

IS PUBLIC EDUCATION NECESSARY?

by

Samuel L. Blumenfeld

We would not have to ask the above question if public education had not become the great, costly, and tragic failure that it is, a failure that both liberals and conservatives, progressives and traditionalists acknowledge. A great failure in terms of the expectations it has failed to fulfill. A costly failure in terms of the enormous financial burdens it has added to the taxpayers' shoulders. A tragic failure in terms of the intellectually disabled, semi-literate, disoriented, frustrated and unhappy youths it is now turning out by the thousands, by the millions. The measure of that failure cannot even be estimated: it may in the end cost us our freedom, our civilization. That indeed is an unacceptable price to pay for a delusive social experiment.

Perhaps Walter Lippmann best expressed that great disappointment in

expectations when he wrote in 1941 while World War II was raging:

"Universal and compulsory modern education was established by the emancipated democracies during the nineteenth century. 'No other sure foundation can be devised,' said Thomas Jefferson, 'for the preservation of freedom and happiness.' Yet as a matter of fact during the twentieth century the generations trained in these schools have either abandoned their liberties or they have not known, until the last desperate moment, how to defend them. The schools were to make men free. They have been in operation for some sixty or seventy years and what was expected of them they have not done. The plain fact is that the graduates of the modern schools are the actors in the catastrophe which has befallen our civilization. Those who are responsible for modern education -- for its controlling philosophy -- are answerable for the results."

Since those profound observations were made, we have had the Korean War and the Vietnam War, of which the latter is probably the most debilitating, devisive, wasteful, and bloody foreign exercise this nation has ever engaged in. All of our public education did nothing to save us from it, and we shall be paying its price for years to come. In addition, since 1941, Communist tyranny has spread across the globe, even invading the Western Hemisphere. Our people have not known how to stop this malevolent political cancer from spreading far and wide. As a result, we live in a world of unceasing political tension, threatened by war and nuclear destruction.

There were many seductive arguments for free universal public education at the time of its first promotion in the early years of the last century. Horace Mann saw compulsory free education as the means of perfecting humanity,

the "great equalizer," the "balance wheel of the social machinery," the "creator of wealth undreamed of." Poverty, ignorance, prejudice, and every other evil afflicting the human race, it was thought, would disappear. Others argued that free public education for all would help us preserve our free way of life.

Governor DeWitt Clinton of New York said in 1826:

"I consider the system of our common schools as the palladium of our freedom, for no reasonable apprehension can be entertained of its subversion as long as the great body of people are enlightened by education."

Daniel Webster, the eloquent U. S. Senator from Massachusetts, echoed these sentiments in 1837 when he said:

"Education, to accomplish the ends of good government, should be universally diffused. Open the doors of the school houses to all the children in the land. Let no man have the excuse of poverty for not educating his offspring. Place the means of education within his reach, and if he remain in ignorance, be it his own reproach. . . . On the diffusion of education among the people rests the preservation and perpetuation of our free institutions."

Yet, with more compulsory universal education than ever in history, we have seen a steady erosion of our domestic freedom to an ever growing dependence on government to solve all of our problems. Most Americans, living in a capitalist society, with all their years of compulsory education, cannot understand such basic economic concepts as supply and demand, or the meaning of the word "profit," or how government can cause inflation and thereby destroy the value of our currency. The result is that our people are unable to solve their problems and readily turn them over to those who they think can solve them:

the politicians and bureaucrats.

It is interesting to note that our system of compulsory state-controlled education was not brought about by spontaneous popular demand, for education was already virtually universal in America before it became compulsory.

Socialized education was promoted by politicians like DeWitt Clinton and Daniel Webster and state administrators like Horace Mann and Henry Barnard, as well as by the professional educators serving the state because it was in their political and economic interest to do so. According to E. G. West:

"The suppliers of educational services to the government, the teachers and administrators, as we have seen, had produced their own organized platforms by the late 1840's; it was they indeed who were the leading instigators of the free school campaign. Whilst conventional history portrays them as distinguished champions in the cause of children's welfare and benevolent participants in a political struggle, it is suggested here that the facts are equally consistent with the hypothesis of self-interest behaviour as described above."

