

The SCHOOL OF THOUGHT Campaign

Reclaiming Education's Timeless Role & Purpose

An education manifesto providing the foundation and framework
for a statewide entrepreneurial scholastic cooperative per each county
under the auspices of The ChrisCorps Commission.

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Introduction

“We have educated ourselves into imbecility,” quipped the English journalist Malcolm Muggeridge. This could only happen when the universals of life are discarded. If human beings do not eat, they will starve; if they do not read, they will not learn, and if truth does not penetrate their minds, they cannot think. Put another way, when we start with the wrong assumptions, we always end up with the wrong conclusions.

There are two systems of learning that do great harm to a student’s thoughtlife, and they are really two sides of the same coin. One says that Value System “X” is no better or worse than Value System “Y”. The other says there is no such thing as absolute truth – when all is said and done, everything is relative. Everyone decides for themselves what is true and false, good and bad, right and wrong.

Tragically, modern higher education has been thoroughly seduced by this worldview, and it has trickled down to our primary and secondary schools. Allan Bloom, former University of Chicago professor and author of *The Closing of the American Mind*, said in his classic, “ ... there is one thing a professor can be absolutely certain of: almost every student entering the university believes, or says he believes, that truth is relative.”

To teach young people, however, that there is nothing that is absolutely true in life is to not only give them a philosophy of life that doesn’t work, it is to sell them the ultimate lie about reality. Truth, for it to be truth, must be absolute, exclusive and antithetical ... or it is not truth. Relative truth is an oxymoron. It’s like saying “good grief” or “same difference.” If it’s truth, it’s not relative; if it’s relative, it’s not truth.

The day academia in this country began rejecting the notion of transcendent truth was the same day it began its downward spiral. As it continues on this slippery slope, it will have less and less to offer society by way of civic virtue, not to mention intellectual integrity. Its only legacy will be a worldview replete with moral absurdities followed by a world filled with moral chaos, exactly where we find ourselves today.

Unfortunately for human nature, denial is second nature. Consequently, to rationalize, justify, minimize or excuse is one of the oldest tricks in the book. Moreover, it has become one of the more insidious forms of discrimination in this country that seeks to shred the values of traditional America and not only disrespect, but hold in contempt, the beliefs of devout people of faith.

For over a hundred years, it has been some of the more radical elements of postmodernist thinking that are determined to become the predominant worldview of our

society, using our schools as one of the prime vehicles to get there, even if it goes against the wishes of the majority of American parents – and it usually does.

The key players and purveyors of this worldview are very savvy, however, and they know all too well what stands in their way. They know they can't ultimately succeed in becoming society's dominant and accepted ideal unless they get the other belief system out of the way, relegating it first to the sidelines, and then from there, to the ash heap.

This is the context for the great debate and the great divide in contemporary American K-12 public education. Moreover, as a result, the dominant tension for the last one hundred (plus) years has hinged on one basic question: *what is the purpose of education?* How one answered that question determined how one would answer a series of subsequent and secondary questions. For example, *who* was to be educated, *how* were they to be educated, and *what* were they to learn?

Cumulatively, all of this set the stage for an intense hundred-year face-off between *two philosophical models of education*: the classical and the progressive.

Classical Education Defined

The Classical Model was deemed the tried-and-true model; synonyms were academic, traditional, scholastic, general, liberal. The advocates were called classicists or essentialists.

Tracing back to and rooted in the Greeks and the Romans as well as the Jews and the Christians, the classical approach involved the systematic study of the liberal (liberating) arts and general sciences with their respective branches: the language arts and the mathematical sciences, the fine arts and the natural sciences, the philosophical arts and the theological sciences, the literary arts and the cultural sciences as well as the manual arts and the technical sciences.

It was a pursuit of truth, goodness and beauty, and it casted a long-term vision of what it meant to be fully human through a concerted transmission of the wisdom of the ages. It was not opposed to the practical merits of job-training, only with being considered synonymous with or replaced by the same.

Progressive Education Defined

The Progressive Model was deemed the up-to-date model; synonyms were modern, industrial, utilitarian, functional or natural. The advocates were called progressives or

experientialists.

The progressive approach to education launched “student-centered” learning and what was called “natural” education. It disparaged “bookish” learning and denounced teacher-directed classrooms as elitist and authoritarian, promoting what it deemed a freer, more joyful approach of letting student interest drive the educational endeavor.

So it became the contrast and contest between classical and progressive education – the historic approach versus the modern approach, the traditional model versus the contemporary model. In a nutshell, *the old school versus the new school*.

And what was the fundamental disagreement over? To be clear, it was not primarily about methods or curriculum; those issues were merely symptomatic. The central contention was over *the purpose of education* itself – the rest was just noise.

Why It Matters

The reason this is of dire concern is because of the consequences. When the very purpose of education is misunderstood or redefined, the outcomes are always adverse, for both the student and society. Not only does the integrity of quality instruction get compromised, but learning eventually gets dumbed down.

Children get pushed through the system and a vacuum is created that gets filled by every educational fad imaginable. Eventually radical ideologies emerge, destroying any semblance of what a robust education looks like within a democratic republic.

To be sure, something is amiss when university educators begin to trash the systematic study of human knowledge (which is what happened in the early 1900’s). To risk mass ignorance through pervasive levels of cultural illiteracy is to ignore the famous warning of Samuel Adams: *“It is in the interest of tyrants to reduce the people to ignorance and vice. For they cannot live in any country where virtue and knowledge prevail.”*

In short, when education loses its anchor, a spirit of anti-intellectualism begins to grip our country and our students. As our children swim in the ocean of the pop youth culture and social media, without something deeper and more substantive to hold on to, they will drown.

Moreover, when schools lose their intellectual and moral compass, the educational enterprise gets hijacked by nefarious, agenda-driven forces, and schools eventually become subversive, government-controlled vehicles, not only at odds with the family and faith communities, but with the vision of the Founding Fathers. Nonetheless, when you begin with the wrong assumptions, you always end up with the wrong conclusions.

The Purpose of Education

So what *is* the purpose of education? It is the most important question we can ask ourselves and it was often the first question I would ask my 7th-8th grade students on the first day of school ... “*Why school?*”

After a wide array of creative (and hilarious!) responses, someone would finally burst out with the words, “To learn! We go to school to learn!”

“That’s right!” I would respond, and I’d write those two words on the board in big, bold, block letters ... T-O L-E-A-R-N. But then, with a slightly pregnant pause and a mildly lowered voice, I continued, “However ... that is only *half* right.” Then I wrote two more words on the board alongside the first two words: T-O T-H-I-N-K.

Another mild pause followed as our eyes met, and then I said, “Put those four words together, and you have the reason for why you come to school ... *to learn to think.*”

As historian David Barton explained it, “Up until about the 1920’s, the emphasis in education was on producing thinkers, not learners. The idea was that if kids could think, they could learn anything for themselves; but if the focus was on ‘learning,’ they would become gullible and passive, believing everything they heard and read.”

‘Tis true! The thrust of Aristotelian logic and the Socratic teaching method was always on developing thinkers. Socrates himself said, “I can’t teach anyone anything, I can only make them think.”

During a speech at Oxford University, British author Dorothy L. Sayers spotlighted what she called “the great defect” of education today: “...although we often succeed in teaching our pupils ‘subjects,’ we fail lamentably on the whole in teaching them how to think.” That speech was given back in 1947.

In his *Improvement of the Mind* (published in 1741), Isaac Watts reminded us that this begins with a dose of humility: “Acquaint yourself with your own ignorance,” he said. “Impress your mind with a deep and painful sense of the low and imperfect degrees of your present knowledge.”

But intended as an encouragement rather than an indictment, Watts was quick to clarify that deep thinkers are made, not born, and it happens through hard work and application. “Studious thought ... the exercise of your own reason and judgment upon all you read ... gives good sense ... and affords your understanding the truest improvement.”

To learn to think ... the purpose of education for over a thousand years. That's why 19th Century American educator William Mowry rightly called the local community schoolhouse a "brain factory." It has only been in the last hundred years that the progressive model has shifted the paradigm and redefined the purpose, and they have been experimenting with our kids ever since.

From America's conception up until the early 1900's, there was consistent and universal consensus on what schools were supposed to do and why they existed. And this was so because our Founding Fathers and early Americans were not so arrogant as to think they knew better than their predecessors, recklessly dismissing centuries of wisdom and experience.

But then in the early 1900's, a group of progressive educators, philosophers, psychologists and sociologists (who thought themselves more enlightened than the populace) hit the scene. Driven by a strange mix of utilitarian perspectives, child-centered rhetoric and the impulses of social engineering, top-down initiatives were aggressively pursued and pushed on the American public, whether they liked it or not (and they didn't), whether they agreed with it or not (and they did not).

The leading proponents of progressive education, hailing from the Ivy Towers of some of our nation's most prestigious universities, entered the scene stage-left and proceeded to deconstruct and reconstruct the foundation of American education.

The Gurus of the Child-Centered Crusade

The three main actors who staged this drama were 18th Century Frenchman Jean Jacques-Rousseau, 19th Century Englishman Herbert Spencer and 20th Century American John Dewey. With Rousseau and Spencer as the forebears and Dewey as the facilitator, the child-centered movement was born.

The seminal text for this untested approach was Rousseau's *Emile*, a fictional account of how Rousseau would educate a youngster in a more natural approach, free from the oppressive influence of society. To be child-centered meant that the education process should be based on the needs and interests of the child.

This mammoth paradigm shift caught fire fast, though it was replete with contradictions: Rousseau hated social institutions, but to progressives (who were reconstructing the public education system), he was a hero.

