hysterical responses will improve education — because none of them address the very root of the problem.

The truth is, none of the problems will go away, nor will children learn until both parents and politicians stop trusting the education establishment and start ridding the system of its failed ideas and programs. Parents and politicians must stop believing the propaganda handed down by the education establishment that says teaching a child in the 21st century is different and must be more high tech than in days past. It simply isn’t so.

### **The Root of the Problem**

Today’s education system is driven by money from the federal government and private foundations, both working hand-in-hand with the education establishment headquartered in the federal Department of Education and manned by the National Education Association (NEA). These forces have combined with psychologists, huge textbook publishers, teacher colleges, the healthcare profession, government bureaucrats, big corporations, pharmaceutical companies, and social workers to invade local school boards, classrooms, and private homes in the name of “fixing” education.

The record shows that each of these entities has benefited from this alliance through enriched coffers and increased political power. In fact, the new education restructuring is working wonders for everyone involved — except for the children and their parents. As a result of this combined invasion force, today’s classroom is a very different place from only a few years ago.

The history of education restructuring and transformation dates back to the early efforts by psychologists like John Dewey, whose work began to change how teachers were taught to teach in the nation’s teacher colleges. The changes were drastic as education moved away from an age-old system that taught teachers how to motivate students to accept the whole scope of academic information available. Instead, the new system explored methods to maneuver students through psychological



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behavior modification processes. Rather than to instill knowledge, once such a power was established the education process became more of a method to instill specific agendas into the minds of children.

As fantastic as it seems, the entire history of the education restructuring effort is carefully and thoroughly documented in a book called *The Deliberate Dumbing Down of America*. The book was written by Charlotte Thomson Iserbyt, a former official at the Department of Education in the Reagan Administration. While there in 1981-1982, Charlotte found the “mother lode” hidden away at the Department. In short, she found all of the education establishment’s plans for restructuring America’s classrooms. Not only did she find the plans for what they intended to do, she discovered how they were going to do it and, most importantly, why. Since uncovering this monstrous plan, Charlotte Iserbyt has dedicated her life to getting that information into the hands of parents, politicians, and the news media.

Iserbyt’s work details how the process to restructure America’s education system began at the beginning of the 20th century and slowly picked up speed over the decades. The new system used psychology-based curriculum to slowly change the attitudes, values, and beliefs of the students.

The new school agenda was very different from most people’s understanding of the purpose of American education. NEA leader William Carr, secretary of the Educational Policies Commission, clearly stated that new agenda when in 1947 he wrote in the *NEA Journal*: “The teaching profession prepares the leaders of the future.... The statesmen, the industrialists, the lawyers, the newspapermen ... all the leaders of tomorrow are in schools today.” Carr went on to write: “The psychological foundations for wider loyalties must be laid.... Teach those attitudes which will result ultimately in the creation of a world citizenship and world government ... we can and should teach those skills and attitudes which will help to create a society in which world citizenship is possible.”

Professor Benjamin Bloom, called the Father of Outcome-based Education (OBE), said: “The purpose of education and the schools is to change the thoughts, feelings and actions of students.” B.F. Skinner determined that applied psychology in the class curriculum was the means to bring about such changes in the students values and beliefs simply by relentlessly inputting specific programmed messages. Skinner once bragged: “I could make a pigeon a high achiever by reinforcing it on a proper schedule.” Whole psychological studies were produced to prove that individuals could be made to believe anything, even to accept that black was white, given the proper programming.

The education system is now a captive of the Skinner model of behavior modification programming. In 1990, Dr. M. Donald Thomas perfectly outlined the new education system in an article in *The Effective School Report* entitled “Education 90: A Framework for the Future.” Thomas said:

From Washington to modern times, literacy has meant the ability to read and write, the ability to understand numbers, and the capacity to appreciate factual material. The world, however, has changed dramatically in the last 30 years. The introduction of technology in information processing, the compression of the world into a single economic system, and the revolution in political organizations are influences never imagined to be possible in our lifetime.... Literacy, therefore, will be different in the year 2000. It will mean that students will need to follow

- Appreciation of different cultures, differences in belief systems and differences in political structures.
- An understanding of communications and the ability of people to live in one world as one community of nations...
- In a compressed world with one economic system...it is especially important that all our people be more highly educated and that the differences between low and high socio-economic students be



significantly narrowed...

- Education begins at birth and ends at death...
- Education is a responsibility to be assumed by the whole community...
- Learning how to learn is more important than memorizing facts...
- Schools form partnerships with community agencies for public service projects to be a part of schooling...
- Rewards are provided for encouraging young people to perform community service.

In this one outline, Dr. Thomas provides the blueprint for today's education system that is designed to de-emphasize academic knowledge; establish the one-world agenda with the United Nations as its center and away from belief in national sovereignty; replace individual achievement with collectivist group-think ideology; and invade the family with an "It takes a village" mind-set. Dr. Thomas' outline for education is the root of why today's children aren't learning. These ideas permeate every federal program, every national standard, every textbook and every moment of your child's school day.

## **The Bush Solution**

Upon election, former President George W. Bush declared education to be his number one priority. His first legislation to reach the Hill was a major education policy proposal called: "No Child Left Behind." The President said education was the hallmark of his time as Governor of Texas, where he imposed strict guidelines for annual testing. He says he wanted to confront the growing problem of American illiteracy and the low standing of test scores. And the President said, "We must focus the spending of federal tax dollars on things that work."