Thus the bureaucratic mentality was an important force in promoting and creating a system that today serves its administrators more than it does its supposed clients, the students. If you understand the bureaucratic mentality, you will understand that the basic inner motivation of the bureaucrat is not to solve problems, but to keep them from being solved, for no bureaucrat wants to work himself out of a secure berth. Nor do politicians solve problems. Their function is to help create them so that our people will turn more and more to them for the answers. Thus, the politician and the bureaucrat, the midwives of legislated force, work in tandem, the former to help create our problems,

the latter to keep them from being solved. The purpose of our public educational system in this scheme is to indoctrinate our people into believing that we cannot live without either politicians or bureaucrats and that they are our very saviors.

The public educational bureaucracy is a force in our society to be reckoned with, and its political power is increasingly being used to preserve and extend its own vested interests. For example in 1973 the California Teachers Federation played a pivotal role in defeating Gov. Ronald Reagan's constitutional referendum to limit state taxing authority and, indirectly, state spending. The C.T.F. also spent \$100,000 that same year to help elect 152 local school board members it approved of. In New Jersey, teachers helped force out a state education commissioner who favored teacher accountability and evaluations. In Utah, the teachers' lobby helped kill free textbooks for schoolchildren that might divert money from teachers' salary increases. Obviously, the public educational lobby will favor all politicians, school board members, and legislation which will further strengthen the hold of the bureaucracy over the country, thus strangling American freedom even more.

It should not be overlooked that all of the totalitarian states of the modern world have used the instrument of public education, with the willing cooperation of public educators, to keep their people enslaved. In fact, our own compulsory system was based on the Prussian model, which was criticized by the wary as being inappropriate for a free country. Even at the time of its adoption it was suspected that such a system transplanted to our soil would not promote freedom. Horace Mann, who was most instrumental in getting America

to adopt the Prussian system, was aware of this and wrote in 1844:

"Among the nations of Europe, Prussia has long enjoyed the most distinguished reputation for the excellence of its schools. . . . Recently, however, grave charges have been preferred against it by high authority. . . . In 1843 numerous tracts were issued from the English press, not merely calling in question, but strongly denouncing, the whole plan of education in Prussia as being not only designed to produce, but as actually producing, a spirit of blind acquiescence to arbitrary power, in things spiritual as well as temporal,-- as being, in fact, a system of education, adopted to enslave, and not to enfranchise the human mind. And even in some parts of the United States . . . some have been illiberal enough to condemn, in advance, everything that savours of the Prussian system, because that system is sustained by arbitrary power.

"If Prussia can pervert the benign influences of education to the support of arbitrary power, we surely can employ them for the support and perpetuation of republican institutions. A national spirit of liberty can be cultivated more easily than a national spirit of bondage; and if it may be made one of the great prerogatives of education to perform the unnatural and unholy work of making slaves, then surely it must be one of the noblest instrumentalities for rearing a nation of freemen. If a moral power over the understandings and affections of the people may be turned to evil, may it not also be employed for the highest good?"

Mann's argument tantalized a lot of wishful thinkers. By naively adopting the dangerous notion that the end justified the means, Mann thought that the

Prussian compulsory system could be used to inculcate freedom. Unfortunately, he was the victim of a serious error: that of equating education per se with compulsory education, as if the element of compulsion would not contaminate the idea of education. The truth is that the very idea of compulsion contradicts the aims and goals of a free society and therefore, by its very nature, cannot be used to promote freedom -- no more than hate can be used to promote love.

But we need not put forth moral arguments alone against Horace Mann. We have the performance of public education itself to draw on, which has induced our people to turn more and more of their freedoms over to the tax collectors, the currency debasers, the price controllers (at least temporarily) simply because our educational system has neither taught us how to solve our problems nor maintain our freedoms. At the rate that Americans are currently turning over their freedoms to their government, there may be none left by the time we reach Orwell's prophetic 1984. Our public education system then will serve the very same purposes that public education serves in Soviet Russia, or Red China, or Castro Cuba.

Or if we do have freedoms, they will be the freedoms given to a spoiled child by a confused, perverse, and deranged parent: the freedom to commit suicide, to become a heroin addict, to engage in mindless promiscuity, or to abort ever increasing numbers of the unborn. But we shall not have the freedom to grow up and become independent of government, to own our own gold, control our own wealth, run our own businesses, and exchange our products without the meddling and interference of our deranged parent.

