

The Blumenfeld Education Letter

"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." HOSEA 4:6

Vol. 6, No. 1 (Letter # 53)

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January 1991

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 these risks.
"Without vision, the people perish."

Public Education: The Sick Dinosaur. Can It Survive the Trends Toward Decentralization and Privatization?

It is said that the dinosaur had a tiny brain in a huge body, which undoubtedly contributed to its extinction. This huge body also required an enormous amount of food for its survival. The public education establishment has the same characteristics: small brain, huge body, enormous appetite for taxpayer money — its only means of survival.

The government school is also obsolete, a product of 19th century utopian reformers who believed in the perfectibility of man and education as the means to salvation. None of their ideas have panned out.

Indeed, the whole idea of centralized, government-monopoly education is totally incompatible with the values of a free society. But these statist ideas, which swept over America in the wake of the industrial revolution and the socialist reaction to capitalism, are now beginning to recede. The computer age has heralded in the post-industrial information society in which decentralization and privatization are now the imperatives for the future development of a dynamic market economy.

The government school is an anachronism. Not only does it no longer serve the purposes of education, and not only has it become a huge parasite on the national economy, but it is blocking the development of the new private institutions which will be needed in America's future. The establishment's preoccupation with politics is an indication that it knows its survival depends not on pleasing the consumer but on controlling legislatures. And the more incapable it becomes of delivering academic excellence, the more it will rely on politics for its survival.

Of course, the education establishment is good at pretending to reform itself, but these reforms cannot work because the collective brain that has produced them is not only minuscule in power, but exhibits the symptoms of disease and retardation. In addition, the establishment's body is so infected with moral corruption, that more and more parents feel uneasy about putting their children in the government schools.

In a sense, public education has AIDS: an inability to resist corrupting influences.

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In fact, corrupt ideas seem to thrive in the body of public education, and the more corrupt the idea, the more eagerly the system accepts it.

Moral Confusion

Who will deny that distributing condoms to high-school students is about as corrupt an idea as has ever been promoted by so-called educators? Who can deny that separating education from Biblical moral values has simply delivered the schools to the devil? And who can deny that the young adults emerging from our high schools are not only poorly educated but morally confused and ill-equipped to deal with the problems of our society?

One would think that after a hundred years of compulsory school attendance, this nation would have reached new heights of literacy and intelligence. But the very opposite is true. In fact, literacy is declining. In 1972, 2,817 students achieved the highest verbal score of 750 to 800 on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). In 1987, that number was down to 1,363, and in 1990 it was down to 1,226. Nothing in the educational reforms proposed to date promises to reverse that trend.

A review of the reforms being advocated by the establishment should convince any thinking citizen that public education is headed toward oblivion: a longer school year, a longer school day, higher teacher pay, national certification, restructuring, more social services, preschool education, smaller classes, etc. All of these reforms will cost the taxpayer much more money, but not one of them promises academic improvement.

The Fiction of Reform

That doesn't mean the educators aren't trying. They are good at holding conventions, conferences, seminars, and workshops

to discuss curriculum reform, curriculum innovation, curriculum revision, curriculum enhancement, curriculum infusion. Each year thousands of hours are spent discussing every aspect of public education, thousands of articles are written for countless educational journals, hundreds of books are published on school reform, and yet the system keeps getting worse.

Recently, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) held a conference on "Education's Future Agenda." The *ASCD Update* of Dec. 1990 reported:

Stanford University's Elliot Eisner suggested that many of the reforms aimed at raising academic achievement have the wrong purpose in mind. The purpose of school, he said, is not merely to help students achieve academically in school, but to prepare them to lead fulfilling lives.

"We shouldn't be thinking about effective schools or about effective teaching simply in terms of high-level achievement within the context of schooling," Eisner said. "I don't think that the major aim of school is to help kids do well in school. . . . Schools exist for the kind of life that kids are able to lead outside of schools." . . .

