

The Main Goal of Schools is Not Education, It's Conformity

Over the weekend, I had an interesting chat with a friend about her daughter's preschool program. She confessed to me that she couldn't wait until the school year was over, for the preschool program dominated their lives. The schedule, she explained, interfered with other outside learning opportunities. At the same time, one of the main things her daughter was learning in the program was how to line up – perfect for fostering an environment of compulsion, but not for encouraging creativity or an enthusiasm for learning.

Unfortunately, this attitude of toeing the line is not limited to preschool, as Jay Matthews makes clear in a [recent edition](#) of *The Washington Post*. Matthews relays the story of a Michigan 6th grader, whose thirst for learning has caused her to excel far beyond her grade level in math and science:

“As Vipul Gupta tells the story, his daughter's experience with mastery began innocently at the Grand Blanc school district. When the girl entered fifth grade, a test showed she was a year ahead of her class in math. She could take sixth grade at the school or, under Michigan law, could do an online course.

She chose online. When she completed sixth-grade math in a few months, she went ahead and did seventh-grade math, too. She asked to do the same in science. The school resisted at first, but eventually she was taking ninth-grade science as a sixth grader. She is now five years ahead of her grade in math and three years ahead in science. Her school also let her take an entrepreneurship course full of 11th- and 12th-graders at the district's Career Institute.”

But while Gupta's daughter is enjoying breaking the grade-level mode of learning, her public school is not. As Matthews goes on to report, the school claims that she has too many credits, and thus prevented her from taking a Spanish class.

Any lover of common sense might well ask why any school would prevent and even punish a child from going above and beyond when it comes to learning. The answer to that question is answered by former New York teacher of the year John Taylor Gatto in his book [*Dumbing Us Down*](#). In brief, Gatto explains that public schools prevent learning and accelerated education because that is not their true goal. If it was, public schools would not insist on perpetual conformity:

"Whatever an education is, it should make you a unique individual, not a conformist; it should furnish you with an original spirit with which to tackle the big challenges; it should allow you to find values which will be your road map through life; it should make you spiritually rich, a person who loves whatever you are doing, wherever you are, whomever you are with; it should teach you what is important: how to live and how to die."

As my friend and Vipul Gupta demonstrate, many parents are waking up to the fact that the education system has been paving a path which leads to mediocrity rather than excellence; as such, both are seeking to get their children into education systems that do not stifle learning or foster conformity. Given this mindset, is it possible that these parents will actually be the ones who raise the successful leaders of tomorrow?