So much for how public education is helping us preserve our freedom. Its

purpose has been to turn us into helpless, brainless, spoiled, overindulged children, without self-discipline, without the intellectual means to solve the many difficult problems of an increasingly complex civilization. And because of this, our unhappiness and frustration grow, our rate of drug and alcohol addiction increases and with it the rate of suicide, crime, delinquency, divorce, and other indicators of profound human unhappiness. Clearly, our "pursuit of happiness" has been seriously sabotaged by our educational system.

Other reasons have been given for the necessity of public education. At the end of the last century it was seen as a means of Americanizing our immigrants. But today we have few immigrants to Americanize and the emphasis has shifted to promoting ethnic identity and cultural pluralism. Then, in the first five decades of the twentieth century public education, in the hands of social reformers, became an instrument for social indoctrination, for "life adjustment," so that the little ones when they grew up would eventually want to remake America in the image of a socialist democracy. That utopian plan blew up in America's face in the 1960's with the spectacle of college students, the flower of public education, rioting on their campuses and turning academia into a nightmare. Today the purpose of public education is harder to determine. No one seems to know exactly what it is supposed to do. Perhaps the best source of information on the present mental state of public education is the Fleischmann Report, a survey of the New York State public school system conducted by a special commission appointed by Governor Rockefeller and published in 1973. Here are some revealing and relevant excerpts:

"It came as a surprise to learn how little hard knowledge exists in the

field of education--and specifically with respect to the manner in which education of high quality can be produced. As examples, there is no broad agreement among educators as to what method of teaching reading is most effective (though all are agreed that all but a very few children can be taught to read adequately); there is no agreement as to the optimum size of a class in primary or secondary schools; a continuous controversy drags on as to the merits of 'open' schools as against their more formal counterparts; last but hardly least, there is not even a consensus as to what the 'goals' or 'objectives' of education should be."

"More than 66 per cent of the students sampled indicated that they did not enjoy school. Responses also revealed tensions in student-teacher relations. Students generally felt that teachers did not help them to do their best, did not understand their problems, did not help them to improve their skills and were not concerned with their future. More than simply not enjoying school, many students indicated that their school experience was actually painful. . . . Student dissatisfaction of this magnitude is a real cause for concern."

"It is difficult to pinpoint the causes behind the rapidly increasing problem of drug abuse in New York State. Studies conducted for the Commission reveal that one high school student in four in New York State routinely takes some form of psychoactive drug. In New York City the figure is one high school student in two."

"Certainly the fact that large numbers of children do not learn to read or write or cipher satisfactorily is evidence that the schools have a long way to go before they can be said to be efficient at their basic job."

But perhaps the best summary of the actual current purpose of public education was given by the Commission in the following statements:

"For most children, the first experience with the legal and political framework of their society is in the school. They know that the public maintains the schools, and that they are required by law to attend. And quite apart from the reading, writing and arithmetic they learn in their schools, they also receive an unspoken message -- their society's concern, or lack of concern, for them, and the seriousness, or lack of seriousness, of the principles the society professes."

"This Commission believes that a school system, maintained by law, governed by public officials, supported by public revenues, cannot, by acts of commission or omission, permit the young who come into its charge to draw the inference that public authority accepts, encourages, or participates in, the division of our society into first- and second-class citizens."

"The goal to which the schools must aspire is not merely desegregation but integration."

"Integration in the schools should be given the highest priority because it is clear that such cooperation and understanding are more easily instilled in young people than in adults."

Thus, one might conclude from the Fleischmann Report that the latest purpose of our public educational system is the integration of the races, a purpose some light years removed from the original ideas behind public education. Obviously, the reasons why the country adopted compulsory public education are vastly and radically different from the ones -- if you can find them -- now

used to justify its maintenance and continued existence. In fact, what is somewhat astounding is that even the most loyal supporters of public education can't seem to come up with any convincing or cogent reasons why public education should continue to exist other than because it already exists. But if the existence of public education is causing this nation no end of troubles, why should it continue to exist?

Walter W. Straley, Chairman of President Nixon's National Reading Council, painted this dismal picture in 1971 when he said:

"Across the country, more than half of last year's school bond issues were defeated in confrontation of often angry voters. Taxpayers strike against their schools, teachers strike against school boards. Administrators cut staff and curricula. Many schools must close before normal terms are ended. Probably a million children will strike out this year by simply dropping out, many to drugs and decay."

Add to the above the intense conflicts arising over forced bussing and perhaps it is easy to understand why public education has so few supporters today other than those whose livelihoods depend on it.

