

# Rethinking Education: Time to Make Some Changes

Recently I visited my daughter, her husband, and the grandkids in rural Pennsylvania, where they live in a large 140-year-old house. A short walk away is Gregory the Great Academy, grades 9-12, where my son-in-law Mike works and where my oldest grandson is a student. The 60-some boys in the school receive a classical education with heavy doses of literature and history, attend prayer or church services daily, and frequently wear blazers and ties to classes.

They also live a rough-and-tumble existence. Their soccer and rugby teams have won state competitions, and their extracurricular activities include classes in animal husbandry – the school has chickens and pigs – and rigorous special events. The week I was there, for example, found them camped in the woods for three days without tents for their annual Robin Hood Days, where they endured rain and cool temperatures, competed in archery contests, sang old folk songs, wrestled, lived on meager rations, hiked, and gathered for prayer.

Because of the small size of the student body and their many shared activities, these young men forge lasting friendships. Mike, who graduated from the academy, still counts the “Greg boys” among his best buddies.

The cost? Full tuition, room and board, and activity fees at the academy come to around \$18,000 per year.

Meanwhile, the cost per student in Pennsylvania’s public schools is [close to \\$16,000](#).

There’s something wrong with this picture, especially since so many of our public schools are failing to provide students with an adequate education.

The high cost of the public school system stems in part from the extravagant number of administrators and other non-academic employees it keeps on staff. Sometimes the salaries of these non-teachers are extravagant as well. Here in Virginia, for example, Superintendent of Richmond Schools Jason Kamas receives a [salary](#) of \$250,000 plus benefits and perks per year.

Though many factors account for the failure of our public schools – the politicization of the classroom, the anti-Americanism of textbooks and teachers, the incompetency of teachers, failures to instill the basics of reading, writing, and math – broken families also play a huge role in the collapsing test scores and ignorance of our young people. A working single mom with two or three children often has little to no time to help with homework or volunteer at school.

A recent [report](#) reveals yet another reason for the sad state of so many of public schools. During the spring COVID-19 shutdown, the New York City Department of Education and the New York City Council found that during distance learning schools where more than half of the student body was half Hispanic and black were eight times more likely to report low student engagement and poor attendance compared with schools with lower black and Hispanic populations.

So culture also plays a part in student performance. American students of Asian backgrounds, for instance, generally thrive in school because their parents stress the importance of learning and often goad them to that end.

Most of the students at Gregory the Great have this same advantage: they come from homes with a mom and a dad who place a high priority on education and life experiences.

Until we as a society once again emphasize family life and the importance of a real education, many of our public schools will continue to falter. Private organizations promote

fatherhood and family, others push for educational reforms or take a more hands-on approach to helping students, but in these areas our governments at the state and national levels have failed abysmally. And these organizations do their work not so much with increased funding or new layers of government control, but simply through positive words and actions that help keep the importance of intact families and learning in the public eye.

Moreover, there are dozens of practical steps that can make for stronger schools. Here are just a few of them.

- Remove all but the most necessary administrators and hire more teachers.
- Consider ending coed classes. Though it may be impractical to make public schools single-sex, separating boys from girls in the classroom might increase student performance, particularly that of the boys, who tend to lag behind their female counterparts.
- Drill students in the basics in elementary school. No one should leave the sixth grade unable to write, read, or do grade appropriate math.
- Offer a common core of literature to students: classic childhood tales and poetry in the early grades, followed by more advanced literature in middle school and high school, works which for the most part that have stood the test of time.
- Teach history that develops pride in our country rather than hatred for it.
- Teach practical subjects when scheduling permits, life skills ranging from personal finance to crafts.

Education should be our country's top priority. Our young people can't afford to be ignorant or poorly prepared.

The future of our country will one day be in their hands, so those of us of older generations can't afford it either.

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