Rousseau championed home-schooling over public schooling, believing the best teacher for a child was his own father, in spite of the fact that he had abandoned his

own five illegitimate children. [*The Emile of Jean Jacques Rousseau*, tr. and ed. William Boyd/New York: Teachers College Press, 1971, p. 18]

But as he illustrated through the story of *Emile*, Rousseau's teaching approach from the get-go was to be guided by the pupil's choices – no habits, no lessons, no instruction, only experience. His role as tutor was to “*do nothing and let nothing be done.*”

Moreover, his student would learn nothing “*by heart,*” nor would he learn to read until necessity required it. In fact, Rousseau declared, “*Reading is the greatest plague of childhood, Emile will scarcely know what a book is.*” Present and personal interest was to be the only motive for learning.

Enter Herbert Spencer in the 1850's. As a prolific English philosopher, Spencer became the bridge between Rousseau and Dewey. He claimed that education must have “*practical value*” or it has no value, and needed to be “*useful in later life*” or it had no use. According to Spencer, when it came to the classroom, *utility* was the measure of all things.

After the Civil War and right up to World War I, Spencer became the dominant thinker and most influential voice in American education. His book on education published in 1862 (*Education: Intellectual, Moral and Physical*) became the most widely read in America. His fire was fueled by social Darwinism, and he was actually the one who coined the phrase “*survival of the fittest.*” These were the seed-thoughts planted in the soil of American universities that took root and were subsequently propagated by Dewey and his disciples.

And so, this child-centered philosophy became the centerpiece of the progressive education movement. Like Rousseau, Dewey rejected the rote learning of the 19th century public schools, and referencing *Emile*, Dewey contended that what is learned in school is “*relatively superficial*” compared to what is learned in everyday living. Either Dr. Dewey himself didn't understand the purpose of education, or he understood it but rejected it and intentionally tried to redefine it – likely, it was the latter.

Curiously though, Dewey did once admit that “*if Rousseau himself had ever tried to educate any real children, he would have to structure some kind of set program.*” [John Dewey & Evelyn Dewey, *Schools of Tomorrow*, rev. ed./New York: Dutton, 1962; first published 1915), pp. 1-2, 45]

Dewey's Disciples & Social Control

Another key player in this mix was Horace Mann. To this day he is known as the Father of American Education. As another leading forebear of Dewey and contemporary of

Spencer, we see an alternate view of education being propagated, way back in 1840: “We who are engaged in the sacred cause of education are entitled to look upon all parents as having given hostages to our cause.”

In 1865, the Wisconsin Teachers Association followed suit when they claimed, “Children are the property of the state.”

In 1896, University of Chicago sociologist Albion Small, speaking to the National Education Association, blasted the academic curriculum that most schools were using at that time. He declared that “*sociology demands of educators, finally, that they shall not rate themselves as leaders of children but as makers of society.*” With that incredible statement, fully in step with Horace Mann, the seeds of social engineering were planted in our public education system. [C.A. Bowers, *The Progressive Educator*, p. 23]

In 1901, Stanford sociologist Edward A. Ross claimed that free public schooling was “*an engine of social control.*” He said schools were supposed to “*collect little plastic lumps of human dough from private households and shape them on the social kneading board ...*” [Ross, *Social Control*, pp.174-179]

If that wasn't enough, he envisioned the role of schools as “*an economical system of police ...*” Such an admission, he admitted, “*shocks the public and chills teachers. But now and then the cat is let out of the bag.*” [Ross, *Social Control*, pp.174-179]. Ross was confident that the establishment of this kind of school as the guarantor of social order would lead to the disestablishment of religion. [Ravitch, *Left Behind*, p.80.]

Following in Ross's shoes was one David Samuel Snedden. As a student of Ross at Stanford, Snedden fully embraced his social control teachings and became the leading representative of the Social Efficiency movement in American public schools. Snedden absorbed Herbert Spencer's writings, and agreed that the needs of society determined the needs of the individual.

Moreover, he perpetuated the view that the major purpose of education was to adjust students to carry out their social roles (the essence of social efficiency thought). [Ravitch, *Left Behind*, p. 81]. This redefinition of education was taken up by the NEA (through its famous Cardinal Principles report) and was echoed by other voices within the progressive education establishment.

Dr. Snedden went so far as to predict that the public school would increasingly take on the responsibilities of the home and the church. He was relentless in his attacks on traditional academics, calling them “*repressive*” and “*repellant.*” [Ravitch, *Left Behind*, p. 81]

He claimed algebra had no utility, Latin & Greek had no value and the usefulness of grammar, arithmetic and geometry was spurious at best.

He unapologetically declared that academic subjects in high school did not “*function*” at all and actually thought the need for art was no longer vital and compelling. He opposed the chronological teaching of history and referred to “*the dead hand of mathematics.*” * [David Snedden, “Increasing the Efficiency in Education,” *The Journal of Education*, July 17, 1913, pp. 62-63; David Snedden, “Proposed Revision of Secondary School Subjects Looking to More Effective Education in Personal Culture and Good Citizenship,” *School and Society*, Feb. 8, 1919, p. 161; David Snedden, “The Waning Powers of Art,” *The American Journal of Sociology*, May 1917, pp. 805,808.]

To reiterate, as the 20th Century opened, there was strong consensus amongst parents and teachers on the purpose of education (i.e., the intellectual and moral development of our children). Thanks to progressive ideology, however, Americans were forced to contend with another (untested and unproven) approach. Once those seeds were planted, it was not long before the concept of “*curricular differentiation*” took root.

What is curricular differentiation? It is *an academic education for some, a non-academic education for others*. This idea was floated first in two of our leading universities at the time (University of Chicago and Columbia University’s Teachers College) and took hold of our American public schools (even some private schools) in the 1920’s and 1930’s.

What is the difference between an academic and non-academic education? The difference is that an *academic* education consisted of those standard scholastic disciplines like math and science, the languages, “the Great Books” of literature, as well as history and geography. Conversely, a *non-academic* education consisted of vocational subjects like woodworking or book-keeping as well as elective-based subjects like home economics or shop class.

Curricular differentiation led to an all-out attack by the progressives on all things old school, including book-learning, classical languages, homework and mental discipline. From there we got served up an endless litany of movements, methods and models.

And then from there we were off to the races, with sociologists and educational psychologists crowned as the new architects of American education, supplanting the timeless role of parents and teachers.

The New Gospel of Industrial Education

1906 brought us the Industrial Education movement, launched by a report from the Massachusetts Commission on Industrial and Technical Education. Historian

Sol Cohen wrote that *“Few movements in the history of American education have taken so sudden and so powerful a hold on the minds of school reformers.”* [Sol Cohen, “The Industrial Education Movement, 1906-17,” *American Quarterly*, 20 (Spring 1968), p. 96.].

Please note: the Industrial Education debate was not about whether our schools should be preparing young people for the emerging industrial job market – most schools at that time were already offering vocational and commercial classes. The issue was one of pre-empting or replacing academics with job-training for many American young people.

Besides robbing so many students of a general/liberal arts education, this resulted in a different kind of education for black children. As author Diane Ravitch noted, *“The new gospel of industrial education and curricular differentiation dealt a deadly blow to the aspirations of African Americans.”* [Ravitch, *Left Back*, p.107]

But this was the age of modernity, and the so-called education experts wanted above all to be “modern.” To progressive professor G. Stanley Hall, a modern education meant a “natural” education. As a great admirer of Sigmund Freud and his radical sexual theories, Hall wanted schools utterly stress-free, full of child-directed play time and no homework.

Greatly influenced by Hall, and following in his footsteps, was one Edward Bok who led a campaign in 1900 against homework. Bok called it *“A National Crime at the Feet of American Parents”* and believed it was ruining American childhood.

In 1918, the NEA’s Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education (CRSE) handed down its “Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education,” a report considered to be *“the single most important document in the history of American education.”* [Bennett, *Our Children and Our Country*, p. 161] Based on the *social efficiency* concept, the new high school education goals were adopted.

And whatever other curricular changes there were, no academic subject was as dramatically transformed as (wait for it!) ... *history*. Because progressives believed that a systematic historical study *had no practical purpose*, the progressives restructured it and resurrected it under the new label of “social studies.” The choice of wording (read: re-wording) was hardly accidental.

They were convinced that the content of this *“new history”* should be determined by the student’s personal interests and *“general social significance.”* They believed no student could be interested in history unless it was directly related to the present. This “certainty” was consistent with their utilitarian convictions.

The morale of the story? When you misunderstand, redefine or manipulate the purpose of education, you get everything else wrong as well – that is to say again that false assumptions can only and always lead to false conclusions.

From there, of course, it was not a stretch to redefine “democracy” itself, which brings us to one of the leading figures of the progressive movement, Ellwood P. Cubberly. As the author of college textbooks on education history and school administration that were used by generations of teachers and principals, Dr. Cubberly’s influence was enormous.

In 1909, Cubberly laid out the vision: *“Our city schools,”* he said, *“will soon be forced to give up the exceedingly democratic idea that all are equal ... and to begin a specialization of educational effort along many new lines in an attempt better to adapt the school to the needs of these many classes in the city life.”* [Ellwood P. Cubberly, *Changing Conceptions of Education* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1909), pp.56-58.]

Cubberly saw our public school system as the one potent social vehicle the state could use to absorb immigrants and efficiently place workers in their appropriate roles within the social order. He predicted that this new era would become *“paternalistic, perhaps even socialistic, in the matter of education,”* and that *“each year the child is coming to belong more and more to the state, and less and less to the parents.”* [Ellwood P. Cubberly, *Changing Conceptions of Education* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1909), pp.44, 61-63.]

He said, *“If our schools are to become more effective social institutions, our teachers must become more effective social workers.”* [Ellwood P. Cubberly, *Changing Conceptions of Education* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1909), pp. 66-68.]