That public education has also been a costly failure is perhaps the greatest understatement one can make about it. We have created a monumental bureaucratized colossus that is now consuming about \$50-billion of the taxpayers' money each year. Education is only second to national defense in its consumption of the tax dollar, and its cost continues to rise while its quality continues to decline. According to the Fleischmann Report, "Substantial increases in costs per pupil in recent years have not been accompanied by comparable

improvement in school performance." The report could have added that never has so much been spent to obtain so little. Yet public education is in the midst of a national fiscal crisis, with local property taxes, on which school financing has largely relied, reaching the point of diminishing returns. Also, because poor districts can't spend as much on education per pupil as rich districts, there is now a new drive to "equalize education." To provide such equalized schooling, the Fleischmann Commission recommended "full state funding of education" by means of any form of taxation -- real property tax, income tax, sales tax, or any combination of these. In other words, all taxpayers will be required to bear an even larger tax burden for an educational system which has long since outlived its usefulness and has become a very real menace to our national health.

But the truly heartbreaking tragedy of public education is in what it has done to the minds of the youngsters forced by law to go through its grinding, destructive processes. We are committing something akin to intellectual genocide when we force millions of bright young minds into the intellectual meat grinder we call public education. We have seen the results in the greatest juvenile drug-taking epidemic in history, in an increased interest among young adults in black magic, the occult, astrology, and primitivism. These young adults are not that way by accident. They are the finished products of an educational system that neither loves them, nor respects their minds, nor understands the learning process. It is, in fact, a system not interested in teaching at all, just merely existing, for through its existence some two million people are fed and clothed and two million careers are seemingly justified.

Obviously the system wasn't always this bad, or else it would have collapsed years ago. Those of us who went to school some forty years ago know that at least some basic learning took place in those days, enough at least to justify public confidence. What happened since then to change things so drastically? What happened is that the progressives took over the instrument of public education and decided to use it as the vehicle for remaking America. Their ideas and experiments, adopted throughout the system without much thought or consideration for their long-term effects, destroyed a curriculum based on traditional values, methods, and wisdom and replaced it with the chaos and confusion we have today. Their most destructive experiment took place in the area of teaching children to read, by replacing the alphabetic method with a hieroglyphic whole-word method. The result has been widespread reading disability, functional illiteracy, dyslexia, and what Professor Karl Shapiro calls the "degeneration of the literary intelligence." He told an audience of the California Library Association in 1970:

"But what is really distressing is that this generation cannot and does not read. I am speaking of university students in what are supposed to be our best universities. Their illiteracy is staggering. . . . We are experiencing a literary breakdown which is unlike anything I know of in the history of letters."

Some universities, plagued with functional illiteracy among their incoming freshmen, have been at a loss as to what to do about it. In February 1974 Bowdoin College decided that it would demand a written essay as part of its entrance requirements. The admissions director accused the public high schools, especially the progressive ones, of giving their students no proper training

in writing -- of cheating them out of their basic education.

But the reading problem has led to even more tragic consequences. Since a child's reading skill is fundamental to all of his future work, reading failure can destroy a child's school career and lead him to explosive and destructive frustration. The child will take out his frustration against the school and the society it represents. In their recent book, Schools and Delinquency, authors Kenneth Polk and Walter Schafer of the University of Oregon wrote:

"Only in recent years has the enormity of educational failure been fully recognized. The rising rate of juvenile delinquency and adolescent alienation are causing increasing alarm. . . . We propose that educational failure -- by schools as well as by students -- is directly related to delinquency. . . . First, juvenile delinquency in this country is partly heightened by conditions in American public education. Second, these conditions are deeply anchored into prevailing conceptions and organization of the educational system. . . . Unless basic, radical, and immediate educational changes are made, delinquency will continue to increase -- and will be accompanied by the spread of other social ills that stem from the same roots."