Eisner observed that new approaches reflect an emerging view that the context of teaching is enormously important — and that efforts to push teachers toward one instructional approach are misguided. "There is increasing recognition of the importance of context-specificity," Eisner said. "Hardly anyone now believes the idea that there is a 'best way' to teach something, and that we will eventually converge on that best way." Two implications of such a shift are that supervision can't consist of a checklist of generic teacher behaviors, and that staff development must be geared toward helping teachers with strategies applicable to their specific contexts, he added.

Are you a bit confused, not quite sure what Professor Eisner is talking about? If so, welcome to the club. What you have just read is the kind of hot air that routinely emanates from all of these conferences and seminars and fills the professional journals month after month, year after year. It all sounds very profound and very thoughtful

but it is as removed from reality as is the system of cash flow that finances this endless inanity. And that is what public education primarily is: a system of cash flow that supports thousands of doctors and masters of education in the manner to which they've become accustomed. Their biggest job is to train newcomers to plug into the system and to concoct theories and ideas for their endless game of education reform. As long as they can convince the legislators and taxpayers that reform is really possible, they will be able to keep the game going.

Getting a Diploma

Meanwhile, the children suffer. They must pass through these government processing plants where the "educators," better known as "facilitators," press and mold and twist the young American so that his or her brain can no longer function properly, but his or her body is now open to every conceivable sexual experience. The aim of the student is to get a certificate of attendance called a diploma. The latter is the reward for having survived this boring, humiliating and abusive twelve-year obstacle course.

Of course, there are some good teachers in the system trying to do a decent job. But judging from the large number of young adults who emerge from the process with no employable skills, morally corrupted, spiritually depraved, intellectually crippled, the system's overall influence is overwhelmingly perverse.

Academic failure alone should have condemned the system to extinction, but the educators have learned how to survive, how to maintain and even enlarge the cash flow that comes their way.

But the government-monopoly education system may not be able to survive the world-wide trends toward decentralization and privatization. These trends are not only

the result of the technological revolution which is changing the economic structure of society but also of the renewed belief in free-market, capitalist ideas proven by the sordid failure of socialism and the breathtaking vitality of free enterprise.

The world now realizes that the profit motive is the engine of wealth creation and economic development and that individual enterprise is the source of new ideas, new inventions, and new products. An economy can only grow and prosper if it adopts the new capabilities and opportunities provided by technology.

The Successful Family

In America, the family is proving to be the one social unit capable of taking full advantage of the new technology for its own betterment. The home-school movement is the most dramatic manifestation of both the privatization and decentralization trends. But what gives the family its power to succeed is its commitment to Biblical standards and precepts. Contrary to popular belief that the traditional family is obsolete, it is the traditional family returning to a God-centered world view which is emerging triumphant in a society racked by social disintegration and rot.

Home-schooled youngsters are learning better and faster than their government-school counterparts. They are also, on the whole, self-disciplined, peer independent, moral in behavior, enterprising, self-confident, and respectful of elders. Books, computers, modems, video and audio cassettes, fax machines, tape recorders, electronic typewriters, calculators, VCRs, camcorders, copiers and other wonders have turned the home into a highly efficient place of learning and discovery. There are no limits to what the home-school family can do, and many of them are becoming entrepreneurs and creat-

ing all sorts of family enterprises.

The home-school family — private, functional, religiously oriented — has become the safe haven, the most reliable source of security for its members, in an increasingly unstable, dangerous, violent, crime-ridden and diseased society. In short, because the home-school movement, which is largely Christian, represents the ultimate in decentralization and privatization, it is the leading indicator of a changing civilization.

The Dinosaur in Politics

The public school dinosaur cannot adapt. It is too big, too stupid, too preoccupied with economic survival. Its energies are devoted to politics because that is where the power is. The power to tax is the power for the dinosaur to stay alive. And that is why it will fight tooth and nail to preserve that power. But it is hard to resist the future. Alvin Toffler writes in *The Third Wave*:

"A new civilization is emerging in our lives, and blind men everywhere are trying to suppress it. This new civilization brings with it new family styles; changed ways of working, loving, and living; a new economy; new political conflicts; and beyond all this an altered consciousness as well. . . . The dawn of this new civilization is the single most explosive fact of our lifetimes."

