

Education Crisis: Who can help the children now?

-By Doug Archibald

A cacophony of voices cry:
“Not I”

The Little Red Hen could not cool off those pesky feelings of frustration boiling up within her. She had just returned home after an exhausting day of work in the wheat field. She threw her coat on the ground, laid down on the couch, legs outstretched, and started munching on that bag of dark chocolate on the end table. This work would be immensely less exhausting if those mangy scoundrels had agreed to help her like she asked them to. She often mulled over what had went wrong on those days when she had first tried to motivate Lazy Dog, Tired Cat, and Noisy Duck to help her cultivate the wheat. The Little Red Hen had tried being friendly to them, guaranteeing that the long hours of travail over the wheat would serve as a great time to chat and bond

as friends. She had tried being philosophical, expounding to her indolent friends the joys of honest hard labor. She had tried being cute, sending out the occasional colorful glitter-filled letter detailing to her friends the success she was having on the wheat plot. She had even tried being reasonable, informing her barnyard neighbors that good wheat harvests lead to bounteous banquets of breads and pastries. Alas, her friends would have none of it. Seemingly nothing could light a fire under those three. What made the Little Red Hen the most sad was that she could see the enduring happiness of their future sacrificed upon the altar of apathy.

Like the Little Red Hen, the little red schoolhouses of America (and every single other public school in America for that matter) are struggling to motivate their students. Where schools ought to be laboratories of hard work and initiative, they are instead languishing facilities of idleness and distraction. One educator observes that students are growing increasingly “aimless, unambitious, unimpressive, and incredibly comfortable.” The Bill and Melinda Gates foundation observes that 40 percent of classrooms can’t even attain the most basic expectation, i.e. having children behave and do their assignments. They also find that 80 percent of classrooms do not include ambitious learning which challenges students to “think, reason, or analyze.” The Associated Press notes that only thirty-eight percent of parents give a rating of excellent or good to the public schools their children attended.

On top of that, a whopping forty-one percent of parents say schools do a poor job of preparing their children for college. Additionally, fifty-two percent of parents agree that schools do not teach their children skills they will need to survive in life. In short, our schools are essentially as effective as petite poultry when it comes to convincing other creatures to work hard for something which will yield mostly future benefits.

So what should we do? Consign ourselves to this glum fate of schools failing to motivate the next generation? The generation which will soon take our place at running this country, this world. Should we be satisfied with a generation of idle pot-smoking video-game-playing basement-dwellers? Or should we meet this challenge with the courage to change our ways? In response, I paraphrase the immortal words of Don Quixote, in effect, he said “to change the world, friend Sancho, it is not insanity nor something of utopia, rather it is justice.” Likewise, to change the school system would be justice. For, we are justified in expecting the next generation to have as many opportunities to thrive and learn as possible. Therefore, it is with great humility I present to you my plan to update our antiquated school system. I call on all of you to read this plan, distribute your thoughts on it through social media, and discuss it with your elected officials. The members of the school board, school faculty, and members of congress are more than happy to discuss these topics with you. My plan consists of the following reforms:

1. Let parents and students decide which schools to send their children to. Students will feel more dedicated to a school they helped pick.
2. Let students pick their own teachers, and reward the teachers who parents and students feel are the most motivational.

3. Reward students with things they want. I’ll tell you now, they don’t want letter grades, stickers, and candies. They want freedom, they want to be outside, they want to talk to their friends, they want to go on field trips, they want to be recognized for extraordinary work, they want to work on projects of their choosing, and they want opportunities to advance.

These three reforms are not merely arbitrary ideas I came up with while standing in the shower. Rather, they are logical ideas I came up with while standing in the shower. They are backed by mountains of data. A massive 2002 study by Belfield and Levin that examined schools across the US illustrates that school choice improves every element of education examined; including academic test scores, attainment, expenditures, teacher quality, wages, and house prices of graduated students. On top of that, a



21-year study by Jeff Spalding found that school choice programs resulted in \$3,400 in savings per student per year. Concerning my second reform of teacher choice, England’s Children’s Commissioner, Professor Al Aynsley-Green, has noted that allowing children to make these choices helps them feel more involved and dedicated to their decisions. Finally, concerning my third reform of installing incentive systems, parents and

teachers find that schools which reward students with incentives they want such as freedoms, toys, and even eating lunch with the principal, have noticed extremely positive results. For example, KEY academy, a DC school which serves low-income minority students, now performs better on tests than every other DC school because they have embraced this very system.

Returning to the story of our feathered friend, the Little Red Hen, at the end of the day, she indeed ate some bread. But no bread could fill the emptiness of her soul. The fact that Lazy Dog, Sleepy Cat, and Noisy Duck would leave her tutelage utterly unprepared for the challenges of life burdened her weary soul. She also knew that due to her advanced years that this would be the last wheat harvest she could conduct. Unless someone stepped up, this year would be the last she ever tasted of bread. A tear rolled down her feathered cheek.

Like the Little Red Hen, our time is running out. We must not allow ourselves to suffer a similar fate. We must step up and save our school system, not only for our own good, but for the children as well. ☺

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