

Failing public education in america



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The American public education system is failing on the international scale. This is no longer the opinion of just a few people; it is being proven time and time again over the years by many agencies reporting upon academic achievement of students worldwide. In this essay, I will support my claim that the education system currently in place is inadequate, and that there are many successful models that could be followed in order to reform our system, and achieve success internationally. Some of the most successful school systems in the world, such as those in South Korea or Finland, have vastly different practices from schools in the United States, in things such as length of school year and qualifications required for educators, and the success from these practices is much greater comparatively.

I enjoy learning and I succeeded in the public schooling system, but I can honestly attribute almost all of that success to personal motivation. Of course over the years I had a few phenomenal teachers, unfortunately, they were vastly outnumbered by teachers who didn't care about the success of their students in the least bit. I had teachers like Ms. Leighton and Mrs. Friedman, who inspired me to work harder than ever before and are my motivation to become a teacher. On the other end of the spectrum, I had teachers like Mrs. Phillips, who believed the classroom was her public forum for touting her religious beliefs and dedication upon an impressionable group of children, as opposed to teaching English, or Mr. Connell, whose class consisted of nothing at all related to Geometry. He would talk his cell phone and place bids for items on EBay, while the students were left to their own devices.

I can remember from a very young age that I was actively engaged in school. I loved everything about school, the social interaction, the new experiences, and especially the acquisition of knowledge. I was not matched in enthusiasm by any of my fellow students until the second grade. That was when I met Daye. Daye's family had moved here from South Korea just a couple weeks before the school year started. Daye completed her work quickly and efficiently, and managed to be personable with the teacher and her fellow students, even though she was not speaking her native language. I can honestly say, for a seven year old, she was more dedicated to her education than any person I have ever met, even to this day. Even though I was very young at the time, this was the first time I had ever felt challenged academically. I was self-motivated to keep pace with Daye, mainly because I refused to be second best. And despite the fact that she challenged me, or maybe because of it, she became my best friend. Her family moved away the next year, and we didn't keep in touch. Perhaps having a pen pal was too daunting a task for eight year olds, even for kids as motivated as us.

As I furthered in my education beyond elementary school, I started to notice a difference in my teachers. The older I got, the less interested they seemed in their jobs. Of course a few teachers were still involved with their students, and challenged them to work harder than achieving at the curriculum's low standards, but the rest just acted as though teaching was just a way to pay the bills, and nothing else. In the sixth grade, I distinctly remember one of my teachers, upon being told by a student that they could not read, she just shrugged and walked away. I was smart and a good student; I was also desperate for the attention of my teachers. I would raise my hand for every

question that was asked, only to receive a simple " correct or incorrect." By the time I reached high school, even I had lost the motivation I once had.

I still completed all of my work to the best of my ability, but all of the enthusiasm I once held for my education was gone. As soon as the school allowed, I started taking advanced placement and honors classes. There, I found teachers who cared about their students, and other students who actually wanted to learn. The rest of the school still consisted of all the things I had grown to resent. I'm sure I was told almost weekly about how my school was rated among the best public high schools in the country, with their star athletes with third grade reading levels and the D averages required to participate in sports or " honor students" with straight A's, three out of their four classes being Gym, Weightlifting, and Fitness Principles, all of which they could take every semester throughout high school. I had found advanced placement classes to be an escape from my disappointment each day, but I was not convinced that this is what school should be; I'm still not convinced.

Over half of my class graduated with honors; I'm sure that was a difficult feat considering about 90% of work was graded on completeness as opposed to correctness, but the school bragged about it nonetheless. Success of a school shouldn't be based upon an award winning football team or the ability for most students in grades nine through twelve to pass a test based on the reading, writing, and arithmetic skills that should have been mastered by sixth grade. I know from both the statistics and from friends and family that my school is not the only one of such low quality or substandard practices, but that it represents our nation's public schools as a whole in most cases.

<https://assignbuster.com/failing-public-education-in-america/>

My sister teaches sixth grade math in Baltimore, and has told me on several occasions about how not only herself, but even English teachers, are not allowed by the administration to correct children's grammar, and that her students come to her class with math skills suiting that of a second or third grader, but she is expected to have them prepared for the seventh grade by the end of the year. Teachers at my sister's school are told not to correct the children's grammar in fear of hurting their feelings, but if no one corrects them in school, what are the chances that children form these skills by the time they enter the workforce? Administrative policies, not individual teachers, are to blame for the low standard of education. What teachers could truly be motivated to teach in a system where pay grade is not based upon success or results, just time physically spent in the classroom? The public school system is failing both nationally and in individual states.

Among the international rankings as recently as 2010, the United States ranks fourteenth in reading, twenty-fifth in mathematics, and seventeenth in science (Shepherd). The United States is not even within the top ten of any measured subject. The top five countries in the world for education include South Korea, Finland, Canada, New Zealand, and Japan (Shepherd). Twenty-five percent of United States high school students fail to graduate within the allotted four years, and as the Miami Herald states it, " many of those who do graduate are ill-prepared for the demands of college and career," (Bush).