The authors conclude their book with recommendations for changing the system within the context of the system. But it is my contention that the nature of public education makes its change for the better impossible. The problem can be stated quite simply. Because public education is controlled by the government, it theoretically belongs to everyone, which means that no one, or no particular group, has the right to impose his philosophy of education

on the system as a whole. This has created a system with no philosophy of education at all, and unfortunately you cannot conduct education without one. Since most people do not understand this fundamental fact about public education, various factions have endeavored to gain control of public education in order to impose their ideas on it. This has led to constant and sometimes ferocious struggles between various factions promoting different philosophies of education. When liberals or progressives dominate a school board, they try to foster their pet ideas. When conservatives dominate a school board, they try to do the same. The end product is chaos, contradiction, and inconsistency. Walter Lippmann saw the situation in this way:

"Thus there is an enormous vacuum where until a few decades ago there was the substance of education. And with what is that vacuum filled: it is filled with the elective, eclectic, the specialized, the accidental, and incidental improvisations and spontaneous curiosities of teachers and students. . . . The graduate of the modern school knows only by accident and by hearsay whatever wisdom mankind has come to in regard to the nature of men and their destiny."

Jules Henry, a noted liberal educator, described the problem in these pessimistic terms:

"American education is bleak; so bleak indeed that, on the whole, educators, having long ago abandoned the ideal of enlightenment, concentrate on tooling up. Feeble neo-idealistic gestures in the direction of curriculum revision are merely tinkering with a machine whose basic drive must be -- and has been through all history -- the maintenance of a steady state."

Liberals, on the whole, are disgusted with public education because they have not been able to impose all of their ideas on the system. Despite the

enormous success the progressives had in influencing the theory and practice of public education, there has always been enough conservative resistance in the community to prevent a complete progressive takeover. This has led to an unworkable, haphazard, incredibly disjointed compromise, in which contradictory aims and inconsistent methods have produced chaos, confusion, waste, and rampant demoralization. Today, public education has no consistent philosophy of education because it is torn by two diametrically opposed concepts of the mind -- the progressive (collectivist) and the traditional (individualist). As a result, it goes on from year to year, like a grotesque monster, half-blind, half-coherent, stumbling and groping its way from one budgetary crisis to the next. Is it any wonder that its students are taking drugs on an unprecedented scale to render themselves as mindless as the system which is "educating" them?

The basic problem of American public education, a problem which the system can never solve, is its inability to deal with two irreconcilable philosophies of education fighting for dominance within the system. No man can lead a productive, happy life if he is torn by inner conflict to such a degree that he does not know where he is going or what he is doing. The same is true of human organization. The conflict of philosophies raging within the public school system has rendered it impotent as an educator but dangerous as an influence. A child is bound to be mentally and emotionally affected by the system's contradictions, inconsistencies, and schizophrenia. He comes out of the system far more confused than when he entered it.

We recognize what parental conflict can do to a child within a family. Why can't we recognize what educational conflict can do to him in school? No

child should be subjected to such mind destruction in the name of an institution which no longer serves any useful purpose for our country or its people. Dr. F. A. Harper, the late president of the Institute for Humane Studies, once said that if you wanted to solve a problem concerning something, first find out who owned it. In the case of public education, ownership is indeed the key to the problem. Because theoretically everybody owns it, nobody can really impose his ideas on it. The solution? Put American schools back into the hands of private owners.

At the beginning of this essay we asked if public, state-controlled education was necessary. The answer, we are convinced, is no. Education is indeed necessary, but compulsory state-controlled education is not. But what about those parents who would not be able to pay for private schooling? The answer again is quite simple. Let the local community -- out of some special voluntary fund -- pay for the education of any orphan or child whose parents cannot afford to provide him or her with a basic education. But let the parents choose the school according to the philosophy of education they themselves espouse. Thus, liberal parents will be able to send their children to progressive schools, and conservative parents will be able to send theirs to traditional schools, and no one will want to impose their ideas on the other.

Above all, the government should own no schools, for the state is not a fitting educator, nor even a fitting administrator of education. Education is the responsibility and function of parenthood, not statehood. To have confused statehood with parenthood is another reason why public education has failed. The state cannot provide love, only parents can. And when parents don't, the

state can hardly make up for it. In fact, most public school teachers tend to aggravate their students' emotional problems, not alleviate them. Education is part of parental love, not merely responsibility, and a state school is not the fitting instrument of a parent's concern, only a parent's indifference.

It is interesting to note that liberal critics of public education, who want to abolish the entire "system," are very reluctant to allow parents to assume the responsibility of their children's schooling. For example, Paul Goodman, author of Compulsory Mis-Education, one of the most scathing liberal critiques of public education, writes: "The compulsory system has become a universal trap, and it is no good." Yet, a few paragraphs later, he adds: "The compulsory law is useful to get the children away from the parents, but it must not result in trapping the children." The message, of course, is that parents are villains, unfit to either educate or be in charge of their children's education. But who is this all-knowing, all-understanding educator who knows what's good for other people's children? Some super-intellectual from New York whose own kids are on pot?

