

Focus on core classes does not make smarter students

[Business](#)



As time goes on, and many schools are forced to focus more on budget cuts and test scores than the actual value of the education given to students, one finds it easy to imagine an Orwellian educational system being established within the next few decades. Within this system, art and elective courses are completely cut out, as a new society is formed; one without the ability to think for itself. All knowledge is standardized, and genuine intelligence has all but vanished, unable to sustain itself after years of being suppressed by a botched school system. Regardless of what today's school boards and educational committees may have to say on the matter, cutting of electives will in no way benefit students or the American workforce, be it today or tomorrow.

The effects on students should seem rather obvious; lack of varied and truly interesting education could have nothing but negative effects on any student, particularly those already lacking motivation. And the effects on the workforce could reverberate for generations to come, starting with those already employed in teaching jobs. The main problem is that schools across the country are facing a budget crisis, and some things just have to be cut; obviously, school boards are reluctant to cut "core" classes, so they see electives and other such "unnecessary" courses as the obvious choice. However, considering the psychological and economic effects that would eventually be inflicted upon the country, cutting electives in lieu of other programs creates more problems than it solves. There are many things that have apparently not been considered concerning how cutting electives could affect students. The most obvious thing not considered is exactly why students fail.

The fact is, students often do not fail because of lack of knowledge or ability, but because they simply lack motivation and respect for the school system. Anyone who was once a teenager should be able to understand this; they are bored with conventional education and standardized testing, and require further motivation to get them through the school day. As Bob Balmer of OPB News stated, “ classes like music, shop, and art are the academic sunbreaks in an otherwise bleak day. It is these very extras that motivate students to show up” (Balmer). Students who are failing often see no reason to respect the system; they feel that they have been prevented from pursuing their true interests because schools simply will not allow them to. As such, electives must be kept around to prevent students from falling to the deepest lows of failure.

This leads nicely to the next point: it has been shown in several refutable studies that cutting of electives and focus on core classes does not even raise test scores; in fact, test scores drop when electives are removed from the school day. In schools with no electives, students are faced with hours upon hours of mindless work; therefore, little cognitive development is achieved. As journalists Ellen Winner and Lois Hetland observed, students in elective classes are “ taught a remarkable array of mental habits not emphasized elsewhere in school” (Winner). With this sort of creative development, students are taught to solve problems on their own; they are taught to become their own leaders and teachers. It is this sort of development that leads to success both inside and outside the walls of a classroom.

Though the effects on students could be said to last only through their twelve or so years of schooling, it should seem obvious to even the most simple minded that the effects of a standardized, thoughtless education will reverberate through the workforce for generations to come. The most obvious loss of opportunity is already occurring; the unemployment of elective teachers. Even as this paper is being written, schools across the country are laying off thousands of well educated, hard working people dedicated only to the education of their students. According to Grace Chen of Public School Review, hundreds of teachers per state “ were laid off due to issues of funding, testing, and a dwindling social respect for the arts and creative courses” (Chen). Every single one of these teachers have faced the struggles of academia; they have shown themselves to be hard working individuals, going through years of college education in order to attain their various required degrees and accreditations. If students were to see their most educated mentors unceremoniously thrown from comfortable employment, how could the school system expect them to be motivated to seek higher education? Furthermore, with such a system in place, students will no longer be taught to seek improvement or show interest in anything; an apathetic proletariat will be trained, not to think or reason for itself, but to spew forth only what it has been told in its years of narrow-minded obedience.

As stated by Ellen Winner and Lois Hetland, the developing system relies heavily on standardized testing (the true cause of focus on core areas), and “ rewards children who have a knack for language and math and who can absorb and regurgitate information. [This system] reveals little about a

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student's intellectual depth or desire to learn, and [is] a poor predictor of eventual success and satisfaction in life" (Winner). As such, this system hands success to book-smart students, with little or no consideration placed toward the students' cognitive skills, reasoning ability, or natural creativity. Often, the mere ability to memorize and recite information, the focus of this system, will not bring a person success in the real world. Reasons for the dropping of elective courses often revolve around the same idea: funding is low, and something must be cut in order to make ends meet.

Obviously, school boards are reluctant to cut classes in math, science, or reading; this seems reasonable enough. Without education in these basic areas, students would lack many skills necessary to survive in the real world. As John J. Patrick noted, "if [Americans] are to be successful in the global economic competition of the next century, [they] must greatly improve the quality of education" (Patrick). This cannot be disputed; it is clear that education is at the very core of the American economy, and that an educated proletariat will pave the way for success as a nation. However, if funds are so tight, one must question why schools refuse to cut more costly programs (such as athletics); it seems they would rather support the "brawn over brain" mentality, and standardize all knowledge.

Contrary to popular belief, a standardized education system is not necessarily a successful one. The fact is, life is not standardized, and therefore, education should not be. As Ellen Winner stated, "It is well established that intelligence and thinking ability are far more complex than what [schools] choose to measure on standardized tests." It was obvious to

her as well that “ As schools increasingly shape their classes to produce high test scores, many life skills not measured by tests just don’t get taught” (Winner). As education has depreciated over the years, schools are no longer encouraged to prepare students for the real world, but to teach them to do well on the required tests. The focus has shifted from the benefit of the student to appeasement of lawmakers and test scorers.

Having sorted through the facts and figures, it seems foolish that schools should even consider cutting electives in order to focus on core classes and test preparation. Lack of electives in the school day would close doors in many areas of American society, robbing students of motivation to do well and eventually slowing their cognitive development; a ripple effect would take place among the American workforce, as workers became less and less educated, and even the most scholarly and intelligent were thrown from their positions. Some may argue that core classes are more important to the students’ futures; however, as with many issues, this is a mindless assumption made by the uninformed masses. If America is to remain a competitive nation, students must be able to pursue their interests and develop outside of the academic norm. Ideally, school boards should drop this foolish reliance on standardized testing; the current focus on granting each student a standardized set of skills will not benefit them later in life.

If funds are truly low, cuts can be made in other areas, such as athletics, that do not affect the academic ability or creative development of the student body. After all, the purpose of the American education system is not to create a mindless proletariat, but rather to foster creativity and innovation.

Without electives, this is not possible. Works Cited Balmer, Bob. " Schools Should Leave No Elective Behind.

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