

Let's clean our schools

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As high school students, we spend at least seven hours in school every school day. We all desire clean classrooms, tidy playgrounds, bright gyms, unpolluted hallways, and hygienic restrooms. However, recently, due to surging government budget cuts, we are seeing an increasing deduction in janitorial services at public high schools around the nation. What do you do if your bedroom at home gets messy? You clean it.

What if the place that gets messy is not your bedroom but a place you spend just as much time? Would you rather see the place get messier and suffer from the consequences instead of cleaning it? A rational and reasonable person would take action to clean the place. Thus, the solution to the problem of rising neglect in keeping our schools clean is straightforward: have students clean their own schools. If every high school student is required to clean their own school for about fifteen minutes every school day, we'll see a cleaner and healthier school environment. Making school cleaning a mandatory activity for high school students will not only provide effective solutions to pressing educational and financial problems that plague today's public high schools in America, but also advance the core values of education. What is the purpose of high school education? No one can deny that one of the main purposes of high school education is to shape students' minds and perspectives to mentally prepare them for life beyond teenage years. In other words, to fulfill the very purpose of its existence, a high school should instill values that will guide students' ethics and behaviors.

Unfortunately, in most American high schools today, the curricula focus mainly on academic development. They largely ignore the crucial need for

cultivating the personal attributes of high school students. Requiring students to clean their own schools will fill in this gap in several definitive ways. First, if students are taught to have a duty to clean the facilities they use in public, they'll develop a sense of responsibility for their own actions. On the other hand, if students are accustomed to an environment where someone else will clean up the mess they make, they'll tend to develop the belief that they do not have to care about the negative effects of their actions in public. These two contrasting approaches will mold two different kinds of people in our society.

Do you want to be neighbors with people who regularly help clean the neighborhood or with people who believe neighborhood cleaning is none of their business? Do you prefer to work with someone who is willing and able to take responsibility for a task or with someone who expects you to take care of it? The answers are obvious. As a high school student, will you feel thankful that a school activity fosters the sense of responsibility in your mind so that you become a well-trusted person for the rest of your life? The intrinsic value of personal responsibility in this activity is significant and far-reaching. In addition, working together to clean the school presents an excellent opportunity for students to learn and practice cooperation with others. Cleaning school facilities as a group activity requires students to communicate, help, and coordinate with one another. Such a collective effort will help students develop skills in working with others and learn the concept of team spirit.

This idea is of particular importance to today's high schools where most students go home right after the last bell rings. Without the chance to

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interact with peers in a common task on a regular basis, it is impossible for young people to grow the desire and acquire the skills to collaborate with others. As a result, they'll grow up to become self-centered and unhelpful people—people who will not be welcome by society. As a high school student, will you feel appreciative that a school activity improves your interest and abilities in team work so that you become a well-liked person for the rest of your life? The innate value of team work in this activity is significant and far-reaching. Moreover, requiring students to clean up their own surroundings nurtures their concept and belief in caring for the environment.

The very fact that their school facilities need to be cleaned by their own hands demonstrates the importance of keeping their surrounding environment clean. Consequently, they will become naturally inclined to care for the environment. During the course of cleaning the school environment, students also get the opportunity to learn and practice what is appropriate and inappropriate for the environment. As a high school student, will you feel gratified that a school activity creates environmental awareness in your mind so that you consciously become a good steward of the Earth? The inherent value of environmental awareness in this activity is significant and far-reaching. Furthermore, having students clean up their schools helps them develop a sense of appreciation for the work of others. Through vacuuming floors, scrubbing walls, mopping desks, dusting windows, sweeping grounds, and watering plants, students will become aware of the amount of labor involved in keeping a clean school.

Accordingly, they will appreciate the work their parents have done in tidying up their homes and the efforts their neighbors have made in cleaning up their communities. When people appreciate the work others have done for them, they will become more respectful. Being respectful contributes to happiness, friendship, love, opportunities, success, and many other lifelong benefits; thus, it stands to reason that being respectful will make one be respected. As a high school student, will you feel grateful that a school activity instills appreciation and respect in your mind so that you become a well-respected person for the rest of your life? The essential value of respect in this activity is significant and far-reaching. Therefore, making school cleaning the responsibility of students will significantly benefit the students' character development and better prepare them for life beyond teenage years. Meanwhile, this activity can also provide immediate solutions to some acute issues in today's high schools.

As is common with any new concept, the idea of having high school students clean their campuses will encounter its share of oppositions. Some people may argue that since high school students are already burdened with a heavy academic load, spending time on school cleaning would be a waste of their precious time. There is no denying that high school students are hard-pressed with their academic schedules. However, fifteen minutes a day on school cleaning is not a considerable amount of time compared to the total after-school time the students have. In fact, most students often unknowingly dawdle away the first fifteen minutes or so of their after-school time. If they spend these fifteen minutes on school cleaning, what they can

learn and achieve will far exceed the benefits of what they would otherwise be doing.

The fact that high school students are under substantial academic pressure itself makes school cleaning all the more important; this activity will help them develop values that cannot be learned in doing homework, yet are crucial for their future. School cleaning is not a waste of time. On the contrary, it is an effective and valuable use of high school students' time. Another possible argument against this activity is that students should not be “forced” to do something not related to education. The fallacy of this argument is that it distorts the meaning of education and the role of schools. Education is not just about instructing knowledge; in its essence, it is also about inculcating values.

Since having students clean their own schools teaches them important values, such as responsibilities, cooperation, respect, and caring for the environment, it has everything to do with education. The role of schools is to develop and implement activities that advance the goals of education. Thus, if the school administration makes school cleaning a mandatory school activity in the educational agenda, then it is the obligation of those who attend the school to participate in this activity, just like they have to follow all the other school rules. In other words, the students are not supposed to have discretion on whether to participate in this activity. For those who attend the school, no student will be required to participate in school cleaning any more than they are required to attend their regular classes or to refrain from fighting in school.

School cleaning is not a forced activity unrelated to education. Rather, it is a chosen activity at the core of education. Requiring high school students to clean their schools is a new idea in the United States. However, in some Asian countries, this practice has been in existence for years. In Japan, for example, all high schools require students to participate in school cleaning on school days. International studies have consistently shown that high school campuses in Japan are ranked as some of the cleanest in the world and that Japanese students perform among the best in the world in academics.

One may wonder why this is possible given that government spending on education in Japan accounts for a smaller proportion of its gross national product than in the United States. The answer is clear: by cleaning schools through their own work, Japanese students have not only saved their government's spending on school maintenance, but also made themselves better students. The success of Japanese schools demonstrates that mandating high school students to clean schools is feasible, valuable, and inspiring. If we want our schools to succeed in today's increasingly competitive global competition, we should consider and adopt this successful practice. Given the enormous developmental, educational, and financial benefits engendered by mandating high school students to clean their schools, there is simply no reason not to promote and implement this activity in American high schools. It is time for us to take care of our schools so that we can one day take care of our families, our communities, and our country.

For a healthier school environment, for a richer educational experience, for a brighter future, and for a better self, let's clean our schools.

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