Progressives & The Ideal Society

Then in 1927, some professors from Columbia Teachers College began meeting informally over dinner once a week to discuss how education could be used to change social, political and economic orders. Led by William Heard Kilpatrick, this cohort represented Columbia’s most radical faculty members and included the likes of Harold Rugg, George Counts, and of course, John Dewey. Rugg himself dubbed this group the “frontier thinkers.”

What brought them together was their shared disdain for capitalism and their strong socialist strains. The profit motive was detestable in their minds, so collectivism must replace individualism, which of course required the central planning and government control of our economy.

They were convinced the ideal society would operate just like the ideal progressive school, absent of competition, rewards or individual recognition, which is why the group

viewed the newly formed Soviet Union (fresh off the Russian Revolution) as the world's most important experiment in social planning.

So about a year later, several members from this group paid a visit to the Soviet Union. At age 70, Dewey was one of them, and by his own well-documented accounts, he was very impressed.

He loved how safe and orderly society was there in the new Soviet Union, turning a blind eye to the secret police, arrests and opposition exiles. He claimed the shops were owned by independent cooperatives, not the government, and the Bolsheviks were carefully preserving the churches (which they were not).

He even admired the steps the Soviets were taking to dismantle the traditional family, which they saw as a threat to communal life. Dewey commended them for making new social units that were more expansive than the family. (Ravitch, *Left Behind*, p. 206) and wondered aloud if the family, as “*a breeder of non-social interests*,” might actually do more harm than good for the social order. [Dewey, *John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925-1953*, vol. 3: 1927-1928, pp. 229-231].

Dewey refuted any negative criticisms about the Russian Revolution, hailing it as heroic, and though propaganda was everywhere, he saw what he wanted to see. Thrilled that the Soviets had figured out how to make schools into vehicles of social change, he became skeptical that good schooling was even possible in a capitalist society like America.

He thought it an absolute stroke of genius that Soviet educators made school and society work together to foster a collective ideology. In this new revolutionary paradigm, Dewey gushed that in Russia, the schools and society were *as one* because the school had become an arm of the state, both having the same purposes and the same goals. [Dewey, *John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925-1953*, vol. 3: 1927-1928, pp. 238-239].

In 1928 after his visit to the new USSR, Dewey came to believe that we should make “schools active and militant participants in creation of a new social order.”

Then in 1929, Dewey's sidekick, William Heard Kilpatrick, visited Moscow. Another partner in crime, George Counts, made several trips there as well. It is no exaggeration at all to say that like their fearless leader, they both fell head over heels in love with Soviet education and Soviet society.

Kilpatrick was pleased to learn that the Soviets used his textbooks in all their

teacher-training institutes. His visit impressed him so much, in fact, he came home concluding that *“no school system in history has been more thoroughly and consistently made to work into the social and political program of the state ... every item is planned to further the Soviet plan of society.”*

On George Counts's second trip to Russia, he spent three months touring the country and enthusiastically lauded what he believed to be *“the greatest social experiment of history,”* far superior to the planless, self individualism in America. Unphased by the mass arrests and merciless murders of thousands of landholding peasants, Russia's Five-Year Plan to George Counts was a *“brilliant and heroic success.”*

Agents of Social Engineering

So influenced by what he saw in his visits to the Soviet Union, Dr. Counts became the most intense purveyor of counter-American ideas in the education world. In fact, when he was invited to address the Progressive Education Association in early 1932, he issued a clarion call to the audience to scrap capitalism, help resurrect a socialized economy, and get over their fear of indoctrination. He challenged schools to take the lead in building a new social order. [Ravitch, *Left Behind*, p.215-216]

Counts was forceful enough to persuade major education organizations to jump on board, including the National Education Association. At their annual meeting in 1932, one of the NEA officials asked the question, *“What agency shall take the lead in creating a new social order?”* Answering his own question, he exclaimed, *“...it has to be the NEA!”* He contended that the NEA should *“assume the leadership and point the way.”*

Then he reiterated the point: *“... the educators of America propose to assume major responsibility for building such a social order.”* This was the turning point, and the seed-thoughts of social engineering were taking root. [C.A. Bowers, *The Progressive Educator* , p. 23]

In 1933, Harold Rugg, a trained engineer himself, figured out how he would integrate the “naturalness” of child-centered schools with the essentials of collective social planning. Standing on the precipice of what he called “the Great Technology” (an economic utopia of sorts), this perfect society could only emerge if there was a centrally-controlled economy run by technological experts.

Then in 1935, the first mission statement of John D. Rockefeller's General Education

Board came out. In it, Rockefeller said the following: “In our dreams, people yield themselves with perfect docility to our molding hands. The present education conventions of intellectual and character education fade from their minds and unhampered by tradition we work our own good will upon a grateful and responsive folk.”

So what would the new role of educators be? It would be to produce the mass understanding needed for the new order to work, while the social engineers would reshape the new society. And the way to create this, Rugg maintained, was to utilize high-powered sales techniques to win over the minds of the “thinking minority,” those 25 million people at the time who possessed high IQ’s. [Rugg, *The Great Technology: Social Chaos and the Public Mind*; Harold Rugg, *American Life and the School Curriculum*, p. 224.]

The point I hope is obvious: these were the 20th Century architects of America’s present public education system – these were the movers and shakers who conceived it, taught it, promoted it and instituted it. These were the people who took it upon themselves to redefine education, remaking it in their image.

This dramatic paradigm shift regarding not just the content of education, but its very purpose, did not happen accidentally, incidentally or coincidentally. It did not happen quickly or abruptly, and it did not happen secretly – the lead designers were very intentional and very public about what they were trying to do, though they knew most Americans were not paying attention.

Moreover, they possessed a worldview that was in conflict with most Americans, but they were never shy about imposing it. They had little respect for the intelligence of the American people, thinking themselves more enlightened. They showed even less respect for the values of religious America. They sowed to the wind, and we have been reaping the whirlwind ever since.

The School Survey Movement

The next step was obvious and simple: the propagation of school surveys. Between 1911 and 1930, nearly two hundred cities and states were surveyed by “experts” from the major schools of education. It probably would not surprise you to hear how much school officials loved these surveys because they always resulted in proposals for three things: more power to the professionals, less lay interference, and more money. [Ravitch, *Left Back*, p. 103]

Because they were trained in Dewey and Kilpatrick’s child-centered philosophy, these surveyors typically looked askance at any schools that were primarily academic. One

survey in Texas in 1924 blamed the “conservatism” of parents and colleges for “*the absurd emphasis on ancient history, composition, and algebra.*” [Ravitch, *Left Back*, p. 103]

One of these so-called “experts” was Professor Cubberly; another one was John Franklin Bobbitt of the University of Chicago, who presented himself as an educational engineer. Nobody imagined that these school surveys would have the net effect of putting these guys in a position to wield such enormous power over how our schools functioned and how our children were educated. [Ravitch, *Left Back*, p. 106]

Not surprisingly, concurrent with the school survey movement was the IQ testing movement. During World War I, educational psychologists had developed group intelligence tests for the Army, and felt they were now on the precipice of a major scientific advance: the ability to measure the human mind.

As American industry became more mechanized and standardized, so did the schools through these tests. And educational psychologists were envisioning a pivotal role in shaping future society in a more rational fashion. “*Beginning in the 1920’s, the most common use of the IQ test was to determine which students qualified to study an academic curriculum and which did not.*” [Ravitch, *Left Back*, p. 160]

According to H.H. Cadard, Chairman of the Princeton Psychology Department, “... standardized testing would cause the lower classes to confront their biological inferiority, sort of like wearing a dunce cap.”

In fact, Edward L. Thorndike, widely acknowledged as one of the leaders of progressive education, said that “*Education is one form of human engineering and will profit by measurements of human nature ...*” (Ravitch, *Left Back*, p. 131). Concurrently, Robert Yerkes (president of the American Psychological Association at the time) predicted that *psychologists would be the social engineers of the future.* [Ravitch, *Left Back*, p. 142]

Ultimately, as Diane Ravitch noted, “*The lasting effects of the intelligence-testing movement on American schools were far more negative than positive.*” Though they purported to identify the students needing special help, they also “*provided a selection instrument that facilitated the ongoing progressive campaign to restrict the academic curriculum to the minority of students who were preparing for colleges.*” [Ravitch, *Left Back*, p. 160]

Replacing the Core Courses

Not far behind (1918) came what was dubbed the Project Method. As the brain-child of

William Heard Kilpatrick, a professor at Columbia Teachers College and one of Dewey's most ardent followers, the "project" to Kilpatrick was not just a new teaching method but was education completely re-imagined, and it was quickly hailed by the progressives as "*the quintessential statement of the child-centered movement.*" [Samuel Tenebaum, *William Heard Kilpatrick: Trail Blazer in Education*, New York: Harper, 1951, pp. 63, 185]

While any effective teacher certainly appreciates the strengths and benefits of a well-designed group project as part of the learning process to supplement and enhance the academic subjects, for Kilpatrick, his "project method" was not about supplementing the core curriculum, but ultimately replacing it.

He viewed the mathematical sciences as "*harmful rather than helpful,*" and was utterly opposed to teaching advanced mathematics to non-college bound students.

In a speech he gave at the University of Florida, he said, "*We have in the past taught algebra and geometry to too many, not too few.*" And this antipathy was not just directed at mathematics but all academic subjects. For Kilpatrick, *how* children learned was the important thing, not *what* they learned. [William Heard Kilpatrick, *Foundations of Method: Informal Talks on Teaching* (New York: Macmillan, 1925, pp. 102, 105, 141)]

This from the man who taught 35,000 students in his twenty-seven years at Columbia and was known as "the million dollar professor" because of the student fees he generated, attracting more students to the Teachers College (the progressive's flagship training institution) than any other professor at that time.

