

Schools Cannot Do This Alone

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America's public schools can be traced back to the year 1640. The MA Puritans established schools to:

1. Teach basic reading, writing, and arithmetic skills, and
2. Cultivate values that serve a democratic society (some history and civics implied).

And in most states we have not added a single minute to the school calendar in five decades!

From 1900 to 1910, we added:

- ◆ nutrition
- ◆ immunization, and
- ◆ health to the list of school responsibilities.

From 1920 to 1940, we added:

- ◆ vocational education
- ◆ the practical arts
- ◆ business education
- ◆ speech and drama
- ◆ half day kindergarten
- ◆ Phys. Ed. Including organized athletics, and
- ◆ school lunch programs (We take this for granted today. It was, however, a significant step to shift to the schools the job of feeding America's children 1/3 of their daily meals.

In the 1950's, we added:

- ◆ safety education
- ◆ driver's education
- ◆ expanded music and art education
- ◆ foreign language requirements are strengthened, and
- ◆ sex education introduced (topics escalate through 1990's)

In the 1960's, we added:

- ◆ Advanced Placement programs
- ◆ consumer education
- ◆ career education
- ◆ peace education
- ◆ leisure education, and
- ◆ recreation education

In the 1970's, the breakup of the American family accelerated, and we added:

- ◆ special education (mandated by federal government)
- ◆ Title IX programs (greatly expanded athletic programs for girls)
- ◆ drug and alcohol abuse education
- ◆ Head Start
- ◆ parent education
- ◆ behavior adjustment classes
- ◆ character education
- ◆ environment education, and
- ◆ school breakfast programs appear (Now, some schools are feeding America's children 2/3 of their daily meals. Sadly, these are the only decent meals some children receive.)

In the 1980's, the floodgates open, and we added:

- ◆ keyboarding and computer education
- ◆ global education
- ◆ ethnic education
- ◆ multicultural/ non-sexist education
- ◆ English-as-a-second-language, and bilingual education
- ◆ early childhood education
- ◆ Jump Start, Early Start, Even Start, and Prime Start
- ◆ full day kindergarten
- ◆ pre-school programs for children at-risk
- ◆ after school programs for children of working parents
- ◆ alternative education in all its forms
- ◆ stranger/danger education
- ◆ anti-smoking education
- ◆ sexual abuse prevention education
- ◆ health and psychological services are expanded, and
- ◆ child abuse monitoring becomes a legal requirement for all teachers

And finally, in the 1990's, we have added:

- ◆ HIV/AIDS education
- ◆ death education
- ◆ expanded computer and Internet education
- ◆ inclusion
- ◆ Tech Prep and School to work programs
- ◆ gang education (in urban centers)
- ◆ bus safety education
- ◆ bicycle safety education
- ◆ gun safety education

The creators of those first schools assumed that families and churches bore the major responsibility for raising a child. The responsibility of the school was limited and focused.

Public education has prepared millions of people from all classes and backgrounds to catch the American dream. Over the last twenty years, public schools have heroically responded to a rising flood of expectations. They are teaching more students more subjects to higher levels in more creative and dynamic ways than ever before.

Unfortunately, the system was designed for another age and there is a gap growing between what schools provide and what students need. We must significantly change what, when, and how children are taught if we are going to close this gap. Teachers and administrators everywhere are struggling to make these changes, but they cannot succeed without the understanding, trust, permission, and support of the local community. The time has come for every school district to organize a community-wide conversation that results in a shared commitment to create public schools that provide a high quality education for all.

All of the items added to the list have merit, and all have their ardent supporters.

The people of each community must come together to answer two essential questions: What do they want their children to know and be able to do when they graduate, and how can the entire community be organized to ensure that all children reach the stated goals.

**The bottom line: schools cannot do it all.
Schools cannot raise America's children.**

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