This new consciousness is being experienced by those home-school families that have made a radical break with existing institutional norms and created a new kind of family and a new way of educating. They have a new view of politics as they fight for their right to educate their children at home.

Crumbling Structures

Concerning decentralization, John Naisbitt wrote in *Megatrends* (p. 97):

"Centralized structures are crumbling all across America. But our society is not

falling apart. The people of this country are rebuilding America from the bottom up into a stronger, more balanced, more diverse society. . . .

"The growth of decentralization parallels the decline of industry. . . . The mechanical blueprint of industrial society required enormous centralization — in labor, material, capital, and plant. . . . But the decline of American industry and the rise of the new information economy neutralized the pressure to centralize and we began to decentralize."

Those industries that could not adapt to these dynamic changes simply folded. They did not have the kind of political power the education dinosaur has to keep an obsolete, inefficient system in existence indefinitely.

But as more and more parents remove their children from the government schools, the education establishment will find it more and more difficult to postpone the inevitable.

The privatization trend in industry is making dramatic changes everywhere — from Britain to Argentina, from Hungary to New Zealand. In the United States the government school system is the most socialized sector of the economy, and so far it has resisted all attempts to weaken its monopoly through voucher schemes and tuition tax credits.

Liberals Back Privatization

However, even the liberals now have come to the conclusion that privatization is the only way to solve our education problem. Recently, the Brookings Institution, a prestigious liberal think tank in Washington, D.C., published a new book advocating privatization, *Politics, Markets and America's Schools* by John E. Chubb and Terry M. Moe. The book argues that "the government has not solved the education problem because government is the problem."

Chubb and Moe write: "Government control over schools burdens the schools with excessive bureaucracy, inhibits effective organization, and stifles student achievement." Their solution: a radical shift away from government control to reliance on "markets and parental choice."

Roy A. Childs, reviewing the book in *Laissez-Faire Books*, writes: "For the think tank at the heart of the liberal establishment to reach such a conclusion is nothing short of a revolution. Put another way, if the support of the liberal Brookings institution for our current system has disappeared, there is no place for it to go but down the tubes."

What Is to Be Done?

What can we do to hasten the demise of the dinosaur that is destroying the morals and intelligence of our children while eating us out of house and home? The simplest and most effective way is to remove one's children from the dinosaur's care and then to deny it the sustenance it needs to survive by voting against school-bond issues and ever-increasing school budgets.

Don't waste time trying to reform the unreformable.

Talk about the trends toward decentralization and privatization with friends, neighbors, relatives, educators, talk-show hosts.

Write letters to newspapers and periodicals, legislators and Congressmen.

Encourage educational entrepreneurship, for as government schooling wanes, opportunities for private enterprise in education will grow. Private education, which includes home-schooling, is the only road to the kind of academic excellence this nation needs if it is to regain its economic eminence, and the sooner we get there the better it will be for the children, the parents, and the taxpayers.

Teachers Form "Private Practice" Association

A group of teachers in Milwaukee have decided to offer their services as private practitioners, reflecting the trend away from government education. They have organized the American Association of Educators in Private Practice and have about 50-odd members. These are bold, creative teachers who were frustrated in the public schools and wanted to do something about the mounting academic failure of American children. Stymied by the education establishment, they have struck out on their own to bring the spirit of private enterprise to the teaching profession.

Although doctors and lawyers have the option of working for themselves, teachers have never thought it possible to engage in a similar kind of private practice. Their training in teachers colleges prepared them for the career-ladder in public education. Thus, many teachers are startled and puzzled when told of this new career concept. In fact, the National Education Association sees it as a very real threat to union control of the profession.

The private practice idea is simply a further development of the growing practice of contracting out for instruction. Across the country, some public schools are contracting with private firms to deliver entire instructional programs in such areas as foreign languages and remedial education.

Dialogos International Inc. in Raleigh, N.C., teaches French, German, Spanish, Italian, Chinese and Japanese in kindergarten through fifth grade in Wake County public schools. The program began nine years ago, when a new superintendent arrived promising parents foreign language instruction in the elementary grades.