Ivan Illich, who, in his controversial book Deschooling Society, advocates not only the abolition of public education but of all formal education, shares Goodman's distrust of parents as the guardians of their own children's education. For example, he opposes the idea of tuition grants which other liberals favor because "it plays into the hands not only of the professional educators but of racists, promoters of religious schools, and others whose interests are socially divisive." Thus, in that one sentence Illich dismisses as "socially divisive" and unfit to educate their children all parents who do not share his

particular philosophy of education. He does not dismiss forced integration as socially divisive, but only those parents who take action to protect their children from its negative social consequences.

After having read a great deal of liberal criticism of public education, I can only conclude that liberals are not interested in educational freedom. They are merely interested in finding a new vehicle, a new instrument, backed by government force and financing, through which they can foster or impose their own educational ideas. Even Illich's radical system of informal education would, in the end, require government enforcement. He writes:

"A good educational system would have three purposes: it should provide all who want to learn with access to available resources at any time in their lives; empower all who want to share what they know to find those who want to learn it from them; and, finally, furnish all who want to present an issue to the public with the opportunity to make their challenge known. Such a system would require the application of constitutional guarantees to education."

Is an entirely private school system, free of government interference, feasible for America? Yes, it is. We are a nation with a strong tradition of freedom -- of limited government, free choice, and free enterprise. Despite the steady erosion of our freedoms, Americans in general still highly value their freedom. The growth of private education in the South during the past ten years has already proven that parents will take back their responsibilities for their children's education when they are convinced that it is necessary to do so, despite the added financial burden. That forced racial integration has been the catalyst in the creation of these Southern schools in no way detracts

from the fact that these schools have been able to supply better education than their public counterparts at less costs. The Southern experience has proven beyond a shadow of a doubt that private education for the entire community, embracing both rich and poor, is possible.

As for costs, the following figures should prove illuminating. In 1973 it cost \$1,370 to educate one pupil in the public educational system of Massachusetts. During that same period, the tuition fee at the privately owned Council Schools of Jackson, Mississippi, was \$500 for kindergarten through the eighth grade and \$650 for grades nine through twelve. Thus a Southern private school, of comparable if not better quality than a public school, was able to educate a child for less than half the money it costs to educate a child in a public school. And this cost was made good by the parent, not the taxpayer.

Perhaps the most important lesson we can learn from the Southern experience -- aside from the economic lesson -- is that parents, not educators, are the real force behind education in a community. They are the ones who must pay for it all, because it is their children who are to be educated. Educators arise when education is wanted. In the building of their new private schools, whole communities in the South have participated, with parents volunteering their labor as well as their money. The young headmaster of one private school in Alabama told me: "I wouldn't have dreamed it could be done. I would have never asked them to do what they did. Everyone volunteered to do something." A trustee of the school told me: "We have had a tremendous amount of volunteer help. All of the painting and carpeting was done by parents. Parents have literally dug

ditches. Yes, we've done it all ourselves." When I asked the headmaster of another private school in Jackson, Mississippi, if he had had the help of parents, he replied: "We had doctors and lawyers digging ditches. It was amazing."

To liberals like Paul Goodman and Ivan Illich such parents either don't exist, are not qualified to have any say in their children's education, or are "socially divisive." It should be noted that black parents in some Northern cities have shown the same initiative and energy in creating their own private schools for their children. The phenomenon obviously is not limited to white Southern parents.

But another reason why parents should start thinking of private schools, especially in the north, is the enormous rise in costs which the public will have to face. With the bureaucrats and administrators pushing for equality education through "full state funding," as recommended by the Fleischmann Report, we can expect the tax burden of public education to reach unheard of levels. Ivan Illich writes:

"In the United States it would take eighty billion dollars per year to provide what educators regard as equal treatment for all in grammar and high school. This is well over twice the \$36 billion now being spent (1969). Independent cost projectors at HEW and the University of Florida indicate that by 1974 the comparable figures will be \$107 billion as against the \$45 billion now projected. . . .

