

# Goals of public education



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Goals of American Public Education TJC National University Foundations of Education/TED 602 January 13, 2012 Professor KL Goals of American Public Education Public education in America began in the early to mid-19th century with the simple goal of “uniting the American population by instilling common moral and political values” (Spring, 2012, p. 5). Our country was founded by men who designed the constitution so that it could be amended to accommodate changing political and social climates.

They believed in the ideology of the American dream which “holds out a vision of both individual success and the collective good of all” (Hochschild & Scovronick, 2004, p. 1). It is with this same ideology that our public schools were originally formed. Our Founding Fathers Thomas Jefferson felt that public education would ensure the political soundness of the United States by educating the finest future politicians possible. His proposal included limited education for the masses in order to find “twenty of the best geniuses... raked from the rubbish annually” (Spring, 2012, p. ). No widespread public education existed until Horace Mann was elected the first secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education in 1837. Horace Mann instituted a system of public education in Massachusetts that included all children with the ideology of equality of opportunity. His desire that public education would be the “great balance wheel of society” (Spring, 2012, p. 6) was limited by the existing constraints on who could become an American citizen. The creed of equality of opportunity has been foremost in the goals of our public education since the beginning.

Equality of Opportunity School Models It is difficult to attain the idyllic situation that “education would provide everyone with an equal chance to

pursue wealth” (Spring, 2012, p. 57). Many social, economic, and political barriers exist to attaining this ideal objective. Joel Spring, author of the book *Education and the Equality of Opportunity*, defines three models of public education that have been used throughout American history in an attempt to provide equality of opportunity to all citizens.

These models are the Common-School model, the Sorting-Machine model, and the High-Stakes testing model. The Common-School model is one in which the school system is set up in order to allow all students an equal education. The disparities between social classes would, theoretically, be eliminated by this normalization. The Sorting-Machine model recognizes that all students are not created equal. Teachers, counselors, and standardized tests would be used to impartially “overcome the influence of family background” (Spring, 2012, p. 59).

Finally, the High-Stakes testing model is based on the notion that schools can “give everyone an equal chance to learn and to be tested without cultural bias” (Spring, 2012, p. 63). Standardized tests are used for all forms of advancement and placement from grade-level promotions to professional credentialing. These models are used side-by-side, to some degree, in our 21st century implementation of public education. Obstacles in Achieving Educational Goals Throughout the history of public education, there have been barriers to the equality of opportunity philosophy.

Thomas Jefferson’s proposal and Horace Mann’s implementation of public schools excluded non-citizens like blacks, women, and Native Americans. Next, an increase in immigration and industrialization widened cultural and

economic differences between students. The greatest obstacle to equal education is Social class. Many terms have been used to identify students who might have educational problems; the current term used is “ at-risk. ” Several factors determine the “ at-risk” status of a given student, but poverty is a significant indicator. Some public schools are impressive and many are doing a good job... In a few places, chiefly in poor urban districts,... schools are failing miserably” (Hochschild & Scovronick, 2004, p. 77).

Conclusion As a society, America needs to have a globally competitive public school system. Historically the goals of public education were simply to create good citizens and allow equality of opportunity. Today, the goals of public education have been expanded to include sufficient academic knowledge, social skills, and non-cognitive talents to allow children to achieve their dreams in a global economy.

As teachers, we need to facilitate these goals and be aware of existing barriers. It is our responsibility to use all of the resources at our disposal to ensure that each and every child comes as close as possible to equality of opportunity. We can make a difference! References Hochschild, J. L. , & Scovronick, N. B. (2004). American Dream and the Public Schools. Oxford University Press Spring, J. (2012). American education (15th ed. ). New York, NY: McGraw Hill