No surprise then, by the mid 1920's, with Columbia Teachers College as the most influential teacher-training school in America, progressive education became the wave of the future, with child-centered schooling as its crown jewel. So now we see how classroom instruction swung hard from being content-focused in the 19th Century to becoming skills-focused in the 20th.

Then by the mid-1920's, a Curriculum Revision Movement caught steam. High schools began adding subjects at a rapid pace. "*For every subject dropped, almost three were added.*" Ancient and modern foreign languages were the first to go, and "social science" in the place of history was the first to be added, along with commercial subjects, industrial arts and home economics. [Stuart A. Courtis, "Current Practices in Curriculum-Revision in Public Elementary Schools," in *The Foundation and Technique of Curriculum-Construction: The Twenty-Sixth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education*, pt. 1, ed. Harold Rugg/Bloomington, Ill.: Public School Publishing, 1926, p. 133; George S. Counts, "Current Practices in Curriculum-Making in Public High Schools," in *ibid.*, pp. 138-139.]

This paved the way for the Activity Movement in elementary schools, inspired by

Kilpatrick's project method. From building doll houses to creating animal parks, it was now all about *how* students developed rather than *what* they *learned*.

Academic subjects were integrated and textbooks were eliminated. According to one educator, "*teachers were free to do what they wanted in the classroom, but they were not free to use a textbook.*" [Eileen Kathryn Rice, *The Superintendency and the Implementation of Progressive Practices in the Ann Arbor Elementary Schools from 1921-1942*/Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Social Foundations of Education Monograph Series, Number 8, 1978, pp. 43, 124.]

Any emerging critics were quickly dismissed as outdated reactionaries. Substituting content-learning with disconnected experiences was the objective. The prospects of merely supplementing the core content with said activities was rejected out-of-hand, even ridiculed by the progressive priesthood.

Then came the Integration Movement, the Life Adjustment Movement, the Pedagogical Liberation Movement, and the Open Education Movement – all more of the same, on steroids, by a different name. The common denominator in each of these movements was their top-down Ivory Tower dictates, their push for more student freedom, and their unmitigated aversion to the academic curriculum.

Multiculturalism & Self-Esteem

Then came the Multicultural Movement with the Self-Esteem Movement on its heels. The former threw American education into more volatile disputes about how schools should deal with the rising racial and ethnic populations, in terms of what was taught and how it would affect children's self-esteem.

The major consequence of this new debate was that it served as a diversion from the greater need to address the deteriorating quality of American education. It ignored the reality that ideas and knowledge could care less about geographical boundaries, and were rarely the result of one ethnic group.

By the late 1970's, gone from our history textbooks were such traditional heroes as Captain John Smith, Daniel Boone and Wild Bill Hitchcock while Columbus was now a "minor character" reduced to "a walk-on" role. [Frances FitzGerald, *America Revised: History Schoolbooks in the Twentieth Century* (Boston: Atlantic-Little, Brown, 1979), pp.7-11]

Opposing voices such as Historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., once special assistant to President Kennedy, condemned this "*Curriculum of Inclusion*" for insisting that the study of history should be used to raise children's self-esteem.

Schlesinger said, "*I do not believe that we should magnify ethnic and racial themes at the expense of the unifying ideals that precariously hold our differentiated society*"

together. The republic has survived and grown because it has maintained a balance between pluribus and unum.”

“Some of the new history curricula,” Schlesinger maintained, “was heavy on pluribus and light on unum.” [New York State Social Studies Review and Development Committee, *One Nation, Many Peoples: A Declaration of Cultural Interdependence* (Albany, N.Y.: State Education Department, 1991), dissent by Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.]

The central tenets of the corresponding Self-Esteem Movement were as follows:

- First, low-performing students would achieve more if they had higher self-esteem.
- Second, schools could promote higher self-esteem by encouraging children to feel good about their racial or ethnic identity.
- Third, schools should help all children develop higher self-esteem. [Ravitch, *Left Back*, p. 426]

Not a few educators even believed that too much emphasis on academic achievement might actually do damage to a child’s self-worth. It was reasoned that grades, homework, even correcting a child’s grammar or spelling, could do harm. This kind of thinking was entirely consistent with and a logical extension of child-centered education.

The unconvinced quickly countered that the Self-Esteemists had it exactly backwards: self-esteem does not produce achievement, achievement produces self-esteem. Reality always upends the fantasy, and deficits in literacy and numeracy have a natural debilitating consequence, no matter how much we stroke kids.

In the middle of this new shift, the *American Educator* was courageous enough to print an article by Psychologist Barbara Lerner who addressed this aberration. In it she challenged the belief that self-esteem was “*the master key to learning.*” She contended this was an ideology that would do little more than produce a generation of narcissists motivated only by the pleasure principle.

Lerner said the “*feel-good-now self-esteem*” should be replaced by an “*earned self-esteem,*” which came from hard work and productive effort. [Barbara Lerner, “Self-Esteem and Excellence: The Choice and the Paradox,” *The American Educator*, Summer 1996, pp. 9-13, 41-42.]

Psychologist William Damon of Brown University was another lone voice in the wilderness that categorically denounced the “*self-esteem boosting*” that had become the norm in our public schools. He described how his own kindergarten daughter came

home from school one day with a card that said, "I'm terrific."

Damon maintained that flattery and false assurances would do little to build meaningful trust with adults. "*Like happiness,*" Damon argued, "*self-esteem is a goal that cannot be pursued directly or for its own sake.*" It is simply the natural consequence of accomplishment and character. [William Damon, *Greater Expectations: Overcoming the Culture of Indulgence in Our Homes and Schools* (New York: Free Press, 1995), pp. 68-80.]

By the 1990's, thankfully, the tide was turning along with public opinion. The self-esteem movement had failed, not only because of the bad fruit that it produced, but also because of the promise it did not deliver. Nevertheless, although it had been thoroughly discredited, the damage was done and the ripple effect continues to this day. In fact, most teacher-training schools still operate from this perspective and many of our public schools continue to compromise their academic goals for the therapeutic ones.

Progressive Failures, National Standards

After ten decades of student-centered ideology, by all metrics, the progressive model had done a bang-up job of creating a deeply flawed form of education for our children. And while there is no shortage of justifying, rationalizing, minimizing, diverting, projecting and excusing, the jury has long been in and the verdict is inescapable: progressive education, in all its varied forms and through all its many movements, *does not work*.

So much so, that from business leaders to governors and state legislators, the disappointment by 1989 was palpable and intense. International tests consistently demonstrated the below-average rankings of American high school students in mathematics and science. High school diplomas began representing little more than a piece of paper to employers, and the considerable slack was having to be picked up by our colleges and universities.

This brought on the Standards Movement. Every corner of society began demanding higher academic standards in our schools, not only for the future of our economy, but also because of the impressive high academic achievements of the Asian nations.

During the 1990s, besides public pressure, no one did more to fan this flame than Albert Shanker of the American Federation of Teachers. He was unrelenting in his call for higher standards, and urged the nation's governors to create a system marked by academic excellence reinforced by solid assessments. [Albert Shanker, "A Question of Fairness," *The New York Times*, March 29, 1992; "National Standards and Exams," *The New York Times*, March 1, 1992.]

In 1991 and '92, the US Department of Education awarded grants to various education groups to produce voluntary standards in science, history, geography, the arts, civics, foreign languages and English (math standards had already been developed by the NCTM). These standards were designed to detail what students should be learning at each grade level, in each subject.

Constructivists & Their Offspring

Suffice it to say, the pendulum was swinging back, but old habits are nothing if they're not stubborn. Therefore, the renovation of public education continues as well as the resistance. The latter came through what was known as the Constructivist Movement, which was nothing less than re-tooled progressivism. By the mid-1980's, "constructivism" had become the new dominant theory amongst education guru's who still faithfully quoted John Dewey.

The re-hashed idea was that students would only be motivated to learn if they were active learners, *constructing their own knowledge* through their own discoveries. This was taking child-centered learning now to the next level.

Constructivism was hailed as a quantum leap in education and "*treated as the holy grail of pedagogy.*" [Ravitch, *Left Behind*, p.442] Dr. Paul Cobb of Vanderbilt University said constructivism had become "*something akin to a secular religion,*" with its "*mantra-like slogan that 'students construct their own knowledge.'*" [Paul Cobb, "Constructivism in Mathematics and Science Education," *Educational Research*, October 1995, p. 4]

So this opened the door to a rash of new divergent theories that have been pelting our public schools, including gender ideology and critical theory. But some might be surprised to discover that the pedagogical notions of constructivism were very much at the root of the nation's reading wars, which raged for decades in this country (going back one hundred years), and resulted in hordes of Americans who could not read.

Phonics vs. Whole Language

So just to review briefly, we saw how progressive lingo had been replaced by constructivist terminology, setting the stage for the challenge of students "constructing" *all* their own knowledge. To believe this, though, one must reject the reality of objective truth, which is exactly what the "constructivists" were after.

To illustrate, let's go back about seventy years. One day in the 1950's, a man volunteered to tutor a neighbor's son who was struggling to read. The boy's name was Johnnie and the tutor's name was Rudolph Flesch. Johnnie had been held back in sixth

grade because he couldn't read.

Flesch started the first tutoring session by giving Johnnie a word he thought the boy would be able to read, the word "kid." The 12 year-old stared hard at the word, then finally said "kind."

"It staggered me," Flesch recounted. "Nobody born and raised on the continent of Europe can easily grasp the fact that anyone can mistake "kid" for "kind".