"School opened, they didn't have the teachers, they didn't have the program, and

we pulled them out of a bind," says Dialogos chief executive Carey Stacy. "They signed a contract on a Friday night, and I had teachers in the classroom on Monday morning." Most teachers are native speakers, she says, and her firm works on an annual contract. "We work with the schools on what they want to accomplish, and then we go in and do it. They hold me accountable for the product. And that's the way I think education should be."

Learning Enterprise

Two years ago, Kathy Harrell-Patterson, a former Milwaukee elementary school teacher, opened Learning Enterprise of Wisconsin Inc. after watching rising numbers of poor children fail in public schools. Her school runs basic skills instruction for young mothers and provides day care for their children in the same building. She also runs a kindergarten under contract with the public schools.

Harrell-Patterson sees herself as an ally of the public schools. No one school can meet the needs of every child, she insists. Learning Enterprise concentrates on disadvantaged students. "We're catching those kids who have fallen between the cracks," she says, "and unfortunately, there's quite a few of them."

Children's academic deficits are widening, she says. Adult students are entering her school reading at the second-grade level. "These are people who are 18, 19, 20 years old. It's there. It's tragic." If jobs were available for all the unemployed, many would lack the skills to fill them, she says. "And that's a rude awakening."

Another educational entrepreneur is Hector MacDonald, president of MacDonald Research Group, Inc. and former dean of science and math at Brookfield Academy in Milwaukee. His firm offers high quality, high-tech science courses for schools that need

such courses without a huge investment in costly equipment.

MacDonald believes that private practice offers teachers professional status and advancement in the classroom. The option might attract people from outside teaching, as well as current teachers frustrated within the system.

One-Room Private Schools

Another enterprising educator is Jim Boyle, founder of Ombudsman Educational Services Ltd. of Libertyville, Il, a chain of "electronic one-room schoolhouses." As a public school teacher, principal and assistant superintendent, Boyle attempted to try new ideas in the schools without success. The system, he says, is "just too locked-in, too confining. A lot of things get in the way of trying to change things. So I figured if I could do something outside the system, then I could kind of run schools the way I thought they ought to be."

In 1975, he opened Ombudsman. He now has 800 students at 22 storefront schools in Illinois, Minnesota and Arizona. Ombudsman provides individualized instruction in basic skills for students who are about to drop out. School districts pay the tuition. The student-teacher ratio is 5-to-1. Boyle charges about \$3,000 per student, well below the \$6,000 to \$10,000 that competing suburban public schools spend. He boasts an 85 percent success rate — fully remediating students who were close to a zero chance of any academic achievement in school.

Obviously, the failure of the government system is providing unlimited opportunities for enterprising educators to save the lives of countless children otherwise condemned to academic failure. It is no accident that the government system must turn to private resources to get the real job done. (Insight, 12/24/90)

Parental Choice Causes Heated Debate In New Hampshire Town

Ken Preve acted swiftly when selectmen in Epsom, N.H., recently unveiled a controversial program to grant \$1,000 tax breaks to property owners who educate their high-school-age children anywhere but in the local public school. He said the rebate, which he promptly claimed, strengthened his freedom to choose where to educate his children. His son attends Bishop Brady High School, a parochial school in nearby Concord.

But Cyrene Wells, who qualifies with her husband, James, for a \$2,000 tax break for sending their son to Kimball Union Academy in Meriden and their daughter to The Cambridge School in Weston, Mass., said the Epsom selectmen can keep the money.

Cutting taxes for property owners who send children to private or parochial schools unfairly threatens public education, Wells said. "Just because we chose to send our kids to private schools doesn't take away from our responsibility to support the public schools," she said. "The \$2,000 may sound good. But the idea is wrong, plain wrong." Mrs. Wells is a former public school teacher.

It is also deeply divisive in this town of 4,000, which leaders on both sides of the debate expect to be a major battleground in a national struggle over the legal, moral and social merits of so-called "parental choice programs" for education.

Fighting the Epsom plan are New Hampshire's largest teachers union and the state branch of the American Civil Liberties Union. Leaders of both groups say they may challenge the policy in state and federal courts on the grounds that it violates the separation of church and state and discriminates against

the children of residents who do not own property.

