

# Flaws in the public education system

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Very few people argue that public schools are doing fine in America.

We are losing our edge in the world, our students are uneducated and feel entitled to work after college no matter their skills, and statistic after statistic all point to the same thing. The curriculum is continually watered down and made inoffensive, and yet students still cannot cope. Schools are plagued by bureaucracy and financial problems and have become factories that pump out unequipped people. As Glenn Beck mentioned in reference to a study done on 24-year olds, “ 50% couldn’t even locate New York State” (63). Solution after solution has been tried and has not succeeded. There is no quick, easy fix, but there is a solution.

The American government and public are focusing on the wrong problems with the education system and thus are trying out all the wrong solutions. Schools are the poster children of inefficiency. Somewhere along the way, something went wrong. In the early 1900s, students were held back if they didn’t know the material, whereas they are mostly just pushed along through the system now (Coulson). So students who graduated earlier in the century were better equipped, more certified, more guaranteed to actually know what they should than they are now.

This shows that the focus of school has shifted from educating the students to scoring well on standardized tests, to giving them good grades to bring home, and to appear successful. But are students now, who have better material, more funding, more information, more time in school, and better teaching techniques, doing better than they were? By all means students should be doing far better than they were in the earlier part of the century.

This is not the case. Despite spending 67 more days in school than in 1909 students are doing routinely worse. From the beginning of the 20th century until now, reading, math and writing skills have stalled and then fallen (Coulson).

For contrast, homeschoolers who spend an average of sixteen hours weekly in planned lessons scored, on average, in the 89th reading percentile, 72nd math percentile, 87th science percentile, and 81st social studies percentile (Klicka)—meaning that they did better in reading than 88% of others who had taken the test, better than 71% in math, better than 86% of test-takers in science, and better than 80% in social studies. Clearly inefficiency is the issue and not time deficiency: Imagine what public schools could do with 180 six-hour days if they were that effective! Nor is it an issue of underfunding; four times as much money is spent per student as in the 1960s, but skills and performance have not improved but have declined (Beck 71).

Homeschoolers, on average, cost one tenth of the money per student that public schoolers do, and score 35 percentiles better than them! Even between homeschoolers the amount of money per student has no effect: those whose parents spent under \$200 yearly on their child's education averaged the 80th percentile, the \$200-599 group scored in the 80th percentile, and \$600+ scored in the 83rd (Klicka). Homeschooling, however, is not the solution. For a lot of families, especially low-income ones, it is simply not a viable option and isn't practical. But these statistics show that time and money are not the causes (but waste of money and inefficient use of it are large contributors to the problem).

) One other major problem is that the curriculum and atmosphere discourage excellence. Students are thought of as having very little mental capacity for new ideas and concepts. As such, the curriculum is adjusted accordingly. For example, John Dewey, the founder of the modern education system, said, Existing life is so complex that the child cannot be brought into contact with it without either confusion or distraction; he is either overwhelmed by the multiplicities of activities which are going on, so that he loses his own power of orderly reaction, or he is so stimulated by these various activities that his powers are prematurely called into play and he becomes either unduly specialized or else disintegrated. (Dworkin 23) He believes that life is too much for students to handle, and that they will hide under the table when exposed to it.

And of course, this philosophy will bleed over into the school system, creating a system where the greatest fear is that students will be challenged beyond their capacity to learn. But this attitude of low expectations is very unhealthy. Low expectations of students actually create lower performance, and the opposite is true as well, as stated in Beneath the Apathy: “ A culture of high expectations for students, teachers, staff, administrators, and parents is a hallmark of high-achieving schools” (Thompson). So the curriculum being arranged in such a way as to convey the impression of being more difficult than it really is lowers the ability of students to think and learn and be as intelligent as they can be. For example, the fast-paced Honors students take pre-Algebra in seventh grade at Red Lion.

It is stressed repeatedly that this is a difficult course and that Algebra next year is very hard. The implication is that it takes a minimum of six years to <https://assignbuster.com/flaws-in-the-public-education-system/>

learn how to add, subtract, multiply, and divide. Concepts such as parentheses, exponents, negative numbers, and dividing fractions are gone over, but are also thoroughly reviewed in Pre-Algebra. This mentality of trying not to overload students with information is actually hurting their performance and ability. Another problem is that schools no longer try to equip students for life; instead, they try to equip them for the test. Schools are judged by how they perform on tests, and as a result, instead of focusing on areas that could actually be helpful, time and money and resources are spent on actions to improve standardized test scores.

Days are spent in preparation of the statewide testing where students are advised on good test-taking strategies before and during the test, and among the lower grades, stress-reducing activities are performed. The whole focus becomes to perform well on artificial contrived tests, with severe consequences if they do not. Red Lion missed the arbitrary quota of passing students by two students, and as a result, there are a host of new programs enacted. As said by an education historian, Diane Ravitch, “ High-stakes testing is sucking the life out of American education” (Boldt). Actual knowledge and learning has become secondary to basic ideas—such as identifying main idea and author’s purpose of writing—that are actually useless in the real world. And, of course, students no longer care.

They have lost the idea that knowledge for knowledge’s sake is something worth attaining, and the emphasis on grades has led to a loss of honor or a sense of earning your grade. Students no longer care about the quality of their work because nothing affects them (Truong). It does not matter to them if their homework is done as best as they can do it, because they have no

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sense of honor. There is no objectivity or feeling that if anything is worth doing, it is worth doing well. Instead, the students who do care about grades only care to the extent that it could affect what college they go to and what sort of job they will get. More short-sighted students don't care at all, because they recognize that it is an arbitrary judgment.

And so the job of an educator has changed—diverting precious time and resources from actual instruction—from teaching to making students care (Truong). The goal of an English teacher is no longer to read Shakespeare, it is to convince the students that Shakespeare is worth the effort. In conclusion, the American public education system is failing and flailing around in futility. The proposed solutions—more time, more money, more oversight, more accountability, or whatever else—fail to acknowledge the real problems of apathy, inefficiency, and discouraging true learning. The education system needs to be drastically changed if it will be fixed.

It will not be fun or pleasant, but if it done, it will have telling results. More importantly, our school system is churning out base, uneducated students who will not lead us to innovation and success. This needs to be changed to stop our country from falling apart.