Accordingly, to teach Johnnie how to read, Flesch used the same method that he was taught growing up back in the old country (Vienna, Austria). Within six months, Johnnie was reading – not perfectly, but well enough to catch up to his peers.

Flesch remarked that not only did his reading ability change dramatically, but so did his attitude. "He was happy, again," Flesch said, "a changed person."

This experience prompted Flesch to do some further research on the subject. After doing so, he was gripped with astonishment, and this was his conclusion: *"The teaching of reading, all over the United States, in all the schools, in all the textbooks, is totally wrong and flies in the face of all logic and common sense. Johnnie's only problem was that he was unfortunately exposed to an ordinary American school."*

What was happening in these ordinary American schools? Well, instead of teaching children to read through letter-sound correspondences, American teachers were telling students to memorize whole words. If they came across words they didn't know, teachers urged them to guess, look at the first letter, or employ "context clues."

This approach had become entrenched in our schools since the 1930's, typified through the Dick-and-Jane series. I actually remember reading those books in my elementary school in Wisconsin. You'd read short sentences repeating the same simple words: "Come, Dick, come and see! Come! Come! Come and see! Come and see, Spot!"

We were able to read these books mostly because we would memorize the words through repetition and frequency. But if a new word was introduced, we'd be lost.

The result of Flesch's experiment was a book that came out in 1955, called *"Why Johnny Can't Read."* In it he wrote, *"All cultures that used an alphabetic writing system had relied on phonetic methods to teach reading, going back to the ancient Egyptians, Greeks and Romans. But for some reason, 20th Century American educators had decided to teach our alphabet as if it were hieroglyphics. Not only did this condemn many children to illiteracy, it also deprived them of the experience of enjoying literature."*

Starting back in the 1920's, this "whole-word" or "look-say" method of reading instruction

served as a precursor to the contemporary whole language approach. After Harvard professor Jeanne Chall did a comprehensive study of this issue in 1967, however, many thought the entire controversy had been finally laid to rest. Dr. Chall said the evidence was conclusive: children learned to read best through “decoding” (phonics).

But again, strongholds die hard, and with constructivism paving the way, a “whole-language” approach came roaring back in the 1980s through the writings of Frank Smith (University of Victoria in British Columbia) and Kenneth Goodman (University of Arizona). Both were convinced that learning to read should be as natural as learning to speak (it’s not). They came to such a notion based on what they called “science.” In time, it was exposed to be little more than pseudo-science.

Moreover, both men were very critical of any form of reading didactic that featured phonics. Smith claimed that *“the effort to read through decoding is largely futile and unnecessary,”* believing most children learned to read *“despite exposure to phonics.”* In fact, he was so against the phonics approach, he called it *“a flat-earth view of the world”* and railed that whole language teachers *“reject negative, elitist, racist views of linguistic purity that would limit children to arbitrary ‘proper’ language.”* [Frank Smith, *Understanding Reading: A Psycholinguistic Analysis of Reading and Learning to Read* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1971. P. 2; Frank Smith, *Psycholinguistics and Reading* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1973).

Smith was confident children would read when they had a need to do so and he insisted that *“language learning is easy when it’s whole, real, and relevant; when it makes sense and is functional; when it’s encountered in the context of its use; when the learner chooses to use it.”* In other words, children *learn* to read when they *want* to read. [Ken Goodman, *What’s Whole in Whole Language?* (Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1986, pp.26, 37-39, 40.)

Whole language rhetoric was rooted in the progressive teachings of the 1920’s. While Goodman said, *“Whole language learning builds around whole learners learning whole language in whole situations,”* the curious contradiction was that this did not include grammar, spelling or punctuation. In short, whole language did *not* include the *whole* language.

Goodman argued that good readers *“guess or make hypotheses about what will occur in the text.”* They employ *“invented spelling”* and discover conventional spelling without any prompting by the teacher. They read, Goodman said, simply by discerning the meaning of words in their context. He called reading *“a psycholinguistic guessing game.”* [Ken Goodman, *What’s Whole in Whole Language?*, pp.25, 37-38.]

By the 1980’s, the whole language movement was fully in vogue and had developed a hard-core following which included not only the majority of American classroom teachers but most of the education establishment as well (i.e., the International Reading

Association, the National Council of Teachers of English, etc.}. As the hot new trend, it seemed it was here to stay, in spite of all the resistance it was receiving.

When a 1985 report put out by the National Academy of Education said that “*on the average, children who are taught phonics get off to a better start in learning to read than children who are not taught phonics,*” the NCTE countered with a rebuttal, while Goodman disparaged the report with unseemly ridicule. [National Academy of Education, *Becoming a Nation of Readers* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, 1985, p. 43; Jane L. Davidson, ed., *Counterpoint and Beyond: A Response to Becoming a Nation of Readers* (Urbana, Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English, 1988); also see Kenneth Goodman, “Afterword,” pp. 107-108.]

When the research of cognitive psychologist Marilyn Jager Adams demonstrated better results for students who started with “*systematic code instruction,*” her study was dismissed out-of-hand by whole-language advocates. Test scores mattered little, they said, as long as kids were enjoying reading. [Marilyn Jager Adams, *Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning About Print* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, 1990), pp. 7, 125; Connie Weaver, “Weighing Claims of ‘Phonics First’ Advocates,” *Education Week*, March 28, 1990, pp. 32-33.]

But for many teachers, something wasn’t adding up. One of those teachers, in fact, was Gail Gorman, who worked at a high-poverty lower-elementary school in Washington DC. back in the 90s. She wanted to experiment with a reading program that relied on systematic phonics. Like many other schools at the time, her school had embraced the whole language approach in toto.

The principal, Anthony Pedriana, saw no problem with whole language at the time, but he was mystified by the school’s inability to get reading proficiency above 30%. So he told Ms. Gorman to go ahead with her experiment.

She was given a group of 22 second-graders, all struggling readers. Normally the school would have attempted several interventions: behavior plans, vision & hearing screening, counseling, etc. Gorman’s students got none of that.

Nevertheless, after a year of systematic phonics, she managed to get all but one student reading on grade level. The following year, the same students scored proficient or advanced on the state reading test. Not only did their reading scores go way up, but their self-esteem did as well. The end result was that the school principal, Mr. Pedriana, decided to adopt phonics school-wide.

But he got major pushback from some of his own teachers. The kindergarten teachers said the phonics drills were “developmentally inappropriate”, and other teachers denounced it because it was too scripted. Showing the efficacy of such an approach was not something whole language purists would consider under any circumstances.

Nonetheless, another jolt to the public school system came in 1996. The US Department of Education released its state-by-state reading scores, and nearly 40% of fourth grade students were “below basic”. California, as a state that took the whole language bait hook, line and sinker, found their reading test scores near the bottom of the nation. The press responded with a fury, and immediately connected the low test scores to the whole language model.

Newsweek said that *“most research backs the need for lots of phonics, the sooner the better.”* Time magazine said that the evidence for *“explicit, systematic phonics instruction”* was *“so strong that if the subject under discussion were, say, the treatment of the mumps, there would be no discussion.”*

One journalist at the Chicago Tribune did a story on her own daughter’s reading experience and concluded that the whole language approach was *“a cruel mind game to encourage children to read printed words without telling them how.”*

And yet, in spite of the growing consensus favoring phonics, and even after another series of studies underscored the necessity of phonemic awareness (including a major report from the National Research Council that clarified again the need for *“explicit instruction and practice that lead to an appreciation that spoken words are made up of smaller units of sounds,”*), unbelievably, the reading wars that began in the 1920’s still would not end.

In 1999, the National Council of Teachers of English maintained their resolute opposition to phonics instruction in response to the American Federation of Teachers who, at the time, began publishing and promoting the merits of phonetic training.

And the reader will probably not be shocked to learn that though the science of reading research is now overwhelmingly in support of phonetic-based reading instruction, and even though the pseudo-science that whole language was based on has been thoroughly debunked, the antipathy to phonics for some classroom educators still remains strong, dismissing evidence seen even with their own eyes.

To reiterate, the engine that drove the whole language movement was progressive education in general and the child-centered approach specifically. And though this movement failed in its intended consequences, just like most of the others highlighted in this expose, there were dreadfully damaging and long-term consequences, for our students individually and for American public education as a whole. In terms of the latter, we witnessed a dramatic and radical paradigm shift in American public education in the six major areas that follow ...

Six Paradigm Shifts

Over the last one hundred years, there were at least six major shifts in thinking that became deeply entrenched juggernauts within the education establishment. As progressive strongholds, they came to secure the “commanding heights” through total dominance of the teachers unions, the teacher-training colleges, the curriculum companies, and the state and federal departments of education.

Ever resistant to a look in the mirror, the purveyors of this series of switches have always refused to relinquish control or give up the ground they have gained. Through these dramatic changes, the education cartel has been stubbornly determined to hold hostage American families and children to the ideology that ruined public education.

1. The shift of values: from moral absolutes to moral relativism.

Value-free education was introduced into American schools in the 1960’s. One of the founders of value-free education, Dr. W.R. Coulson, eventually admitted that it “turned out to be a deadly scheme.”

He said, “The fault lies in an educational philosophy that calls on students and teachers alike to disbelieve in the concept of temptation. Moral absolutes are routed ... in favor of a psychotherapeutic imperative.” Realizing the egregious error of a value-free education, Dr. Coulson declared, “I and our project teammates owe the nation’s parents an apology.”

Value-free education is a myth because it is impossible to be free of values. Everyone values something. Even relativism adheres to a value system, or as Greek philosopher Plato put it so succinctly 2,500 years ago: “The rejection of a dogma itself implies a dogma.”