"Rather than calling equal schooling temporarily unfeasible, we must recognize that it is, in principle, economically absurd, and that to attempt

it is intellectually emasculating, socially polarizing, and destructive of the credibility of the political system which promotes it. The ideology of obligatory schools admits to no logical limits."

But is there not a limit to public endurance? The advantage of private education, of course, is that its limits are set by the resources of the parents. Parents must provide schooling in much the same manner they provide shoes, food, and the other essentials of life to their children. All are limited by the resources of parents. There is no reason why education should not be limited by the same economic realities. But the beauty of education, of course, is that good teaching, good books, good ideas -- the pleasure of learning itself -- are, like love, not limited merely by economic resources. The amount of money spent has very little to do with the quality of education, just as the size of a diamond ring does not measure the amount of love it represents. One parent, who was instrumental in getting a private school started in her community of Valley Cottage, New York, was quoted in the Christian Science Monitor (Dec. 31, 1973) as saying: "It's amazing how much you can do with so little money. The budgets I see today for various schools are so high they're ridiculous."

Illich has some enlightening information to give us on what money can't do for education. He writes:

"Between 1965 and 1968 over three billion dollars were spent in U. S. schools to offset the disadvantages of about six million children. The program is known as Title One. It is the most expensive compensatory program ever attempted anywhere in education, yet no significant improvement can be detected

in the learning of these 'disadvantaged' children. Compared with their classmates from middle-income homes, they have fallen further behind."

So much for buying education when the will, spirit, and ability to educate are not there -- when the very instrument of education does not permit education to take place.

It is becoming increasingly evident that compulsory state-controlled education indeed stands in the way of education in this country, and that we will not really begin to understand what education is all about until we abandon the public educational system. Just as freedom cannot be achieved in Soviet Russia without dismantling the Communist state, true education in America will not be achieved until we dismantle public education. In Russia a full-scale, violent revolution will be required for the people to gain their freedom. In America no such violent revolution is needed to overthrow the "system." All parents need do is simply withdraw their children from the public system and build their own schools. It has already been done successfully in many parts of the South, without violence, without a massive upheaval in the community, but not without opposition from the vested interests of public education. Surely, America is now ready to give up one of its most costly and harmful delusions. If not, the agony, the financial drain, the intellectual degeneration will continue until it is.



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ASSOCIATE EDITOR

February 27, 1974

Dear Mr. Blumenfeld:

This is too general, and too hortatory for our purposes, but we're grateful to you for thinking to give us a look.

Sincerely,

Michael Curtis

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Note from Internet Publisher: Donald L. Potter

August 13, 2015
Odessa, TX

I found this essay, "Is Public Education Necessary," in a box of files Samuel L. Blumenfeld sent me a few years ago. This essay was probably written in 1973 or 1974. There is a rejection letter from The Atlantic Monthly in the file dated February 27, 1974. C. Michael Curtis of The Atlantic Monthly wrote:

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Dear Mr. Blumenfeld:

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Sincerely,
C. Michael Curtis

Mr. Blumenfeld went on to develop this into his influential book of the same title, *Is Public Education Necessary* that was finally published by The Paradigm Company in 1981, 1985 and American Vision in 2011. I can only imagine what the editorial staff at The Atlantic Monthly thought of the essay when they read its well researched and hard-hitting critique of public education in America.

I have been associated with Mr. Blumenfeld from about 1994, when I started using his *Alpha-Phonics Reading Primer* in my elementary bilingual classroom at the Burnet Elementary School in Odessa, TX. I have published many of his essays on my website, www.donpotter.net.

My own interests have been almost purely in the psychology and pedagogy of reading instruction, rather than any political aspects. I simply wanted to be the best reading teacher I could be. I can say, with great satisfaction, that Mr. Blumenfeld's reading and cursive handwriting program enabled me to be a very successful classroom teacher.

While it is true that I was not particularly interested in the political aspect of reading instruction, I was greatly puzzled as to why much of my training as a public school teacher was in the Whole Language methodology, which has now been thoroughly discredited by modern science. (Pace, Stanislas Dehaene's *Reading in the Brain*, 2009). Perhaps Mr. Blumenfeld was correct in claiming such faulty reading instruction is being promoted by base political motives on the part of those at the top.

I especially recommend *Crimes of Educators: How Utopians are Using Government Schools to Destroy America's Children* by Samuel L. Blumenfeld and Alex Newman (2015). Mr. Blumenfeld passed away on June 1, 2015.