"It's an attempt to shift public funds to private and religious institutions," said Fred Place, president of the state affiliate of the National Education Association. "And it could end up leaving a lot of kids out in the cold."

Ready to Do Battle

But poised for a counterattack are John Kelleher, a former Epsom selectman who devised the plan, and Landmark Legal Foundation of Washington, D.C., whose director, Clint Bolick, praised the town for adopting "the nation's first property tax credit program for taxpayers who educate their children outside the public schools — a milestone in the movement to expand choice in education."

Bolick said the Landmark Foundation, which President Bush has supported in other "parental choice" campaigns, recently agreed to pick up the tab to defend the Epsom plan against all court challenges.

Epsom entered the "parental choice" debate partly because of its Yankee frugality. Ten years ago it rejected Kelleher's idea by a 7-to-1 ratio. But as the town's tax rate rose in the late 1980s, due largely to increased school costs, the voters changed their minds.

In New Hampshire, communities rely on property taxes to meet more than 90 percent of their school costs. The state contributes less than 10 percent to public education, the smallest share in the nation. Recently, a group of communities proposed a lawsuit to force the state to increase its aid to public education. But Epsom shunned that strategy. "It looked to me like a back door move to adopt a sales or income tax," said Kelleher, who is an active Libertarian.

Townpeople Approved

So he pressed his idea, which townspeople approved by a vote of 95-67 in a nonbinding referendum in 1988. Wary of a costly legal struggle, selectmen waited until Landmark Foundation agreed to foot the bill before approving the rebate program.

Under the Epsom Educational Tax Abatement Plan, anyone who owns real estate in town may receive an abatement of up to \$1,000 of the amount he or she spends to send an Epsom resident to a nonpublic high school. Epsom, which has no high school, currently pays \$4,600 in tuition for each of its 180 students enrolled at Pembroke Academy, the regional public high school. Thus, the taxpayers would save \$3,600 on each student sent to a nonpublic high school.

Paul DeMinico, superintendent of schools for Epsom, Pembroke and three neighboring towns, disputes the contention that Epsom would save money by luring a small number of students away from Pembroke Academy. He also argued that the plan "creates a separate category of citizens who in effect have less responsibility toward public education."

The result, said Gary Benner, head of the Epsom School Board, could be that "people who send their children to private schools find it very easy to vote for cutting the school district budget. And that would hurt the kids who can't afford to go to private school."

Program Accessible to All

Under the abatement plan, students whose families own no property in Epsom may be sponsored by other property owners. These owners could be a relative or a business. For instance, a business could sponsor a child of parents who do not own property by claiming the \$1,000 rebate to

help pay the sponsored child's tuition. "Everyone has access to the program," says Kelleher.

But according to Claire Ebel, executive director of the state chapter of the ACLU, "the potential for abuse is enormous. They are encouraging poor people to go about hat in hand begging from those who have no children. It could prove to be an enormous disservice to an entire class of people."

Kelleher said the Epsom plan was partly modeled after a Minnesota program that grants income tax deductions to parents who send their children to nonpublic schools. In 1983, the US Supreme Court upheld the policy in a 5-4 decision.

But Ted Comstock, staff attorney for the New Hampshire School Boards Association, said the Epsom plan "appears to be the first step in the dismantlement of the public schools." And Ebel said Epsom's policy differs enough from the Minnesota program that it may be ripe for a court challenge. (*Boston Globe*, 12/23/90)

Comment: Mr. Comstock, and all the other public officials who oppose the program, are right to believe that the Epsom plan is "the first step in the dismantlement of the public schools." And if that is what the public wants, why aren't the public servants acceding to the public's wishes? Someday, every child in America will be getting a good private education. Besides, all the indicators of cost effectiveness and efficiency point in that direction. But, as Alvin Toffler says, blind men everywhere are trying to stop the future.

Vital Quote

"The generation graduating from high school today is the first generation in American history to graduate less skilled than its parents."

Megatrends, (p. 31)