The value-free movement was dishonest because though it waved the flag of pluralism and claimed to be value-neutral, it was in fact a unilateral attempt to replace one value system with another, i.e., one dogma with another.

Some very smart people understood that if you won the battle of the mind, you would possess the soul of a civilization. And so the war was waged, and it was strategic: target the young people, dominate the classroom ... redefine truth. The seed was planted, watered, and lo, the harvest.

But the *School of Thought* proposition retains moral literacy as a hallmark at the foundation of all other literacy efforts. Any philosophy that makes us shy about teaching

our young right from wrong is not on solid ground and should be exposed for the insanity and inanity that it is.

2. The shift of approach: from classical to progressive education.

This was the transition from the timeless to the contemporary, from what was known as a liberal (or liberal arts) education to a child-centered approach that was driven by the student's desires. This primed the pump for the impulses of social indoctrination and reconstruction that forever changed the purpose of education and redefined the role of our public schools.

Through a well-rounded course of study that is general (not specialized) and liberal (not vocational), the classical approach inculcated the linguistic, mathematical, aesthetic, scientific, literary, cultural, philosophical and theological disciplines.

Culminating in the progressive break from a general education for all children to what they called "curricular differentiation," this paradigm shift put some students on the college-bound track and some on the vocational track, distinguishing those destined for "learning and leisure" from those destined for "labor" (to use Jeffersonian jargon).

This shift succumbed to the error of "supposing that only some, not all, of the children are educable and that only some, not all, have a human right to aspire to become truly educated human beings in the course of their lives." (Adler, *The Paideia Program*, p. 4)

A *Western School of Thought* maintains the exact opposite: not only should all students be educated in the classical tradition (as opposed to the progressive approach), but all have the individual right to receive this kind of comprehensive, immersive, rich and robust education that teaches children how to think and prepares students for life, not just a job.

3. The shift of ownership: from community schools to government schools

When schools went from being called "common" schools" (17th and early 18th centuries) to "public" schools (latter 18th century and 19th century), they gradually morphed from being a community school (subject to the parents of the community) to a government school (subject to the state and federal governments). This, of course, was the perfect and preferred scenario if deconstructing/reconstructing society was the goal.

Through this paradigm shift, local control was supplanted by federal control, and parental authority was progressively surrendered to the state, without parents even knowing it. This gave the progressives the mechanism they needed to advance the ball

of leftist ideology and social control, which would lead ever so seamlessly to the paradigm shift of educational objectives.

If schools are an arm of the government, the state can dictate not only curriculum standards but the underlying “paideia” of American education. Through policy, law and bureaucratic fiat, the feds could trade in the old value system for a new one ... theirs.

Not only that, but they could ultimately maintain their iron grip on the school system by cultivating a level of financial dependence on the government that rivals that of a crack addict. Now one would only need “follow the money” to understand why and how the public schools have changed so radically and dramatically in our country.

4. The shift of objectives: from civic virtue to social engineering.

Where moral literacy was once foundational to the local community schoolhouse in America, multiple decades of value-neutral education changed all that. So if the nature of truth is no longer absolute, then who is to say what is virtuous?

Consequently, while the progressives removed moral authority, they simultaneously extinguished individual and civic virtue. Be assured, the social engineers knew exactly what they were doing, even if the rest of America did not. They sowed to the wind and we have been reaping the whirlwind ever since.

From once being the safest place on earth for our children, schools have become veritable hotbeds of anxiety and fear. Though most of us remember when schools were free of violence, we now have to have police officers on campus. From sexual boundaries to sexual chaos, young people now in our schools are only encouraged to practice “safe sex,” in some places even handing out condoms to help them.

If that’s not enough, in some schools underaged students can even now begin to “transition” to the opposite sex without their parents knowing. Not only that, but in staunchly leftist enclaves, students will hear such Marxist ideas as critical race theory and “white fragility” promoted.

With this resulting madness, nobody is surprised to hear there is growing evidence of increased student suicide rates when American public schools are in session. Researchers say, “Youth suicides are closely tied with in-person school attendance.” (National Bureau of Economic Research) For children ages 8-17, the number of suicides drop during the summer and go up again when schools start in the fall ([source](#)).

And this is not the first time this link has been identified. A 2018 study from Vanderbilt University, published by the journal *Pediatrics*, showed similar findings based on hospital records and ER data.

More recently, pediatric suicides have increased by between 30 and 43 percent during the school year. It was also reported there was a 12-18% increase in suicide rates when schools re-opened after Covid lockdowns were lifted. In other words, more kids committed suicide correlated to school attendance than was ever Covid-related!

Over the past 8-10 decades, with the seismic shift from civic virtue to social engineering evolved the ideology of “diversity, equity and inclusion” (DEI), another seemingly innocuous tool of progressive ideologues to reconstruct society in their image. Not surprisingly, in response to the massive resistance from those who have not drunk the kool aid, this progressive vision resulted in a “cancel culture” that sought to silence its opposition. Alas, how ideas do have consequences.

5. The shift of purpose: from teaching thinking to cognitive programming.

Perpetrated by the teachers' colleges of American universities (the bastions of progressive thought) and sustained by cooperative curriculum companies, the end result of this paradigm shift was cognitive programming rather than cognitive development. Through dumbed-down curriculum, revisionist history texts, federal standards, literacy malpractice and unadulterated political/social propaganda, the timeless purpose of education (*to learn to think*) was utterly derailed. Take a look at each one briefly:

Dumbed-down curricula compromises student numeracy and linguistic proficiency by no longer memorizing math facts or learning the eight parts of speech. Logic (the laws of thinking) has become extinct as a course of study in most public schools. Latin and Greek are no longer required, even though 50% of our English language comes from Latin and 30% from Greek. History was changed to Social Studies and multicultural emphases take precedence over Constitutional studies.

History revisionism, through progressive interpretations of history (i.e., Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States*), viewed all social and historical developments through the adversarial lens of the oppressor and the oppressed. As it emphasizes American warts, sins and failures over American exceptionalism (its strengths and successes), it subtly casts our nation in a bad light and fosters anti-patriotic sentiments.

Federal and state standards were imposed through the “No Child Left Behind” mandates of the Bush Administration and the Common Core State Standards of 2009. Results become linked to federal money, pressuring teachers to “teach to the test.” This limits attention to other parts of the curriculum and ignores higher-order thinking skills.

Literacy malpractice propagated by pseudo-science and a cadre of stubborn professors

with an agenda, this brand of cognitive programming ignored the science of reading and promoted “guessing” (via whole language) versus thinking (via phonetic decoding).

Political/social propaganda through extensive sex education instruction integrating LGBT lifestyles as well as social justice teachings, critical theory, transgender ideology, sexism, racism and various other left-wing political philosophies. Once Covid lifted the lid off our schools and all this came to light, many parents were outraged and lost trust in their local public schools.

These five paradigm shifts in American public school education have prompted both national outrage and a national outcry. Credible scholastic alternatives were sought as parent anxiety increased, and many local and state-wide groups began launching new charter and private school institutions, organizations, associations and networks.

School of Thought sees educational choice, freedom and opportunity as the antidote to this malady and offers a ten-fold vision in response to this crisis in American education.

6. The shift of freedom: from religious liberty to religious extraction.

The one room schoolhouse of the colonial days (1700 & 1800s) regularly, consistently and liberally integrated Scripture verses, biblical principles and other elements of the Judeo-Christian worldview (i.e., the Golden Rule, the Ten Commandments, hymns, prayers, etc.) into the school day without sanctioning one religion over another. They were neither sectarian (denominational) nor secular (absent of religion).

But the extrication of religious liberty from American schools started in 1875 through the Blaine Amendment (explained in detail on pp. 122-123). This set the stage for the progressives in the early 1900’s to advance the secular ball further down the field, and purge public schools entirely of any theistic references. The only religion allowed now was the secular version. And it was all perpetrated on a distorted view of the First Amendment, wresting Thomas Jefferson’s “wall of separation” notions.

But even a cursory understanding of basic logic tells us that if one of the core tenets of our American Republic is religious freedom, and our schools are supposed to be preparing our young for life in a country which propagates this core tenet, then shouldn’t our schools be teaching and practicing the same to prepare our kids for life in a society that deems this essential American liberty to be sacrosanct and non-negotiable?

Of course they should. Which means we’ve been duped and intimidated and manipulated by the progressives’ hellbent deletions of all things religious and divine.

From Strongholds to Strangleholds

Shackles go hand in hand with loss of sight, and loss of sight is linked to a difficult life, with corresponding forms and degrees of bondage. Whatever binds us (puts us in bondage) blinds us (destroys clarity and focus), which makes a healthy vision for society impossible – and where there is no vision the people perish.

Moreover, whatever blinds us binds us. When we lose our sight, we lose our insight, which in time will put wisdom on the endangered species list. This is the very essence of a “mind blind.”

When we can no longer discern what is true and what is false – what is right and wrong, good and bad – we descend into all forms of pathology and all kinds of strongholds, which begin as mere footholds, but end up as freedom-threatening strangleholds.

This is what our country has been descending into for the last seven decades. What is especially hard to swallow is that it has been put on the fast-track by our own American public school system in four core ways: a progressive worldview, an addiction to federal funds, the establishment stranglehold, and fear paralysis.

1. The Progressive Worldview

There has been an unmitigated collision of two conflicting worldviews and value systems that has been unfolding in this country for many decades. We could say it all started in the 1960s with the sexual revolution, but actually the seed-thoughts were planted many years before that, even many decades.

In the midst of all of this, we are always faced with the choice of dealing with this conflict either up-front and head-on, or quietly, under-the-radar, passive-aggressively – or not at all. The latter (denial or avoidance) should not be an option. So deal with it we must.