Why are other countries proving more successful in their education practices? House Education and Labor Chairman, George Miller, claims, " The difference between the countries at the top of these rankings and the U. S. is that the countries who are outperforming us have made developing the best

<https://assignbuster.com/failing-public-education-in-america/>

education system in the world a national goal...They've recognized that the strength of their economy will be inextricably tied to the strength of their education system in the 21st century," (Graves). This is obviously support for the fact that education should become a greater priority in this country. As George Miller stated above, a successful education system in turn leads to a successful economic system. Any substantial gain in quality of education would directly result in economic gain in the trillions, just in the next few decades (Graves). Despite spending some of the highest amounts globally on education, we are still not succeeding, lending to the idea that the funding is not the problem, but how it is being put to use (Bush).

One writer, Amy Richards reports, " twenty-five percent of the United States population is functionally illiterate, unable to consult a dictionary, to read signs or follow basic written directions," (Richards) Based upon recent census data, the population of the United States is approximately 311, 591, 917, which according to Richards' claim, means that there are approximately 77, 897, 979 people in the United States alone that are illiterate (Google Public Data Explorer). That is certainly a vast number of people, and an unexpected number for such a developed country as the United States.

One explanation as to why exactly our public school systems are failing is the existence of zero-tolerance policies for rules within schools, which in turn lead to increased rates of suspension and expulsion. Amy Richards cites the example, " Philadelphia provides a perfect case study in inner city education, expelling students at a rate of three hundred per day. On average, students are about four years behind in reading level in Philadelphia," (Richards).

Higher rates of suspension and expulsion mean one thing for the education

<https://assignbuster.com/failing-public-education-in-america/>

system, less students are in the classroom learning. Richards cites Philadelphia as an example, however the same trend can be found in inner-city school systems throughout the country.

One school system that critics argue is very much the gold standard is that of Finland. Finland ranks second in both reading and mathematics respectively, but ranks highest in science in the world (Shepherd). One compelling argument for Finland's success in education is the fact that private schools do not exist, even on the university level. There are very few independent schools in existence, but even those are all publicly funded. What this means is that all students in Finland are receiving an equal education, that which cannot be elevated by any tuition fee (Partanen). Pasi Sahlberg is the director of the Finnish Ministry of Education's Center for International Mobility and has recently authored the book *Finnish Lessons: What Can the World Learn from Educational Change in Finland?* (Partanen). In an interview about his new book, he cites the lack of private schools as one reason for success, but also includes many strong arguments as to why their system is so successful. Some of the practices that Sahlberg claims are the most successful include the absence of standardized tests, and also the fact that " in Finland all teachers and administrators are given prestige, decent pay, and a lot of responsibility. A master's degree is required to enter the profession, and teacher training programs are among the most selective professional schools in the country," (Partanen). Pasi Sahlberg also brings up ideas that aren't often contemplated as success enabling in the United States such as, " Finland offers all pupils free school meals, easy access to health care, psychological counseling, and individualized student guidance,"

(Partanen). Are the absences of such practices the reason for the immense gap between Finland's prestigious education program and the mediocre counterpart of the United States? Standardized testing is considered a facet in public education in the United States, yet students in Finland only have individual testing created and graded by teachers, and have a much greater margin of success. Finland implements educational practices that are almost completely opposite to those of the United States. Critics argue that the Finnish model would not work in the United States because of the extreme differences in size and ethnic diversity, however Samuel Abrams, of Columbia University's Teaching College argues against this point by citing the country of Norway as a prime example. Abrams argues that though Norway is similar in size and cultural diversity to Finland, Norway's educational system is much more similar to that of the United States, and garners similar, sub-par, results to those of the United States (Partanen).

I have explained potential reasons for the shortcomings of the United States. These include, improvement of education not being a main goal for Americans, standardized testing, high-rates of suspension and expulsion, and inadequate pay-grade determinants for teachers. For some of these problems, there are obvious solutions, such as abolition of standardized testing and zero-tolerance policies. I have also offered a potential solution, the Finnish model, which our country's education system would be more than capable of adapting to if there was governmental policy change. Any change for the better to our education system could potentially yield unfathomable amounts of economic growth and the ability to compete in international rankings.

Citations:

Shepherd, Jessica. " World Education Rankings: Which Country Does Best at Reading, Maths and Science?" The Guardian. Guardian News and Media, 07 Dec. 2010. Web. 16 Sept. 2012. .

Bush, Jeb. " How To Improve Our Failing Education System." The Miami Herald. N. p., 30 May 2012. Web. 16 Sept. 2012. .

Graves, Lucia. " House Education Chair: U. S. School System Is 'Failing Our Country'" The Huffington Post. TheHuffingtonPost. com, 07 Dec. 2010. Web. 16 Sept. 2012. .

Richards, Amy. " Why The American Public School System Keeps Failing Our Youth." ReLIFE's Blog. N. p., 24 Oct. 2011. Web. 16 Sept. 2012. .

Partanen, Anu. " What Americans Keep Ignoring About Finland's School Success." The Atlantic. N. p., 29 Dec. 2011. Web. 16 Sept. 2012. .