

## **Declining Quality of Public Education**

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## Declining Quality of Public Education

American students rank near the bottom as compared to students in other industrialized countries, and is even filled with many students that are graduating with less knowledge and capability than similar students. This problem is due to a variety of reasons. Some mention worthy and popular reasons are the fact that students are in the workforce as a necessity, rather than a luxury; detached home lives, weakened morals and values, classroom disruptions, school violence, and the all time famous reason – Teacher Quality.

Teacher quality is said to be the key to student and school success which is a common misconception. Teacher quality is only one aspect of the larger problem. Quality education, or the lack thereof, is more complex than any teacher can take responsibility for. I believe that most teachers understand how important their role is in educating us, and for the most part take that role very serious. The United States even claims to have a difficult time finding quality teachers. This is obvious considering teachers nearly work for free. According to the Economic Policy Institute, Teacher pay is considerably lower than that of other workers with similar education and skills, and despite the need to recruit and retain highly skilled teachers, the pay disparity continues to grow. This gap puts teachers in a position, where they have to choose between their students and their own wellbeing. This pay disparity makes it virtually impossible for public school systems to keep quality professionals from being lured away by higher-paying positions. According to The National Education Association, the national average public school teacher salary for 2005 - 06 was \$48,536, which lags about 1.0 percent behind inflation. However, due to extra unpaid hours that teacher work, the hourly wage disadvantage is even larger. To make matter worse, teachers are finding it necessary to spend more out of pocket

money than they are able to be reimbursed for using the education tax credit bill. The increased pay disparity, coupled with enormous out of pocket expenses, leads me to believe that although the government values the education system, they have disregarded those that make it work.

Another aspect of this problem is in the true intent of the student. Although the majority of students are prepared and determined to learn, there are still a few that are unwilling or unable to learn. These few cases tips the scale toward discontent. This imbalance can be attributed to the fact that most students today fail to understand the true value in education, many of them work due to necessity, not luxury; the violence and peer pressure gets overwhelming; the hormones; crime rate; no sleep; working parents; bad diet; homework; chemistry; college; lyrics; adulthood; STOP! The answer simply lies within. If the student is focused on learning, coupled with the support of all involved, learning is bound to occur, otherwise learning is impossible.

A typical public education classroom might resemble Mr. Graham's classroom as he places his agenda on the desk, preparing to take charge of the classroom. "Take out your agenda, and prepare to take notes." He appears to be in charge, but that's only the case if the students intend to let him. The most damaging aspect of this truth is that the students know it. Every student knows that, no matter what happens in a classroom, the teacher is NOT allowed to discipline them in any way. This is an invitation for many students to act without any control and become extremely disruptive. Multiply this by an overcrowded classroom of thirty to thirty five students, and you have a mess. The overcrowded classroom, coupled with misplaced authority is not quite conducive to learning for students, or an inviting environment to work in.

The last popular reason for the declining quality of public education can be attributed to the growing rate of the non-traditional family. Parents are spending more time in the workforce and similar activities, and less time in the home, taking care of family issues. According to Americans for Divorce Reform the single parent homes are on the rise, and about 46 percent of marriages will end in divorce. The US Census Bureau states that there are nearly 27 million single parent homes in the United States. Frankly speaking, a non-traditional home does not necessarily compromise how well prepared students are for school. It's the time a parent and family invest, and what's instilled in that student that matters. I know first hand, I am the product of a single parent home. During a time that I've only been told about, every family member took responsibility for the acts and behavior of its own. Ethics and respect were taught at home, and anyone that strayed from that was handled quickly, no matter where the infraction occurred. Whether in public, home, church, and especially school, those teachings were strictly adhered to.

These mentioned, and many other reasons are attributed to the declining quality of our public education system, but there is one that we MUST put at the forefront of them all – The lack of morals and character. Our morals and character are being redefined by public figures, from the President, Music Artists, Sports figures, to Radio and Television personalities, and not the strong entity of the family. We simply must start at the top, bottom, and both ends, and begin to spread increased goodness in all directions.

The government, however, assumes that this growing problem can be corrected from a different angle. They are tackling it from a financial perspective. From time to time, some new government approach is publicized as being the solution to all the Educational problems. Large

amounts of money are spent on programs like The No Child Left Behind Act, the American Competitiveness Initiative, the Advanced Placement Incentive Program, the Striving Readers program. . . , I could go on, and on with the Ready to Teach Act; the Math Now Program, the Adjunct Teacher Corps, Early Reading First, Teacher Incentive Fund, The Promise Scholarships, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, National Security Language Initiative, but I won't. With such a multi-faceted, widespread problem establishing more Guidelines, Laws, Initiatives, Acts, and Programs will never work. Until students are determined to learn, supported by a family that teaches good moral, values, and ethics, the government is just allocating money, and only bandaging a problem that truly needs a surgical team.

Sadly enough, the people who make Laws and who decide on what government programs will be funded, have no idea of what goes on, or any experience in the class room. We simply need to stop, and realize that these problems stem from a more complex matter. So far, the fix-all solutions have had minimal success, and as soon as the immediate problem is bridged, a different, but other related problem occurs. Yes, metal detectors and security officers might lessen the number of violent incidents. More programs will present more opportunity. Teacher quality enhances the likelihood that learning will occur. More pay will enable our system to retain the best qualified teachers, but they will never replace what our education system has lacked for many years - The loss of morals and character. Instilling character in the public school system is essential for education to take place.

The real problem with our public education system is that society as a whole is suffering from a lack of moral aptitude, and character substance which inevitably surfaces in the classroom, devastated by the fact that we really don't value education or those in charge to ensure

us that basic right. The reality is that character is taught by design or default. We need to get back to basics and understand the real need for character and morals in our public education system. School administrators, students, teachers, parents, and society as a whole must be willing to restore character and morality to a central focus in public schooling. A great way to start is for a school to come together as a community. Telling and expecting to be told the truth is an essential element amongst the classroom. Parents should remain the primary moral educators. Since schools take up a lot of a student's time, some of that teaching should also come from school administrators. Students must learn to live and speak with integrity which is the foundation to character. Character is definitely something that can be built through good habits. It's very easy to fall into bad habits, but it takes a lot of effort to be hard-working and take pride in one's work consistently. The conversation should begin with two simple questions: What kind of people do we want students to be, and who can they learn from? When effective character education begins, student behavior will improve, schools will become more civil, which inevitably leads to improved academic performance, increased test scores and higher learning. As students see their own capabilities improve, they will begin transmitting those moral values to the next generation. The benefits will be astounding for the teacher, the students, and for the intended purpose – Quality Education. My point is best summed up with a statement by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., “The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character – that is the goal of education.” Now, that should always be the goal of education, and we all should stop at nothing less to make it happen.

In closing I would like to add that adults should be what they expect, and students should expect who they are. Although adults are the foundation of society, we as students are the future

of society. Unless we begin to make necessary changes in our moral and character NOW, not only will my generation be donned, it will continue to affect generations to come.

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