Of all the narrative versions that humankind wrestles with at this time in history, at the very core, they can be boiled down (essentially) to just two. Those two are

diametrically opposed in their most fundamental presuppositions and never shall the twain meet – therefore, they will always clash.

The one says there is a transcendent authority, the other says we are that transcendent authority. The one says truth is absolute (meaning there are some things in life that are absolutely and always true for all people in all places at all times). The other says truth is relative, and therefore we each decide for ourselves what is true (which means we each decide for ourselves what is good and bad, and what is right and wrong).

So at the core, you have an unmistakable and unavoidable clash because the two narratives disagree on the very nature of truth itself.

The one holds to a “historic” perspective rooted primarily in a sacred belief system, while the other embraces a “postmodernist” perspective rooted primarily in a secular belief system. The former has been espoused by traditionalists, conservatives and orthodox religion while the latter has been espoused by progressives, relativists and humanists.

And because of the inherent clash between the two in their most basic assumptions about life, they cannot neutrally co-exist. One narrative will move to the front, which by definition means the other recedes to the back, or the other narrative will become the dominant worldview of society while its antithesis is relegated to the sidelines.

The one worldview preaches tolerance, yet is anything but. The other worldview is accused of being intolerant, and yet it paved the way for religious freedom, freedom of speech and a democratic society. The one view has always espoused open and free exchange, while the other view is shutting down opposing voices, views and values.

And for over a hundred years, it is the more hard-core elements of “the other view” that is determined to become the predominant worldview of our society, using government, the media and our public schools as the prime vehicle to get there, even if it goes against the wishes of the majority of American parents – and it generally does.

The key players and purveyors of this worldview are very savvy, and they know all too well what stands in their way. They know they can't ultimately succeed in becoming society's dominant and accepted ideal unless they get the other belief system out of the way, the first step of which is to relegate it to the sidelines, and from there to the ash heap. Again, they'll do this primarily through our schools..

On the one hand, the very nature of a pluralistic society demands that these two worldviews co-exist; on the other hand, one of the deceptions of postmodernist thinking is that all ideas are equally valid. They are not, and anyone who has lived life with eyes wide open and feet grounded firmly in reality knows that all ideas are NOT equally valid.

But they do all have consequences, and we ignore, avoid, deny or try to escape those consequences to our own detriment and demise. Because out of every worldview comes a value system, and when you have two that conflict and contradict at their very core, you can't embrace both.

For example, if one belief system (we'll call it "X") values hard work, and its opposing belief system (we'll call it "Y") values laziness, you can't espouse both "X" and "Y" – you can't teach both as viable, admirable or acceptable. If one medical philosophy says your diet should consist of high carbs and low fats, and the other one says low carbs and high fats, you can't practice both – they're the exact opposites.

So we're left to choose one over the other, and hopefully, we'll choose the one most consistent with intellectual integrity, sustained by the fundamental laws of logic, informed by our faith, and supported by hard science and the best research, not the one supported by the popular culture, conventional wisdom, or pseudo-science.

If one value system finds objectionable certain library books that teach our young about group sex, same sex and anal sex in the most graphic manners imaginable, and the other value system thinks these books are perfectly appropriate and actually helpful for some kids, you have a clash of worldviews. A healthy moral compass and basic common sense should tell us where to go from there.

If one view says gender is fluid and the other says it's binary, they're not both right. Either one is right and the other is wrong, or they're both wrong. But they can't both be right.

A society built on the rock solid foundation of transcendent truth is a society that understands the nature of truth, that it is absolute or it's not truth. The nature of water is H₂O. If it's not H₂O, it's not water.

Abraham Lincoln was once asked how many legs a dog has if you call his tail a leg. Lincoln said, "Four. Saying that a tail is a leg doesn't make it a leg."

Lincoln understood the game, and was not willing to play. Neither should we be. Reconstructing reality does not change it. Redefining truth as something subjective and personal does not make it so.

Understanding the nature of truth begins first with facts, and thankfully, "facts are a stubborn thing." From there it graduates to reason based on logic, because logic encompasses the very "rules of thinking." And it concludes with wisdom, because wisdom always leads to "the good, the true and the beautiful."

So to protect the *Homefront*, we must have a true north – a moral compass, from which we get our value system – and intellectual integrity demands we hold to it by making it both our lens and our filter.

2. Addiction to Federal Funds

When serving as State Superintendent of Public Instruction, we took a stand against the USDA Title IX school lunch issue, when the feds coerced State Departments of Education and School districts to re-interpret "sexual discrimination" to include sexual orientation and gender ideology. In the end, 46 out of 48 Wyoming school districts caved to the federal government so as not to lose that federal money, even though the state of Wyoming had the money in their own coffers to pay for their own school lunches.

Think of it, we could have broken free of the entire woke agenda if we broke free of federal funds. There are many nationally-known education institutions (elementary, middle school, high school and college) that don't take a dime from

the federal government, and therefore, can protect the integrity of their philosophy and academic freedom by remaining completely independent.

In this country, over the decades, we Americans have developed a “crack cocaine” addiction to federal monies of mammoth proportions. The very thought of breaking free causes seismic convulsions for our school and state leaders.

Our public schools were once known as community schools, but over time have morphed into government schools, because they’re bought and paid for by the government, and therefore, controlled by the government. We take so much money from the federal governments that they now own our schools. They truly have become “government reservations,” as John Taylor Gatto calls them.

The first step to taking back our public schools is to break the dependence on federal funds. If our leaders are not willing to do that (which the establishment crowd is not), then vote with your feet and find a school that receives no government funding. Period. It’s that simple.

3. The Establishment Stranglehold

We can best restore our political and social institutions through a strong, but limited, government, and this is only achievable through local control when we govern ourselves in civic-related matters that are closest to the people they affect. Alexis de Tocqueville once correctly observed that, in America, every community is the best judge of those matters that concern itself.

But we now live in a nation where 23 million people work in the administrative state with strong motivation from the universities (who reap the benefits) and influence from the corporations that it regulates and subsidizes.

Moreover, most Americans are unaware that the education bureaucracy of the US Department of Education actually outnumbered the teachers it controls. Similarly, most of the electorate is oblivious to the fact that the administrative state occupies half of the American economy.

From paralyzing regulations to hostile lawfare, make no mistake about it, a bloated state and federal bureaucracy make the administrative state the inherent enemy not

only of the people, but of our Constitutional republic. It is the very antithesis of a representative government.

One need look no further than the socialism of countries like Venezuela or the communism of China, Cuba and North Korea, where the administrative state supersedes elected legislatures, disguising their law-making process as the antidote to “politics”. Churchill described them best: “No longer servants and no longer civil.”

For our own country, since the 1930’s (thanks to FDR and his progressive policies), we have witnessed a major private-to-public shift in resources. Back then, the US government only got 12% of our national GDP – it now handles over 50%, trending decisively towards centralization.

Though now hard to believe, one hundred years ago our federal government gave 60% of the money it raised to the people – local American counties and communities. Now it releases only 20%! This dubious transfer of assets from the people to the government should be an outrage, but most of the people don’t even know that Uncle Sam has been picking their pockets for decades.

America used to be a bottom-up grassroots nation, but centralization and the progressives’ administrative state intentionally (albeit incrementally) changed all that.

In the first one hundred years of America’s young existence, our government owned all our western lands. But in 1862, for any hard-working, adventurous American, Lincoln gave 10% of the land to the people, to own and work, through the Homestead Act? That’s the historic American spirit that Lincoln knew and loved.

So why the transition when it is so inherently un-American, and so incredibly subverts the constitutional doctrine of “the consent of the governed”? It was driven entirely by the progressive vision of governance and carefully framed as harmless, common-sense modifications. But peel back the layers and it was about little more than a vulgar lust for power and need to control, because progressive intellectuals truly and deeply believe they know best and are smarter than the people.

But the biblical law of sowing and reaping cannot be subverted and the deficiencies of a regulatory state have been duly exposed for the corrupt enterprise that it has become. Its utter disdain for “We the People” has become apparent through its

obscene over-reach of attempting to replace parents (and punish them in court if they object) and its violation of free speech through its draconian “cancel culture”.

4. **Fear Paralysis**

So what is it that blinds us? In a nutshell, it has always been and will always be *the lies*, either the ones we tell or the ones we are told. Dishonesty, deception and self-deceit is not only difficult, not only debilitating, it’s dangerous, because it always results in varying forms of oppression. But when we see the truth, when we know the truth, the truth always puts us on the path to freedom. “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free,” Jesus said. Not your truth, not my truth, but ***the*** truth.

Many of our civic leaders are paralyzed by fear – fear of losing the election, fear of lawsuits, fear of being unpopular, fear of conflict, fear of appearing radical, fear of losing their jobs, their salaries, their pensions. Afraid to challenge the establishment, push back against the leftist ideology, take on the teacher’s unions, break with federal funds, and exercise religious freedom.

But just as fear is contagious, so is courage. And all it takes is for one or two people in leadership to start exercising courage, and the rest will catch the wave.

