



Education News & Notes

Revolutionizing Teaching In America: Putting Parents In The Driver's Seat

by Guy Doud and Tom Fleming
(NAPSA)—“Hostages.”

That's how Horace Mann, the founding father of public education in America, once said he and his fellow educators were “entitled to look upon” the children that parents had “given to [his] cause.”

We—and 11,000 of our fellow educators—believe it's time to set those “hostages” free.

America pushes diplomats and rattles sabers when its citizens are held captive, yet we approach the hostage situation of our students passively. It's time to put parents back in charge of their

children's education—and to restore teaching as an entrepreneurial, prestigious profession in which teachers rise on their performance, not merely seniority schedules.

We know that parents want to be in charge of their children's education. This was confirmed by research recently released by Parents in Charge, a national, non-profit organization that is encouraging a new debate on American education. Eighty-two percent of poll respondents believe parents ought to have primary responsibility for the education of their children—but why do so many teachers agree?

According to the Department of Education, our nation faces a teacher shortage. As many as two million of this country's 2.7 million teachers will leave the profession over the next 10 years. How do we lure talented teachers into the pro-

fession—and keep them there?

It's time we conceded that teachers will not be treated as professionals unless we take the same risks that other professionals do. We know that America thrives on an entrepreneurial system that rewards effort, talent, individual initiative and risk. Yet we as teachers have empowered our unions and ask our government to

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create a system in which we are insulated from this spirit by civil service law and union contracts.

Many of our colleagues welcome greater accountability and seek it out, not merely for greater pay, but also for greater latitude and freedom. Nevertheless, the bulk of our educational system remains bureaucratic, stifling to teachers and students alike.

Why should this be? Ninety percent of American students attend government-run schools. A 90 percent market share in any industry—especially one in which payment for the product is mandatory by law—surely qualifies as a monopoly. Even before the Sherman Anti-Trust Act of 1890, Americans knew that monopolies produce inferior products at high prices. Since 1920, the cost of public education has risen 14 times in constant dollars, yet the academic

achievements of American students have declined by virtually every measurable standard.

The answer is to open up education to the freedom and competition that has improved every other industry, profession, product and service in American life. We welcome a world in which high-performance teachers turn out high-performance students and

are rewarded accordingly with higher pay and esteem.

How to get there? Put parents back in the driver's seat. Parents will not voluntarily continue to send their children to schools that cannot teach or protect their children. Parents will not all choose the same education product, but schools as various and unique as their own child's personality, abilities and dreams.

Clearly this new approach would have a completely untraditional effect—on the child, the family, on schools, on communities and on the teaching profession as well. It's time to stop ransoming our professional respect and our children's future to the needs of a failed monopoly—and choose a freer, more open system that lets all of us rise to the unknown heights of our unleashed potential.

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