To those ends, the former President's education policy proposal addresses four specific principles including:

- 1) Annual testing to assure the schools are actually teaching the children and achieving specific educational goals.
- 2) Restoring local control by giving local and state school boards the "flexibility to innovate." Said the former President, "educational entrepreneurs should not be hindered by excessive red tape and regulation."
- 3) Stopping funding failure. President Bush proposed several options for helping failing schools to improve.
- 4) Giving parents a choice to find a school that does teach. Former President Bush gave schools a specific period of time to improve. If they failed, parents would be given the option of going to another, more successful school by way of a voucher plan.

On the surface these proposals sounded to many like fresh new ideas to take back local control of the schools and run the federal programs out the door. But time and a closer examination proved otherwise. In fact, President Bush himself unknowingly summed up the problem with his education program with one statement: "Change will not come by disdaining or dismantling the federal role of education."

To the great disappointment of many, President Bush decided to completely ignore the very root of the education problem — the federal government and its programs. Instead, President Bush's proposal accepted the incorrect conclusion that the problem with education is simply an overblown bureaucracy



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that wastes federal funds and fails to enforce clear standards by rewarding bad schools. His numerous statements that “no child will be left behind” came straight from the decade-old motto of the Children’s Defense Fund, the group that claims Hillary Clinton as one of its leaders. By being so off-the-mark, there just was no way the Bush proposal could have appropriately addressed a single school reform issue.

First, his plan to restore local control was directly tied to the use of Title I federal funding. Title I is one of the main federal programs to directly fund the “at-risk” catch-all device now driving the invasion of in-home social workers; the establishment of in-school health clinics; the enforcement of pop diagnosis by teachers and administrators that has put millions of children on Ritalin. Title I is the root of the education establishment’s attack on families.

Second, by leaving the federal Department of Education intact, President Bush left in full force the machinery now driving the education system. State school boards are simply outposts of the federal bureaucrats. They are of the same mindset, driving the same programs in the states that are dictated by the federal office. Local ideas from local teachers and parents have no chance of a hearing in these vast bureaucracies. Failing to address this behemoth simply dooms any attempt to improve education.

President Bush made much of the testing program in the state of Texas, which shows scores up by dramatic numbers. His first Secretary of Education, Rod Paige, owed his appointment, in a great way, to his leadership in the Texas testing program. But a close look at what actually took place in Texas caused concern.

Under Governor Bush, Texas established a statewide achievement test called TAAS, which is administered annually to every public school student from third grade through twelfth. Texas officials tout the fact that, today, Texas reports an 80 percent passing rate. The test is given the credit for the dramatic increase because, as Bush then proposed on the federal level, TAAS was touted as providing “accountability” and an annual measuring stick to determine how students were progressing.

However, Texas colleges reported that Texas-educated students still couldn’t read, even after getting good grades on the TAAS test. Why? Because so much emphasis is placed on passing the test that teachers have begun to “teach to the test.” Even months before test day, teachers pressure students to be ready. They become little more than cheerleaders. Schools fly banners and hold pep rallies, and the pressure builds to pass the test. Classroom time is spent practicing for the test rather than just focusing on well-rounded academic curriculum. Rarely do classes branch off into anything that’s not on the test.

Why such pressure? Because teacher salaries and job security are tied to the results. Schools have even been found to cheat on the results. Is this what parents have in mind when they call for accountability? This was the heart of the Bush plan. Under it, parents may see test scores go up, but they will find that their children still can’t read.

The Bush plan ignored the existence of the social scientists who have made psychological guinea pigs out of the children. It ignored the role of the Department of Education as a teacher training lab that brags that, in just two weeks, it can completely change the attitudes, values, and beliefs of good, academically-focused teachers, and turn them into pliable facilitators to help dumb-down the very students they sought to teach. Nothing was changed in the classroom under the Bush plan. And the same plan flourishes under President Barack Obama.

### **Time to Investigate the Department of Education**

From the start of his administration, President Bush made it clear that he had no intention of getting rid





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of the Department of Education. Consequently, the Republican-dominated Congress dropped its intentions to de-fund and remove the Department of Education. However, it is not possible to make the changes that Americans are hoping for without taking that step. Bush's plan simply used warm and fuzzy rhetoric to further institutionalize more of the same. His voucher plan has proven to be little more than a Judas Goat to lead private schools into the nightmare of federal programs, which attack and feed on any school that accepts federal money. And so the cancer grows.

While promising to fix American education, President Bush doomed any hope of it by insisting on keeping the establishment intact. The "No-Child-Left-Behind" Act simply succeeded in institutionalizing the failed policies of Goals 2000 and School to Work. And that's why American education continues to fall.

It's time to ignore the agenda of a self-interested labor union and begin to look at the real reasons why American public schools are in crisis. What is robbing our children of the ability to get a good education?

Americans who want to rid the nation of this plague have little choice but to insist that their representatives in Congress begin a complete investigation into the Department of Education and its policies, its waste, and its fraud on the taxpayers, parents, and children of this nation.

Perhaps then, as the facts are exposed under the hot lights of a Congressional hearing, the American people will begin to understand that the problem with education isn't low-paid teachers and crowded classrooms — instead, it is the result of a cynical, deliberate attempt to dumb-down America to promote a radical political agenda. For that is the truth.

**Tom DeWeese** is one of the nation's leading advocates of individual liberty, free enterprise, private property rights, personal privacy, back-to-basics education and American sovereignty and independence. Go to [americanpolicy.org](http://americanpolicy.org) for more information.

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