School of Thought: A Ten-Fold Vision

1. **A Vision for the School** in terms of a *cognizant acuity* based on ...
 - Institutional Perspectives – why, what and who the school is as an education institution
 - Organizational Objectives – mission fulfillment, a healthy culture, operational efficiency
 - Educational Distinctives – a school's unique model and distinct classroom methodologies
2. **A Vision for the Board** in terms of a *governing polity* perpetuated in ...
 - The Board Model – defined & supported by policy governance writings/teachings
 - The Board Members – vetted & trained by policy governance processes/precepts
 - The Board Meetings – ordered & guided by policy governance practices/categories
3. **A Vision for the Administration** in terms of a *cohesive continuity* achieved by ...
 - Selection Process – worldview alignment, specific giftings, background checks
 - Supervision Principles – well-trained, connected, organized, visionary, principled
 - Succession Plan – talent identifications, team cultivations, timely transitions
4. **A Vision for the Parents** in terms of the *ultimate authority* sustained thru ...
 - Parent Responsibility – the parents for their children (via increased involvement)
 - School Accountability – the school to the parents (via communiques & feedback)
 - Teacher Accessibility – the teachers to the parents (via availability expectations)
5. **A Vision for the Teachers** in terms of an *inspired instruction* developed by ...
 - Professional Propagation – how we recruit and retain our teachers
 - Pedagogical Supervision – how we cultivate and critique our teachers
 - Promotional Elevation – how we view and value our teachers
6. **A Vision for the Students** in terms of the *highest priority* pursuant to ...
 - Classical Scholarship – producing formed & informed thinkers
 - Thoughtful Citizenship – producing caring & thinking citizens
 - Honorable Leadership – producing good & wise leaders
7. **A Vision for the Curriculum** in terms of a *content clarity* reflected by ...
 - A Literacy Legacy – lingual, cultural, biblical, constitutional and financial literacy
 - The Core Courses – a general/liberal curriculum-continuum of the arts & sciences
 - A Literary Library – the “Great Books” about the Great Ideas from the Great Thinkers
8. **A Vision for the Campus** in terms of a *schematic design* framed around ...
 - Safety & Security – improvements, installments, investments
 - Buildings & Grounds – campus blueprint, charming aesthetics, careful maintenance
 - Additions & Accommodations – facilities that facilitate both vision & mission
9. **A Vision for the Community** in terms of an *increased visibility* fulfilled thru ...
 - Expanded Awareness – traditional and social media communication vehicles
 - Formed Partnerships – community groups, education associations, local colleges
 - Shared Marketing – word-of-mouth, school & community events, leader luncheons
10. **A Vision for the Future** in terms of a *durable strategy* determined by ...
 - Fiscal Challenges – balanced budget, robust donor base, federal independence
 - Legal Changes – control to protection, tax-funded to tax-exempt, cancellation to liberation
 - Optional Choices – micro-schools, University-Model, online schooling, tutorial-based college

School of Thought: A Ten-Fold Vision

As a comprehensive proposition for reclaiming education in our communities and our country, the ten-fold vision that follows is a blueprint of sorts – an education apologetic for the classical model and an antidote to the malady of the progressive virus.

It begins with a foundational vision for the school as a whole. From there it goes to the central vision for a school board and their administration. This is followed by the big-picture focus of the education triad of parents, teachers and students. Then it considers the curriculum, the school campus and the surrounding community, and concludes with a long-term look at the future of the school and the school of the future.

The ultimate aim of this ten-fold vision is for the local community schoolhouse to become the “school of thought” it was intended to be.

A Vision for the School

We start with the big picture, **a vision for the school** in terms of a cognizant acuity based on (1) *institutional perspectives* (why, what and who the school is), (2) *organizational objectives* (the school’s mission, culture and operations), and (3) *educational distinctives* (the school’s unique model and distinct methodologies).

Institutional Perspectives – let’s start at the very beginning

Why a school exists is the most important question in education because it goes to its very purpose. If we don’t get this right, we won’t get anything right. Because we can’t agree on this is why we don’t agree on so many other things in American education.

What the school is has to do with its role. Is a school primarily and fundamentally an extension of and support for the state ... or the home? Is the school an incubator for and a bridge to society ... or to a job? The answer is not cryptic, but many today are not clear on what it is.

Who the school is speaks to its identity and is determined exclusively by one thing: the school’s *paideia*. As a Greek word with no English equivalent, it is difficult to define; however, as the DNA of an institution or civilization, it is not as difficult to explain.

Why a School Is

As stated earlier, the purpose of education can be summed up in four words: *to learn to think*. Schools are supposed help our young people *learn* from others so they can *think* for themselves.

In math, “to learn” means computation, “to think” means application. In science, the learning part comes through observation, the thinking part comes through experimentation. In history, learning is about what happened while thinking is about who told you what happened. In literacy and literature, it’s not only learning how to read but also distinguishing what is worth reading.

That means students have to *learn* a lot before they can *think* a little. They have to have something to think about because thought is formed and informed by knowledge. Until students become semi-educated, so-called group-based learning is often little more than pooled ignorance resulting in little less than groupthink.

Additionally, our youth have to learn *how* to think, not just *what* to think. Thinking is a learned skill and it has rules – we call it logic. Moreover, a student’s thoughts have to be grounded in good soil before they can bear good fruit, which is where truth comes in.

If our thoughts are not grounded in objective truth and consistent with objective reality, there is no end to the “mind blinds” and mental dead-ends. The self-destruction and societal damage that our thoughts can lead to become a crash course because, as Richard Weaver reminded us, ideas have consequences. The inference there, of course, is that not all ideas are equally valid or helpful.

Through the arts and the sciences, the classical vision of education not only freed the mind, it opened it. Its antithesis did the exact opposite (read: *The Closing of The American Mind* by Allan Bloom).

So a clear school vision begins with a clear understanding of education’s purpose. Short of that, the entire enterprise becomes replete with confusion, rife with chaos, void of challenge and dripping with excuses. When it comes down to the popular and trendy versus the proven and timeless, a *school of thought* will choose the path less trodden.

What a School Is

It is worth noting that concurrent with education’s original purpose was the local schoolhouse’s historic role. Envisioned by the Founding Fathers and early Americans, the role of the school was to be an extension of and support for the home (not the state) as well as an incubator for and bridge to society (not just a job).

On the front end, this meant that the school by definition was to work *with* the home, not against it – to cooperate with home life, not conflict with, compete with or replace it. On the back end, it meant our schools would be purveyors of civic virtue and cultural literacy, with the outcome being a mature and wise citizen who is now poised to serve as a consequential participant in his or her family, community and country.

To confuse or conflate this causes a major paradigm shift in what one thinks the purpose of education is, which in turn and of necessity affects everything else: teaching approaches, curriculum content, student motivation, value systems ... everything.

The structure of the school matters little if we aren't clear on the role of the school. Whether a school is public or private, district or charter, homeschool or micro school, private-tutoring or virtual online, 5-day traditional or the University-Model, it is all of secondary relevance if there is not consensus on the school's role. If it is an extension of and support for the home as well as an incubator for and bridge to society, then it should operate as such.

If it is an extension of the state, then the government is the owner of our school's and the one we serve; if it is an extension of and support for the home, then it is the parents to whom we are beholden.

If it is primarily about a job, then we've shifted the paradigm from a liberal (liberating) education to vocational job-training. If, however, it is primarily about preparing thoughtful citizens for a free society, then it will take students deeper and not be reduced to the naked pragmatism that defines life as nothing more than a paycheck.

If education is only about getting a good job, then the paradigm has clearly shifted from a liberal education to vocational training. Both of course are important, but the latter should never replace the former. When it does, schooling becomes training instead of education, with the unique distinctions blurred for many and lost on most.

When we short-circuit the quest for truth, goodness and beauty, we rob students of the deeper meaning of life and what it means to be fully human. When we tell them "the pursuit of happiness" is about pleasure rather than virtue (as the Founding Fathers believed), nihilism becomes their eventual and inevitable inheritance.

We should not be surprised, then, at heightened teenage suicide rates when our schools have become completely devoid of the transcendent and made it utterly impossible to wrestle with what life is really all about.

Who the School Is

The unique qualities and attributes of a school are part and parcel with its identity. If not aligned with its purpose and role, however, it will lack integration and fail the integrity test. Integrity (or the lack thereof) determines the quality of identity (or the lack thereof). So a school cannot know *who* it is unless it first knows *what* it is, and it will not *be* who it is until it knows *why* it is!

Moreover, a school's primal identity markers only emerge temporarily from things like its origin, history or founders. Similarly, such seemingly important things as the school name, mascot and colors only inform school identity superficially at best. Things like the personality of the student body, administrative leadership dynamics, teaching faculty or parent community will form and inform school identity to be sure. But though this is not a problem short-term, long-term it is replete with some negatives and downsides.

The deeper and lasting influence on school identity is what is called the school's "*paideia*." Though the reader may have never heard of the term, it was once widely known to the educated class of its day in many other countries and time periods. And curiously, although it was the life blood that flowed through a civilization's veins, we have no translation for the word in English.

A precise definition is hard to find as well, but as the genetic DNA that forms a school's core identity, we might start with this: *paideia* was **the singular most powerful force in the upbringing of a child and the cultural formation of a civilization.**

So in a nutshell, at the risk of oversimplifying, *paideia* consists of the child's cumulative upbringing. To go further, it is the deeply seated affections and basic life assumptions instilled in a child at a very young age, impinging on its present and future decisions and behaviors. (Hegseth & Goodwin, *Battle for the American Mind*, Ch. 3)

As the key ingredient in how a child is raised, it includes the family's values, moral virtues, its essential lifeview, beliefs, thoughts, attitudes, habits, convictions and passions. In short, it is the total inculturation of a child.

Paideia effectively develops a child's vision of the good life which defines the very nature of a people. It is the strongest cultural force in all of human history and carries with it a consequential dynamic to determine identity and personality, not only for individuals, but for communities and nations as well. It deeply forms a human's nature and is integral to the formation of a civilization's culture.

Furthermore, *paideia* shapes the long-term development of the human mind, body and soul. The human mind, of course, includes both intellectual development and mental health. The human body includes sensory development, fitness and nutrition habits. The human soul includes the full range of emotional, relational and spiritual dynamics.

In our present age, a child's *paideia* would influence things like whether one becomes an introvert or extrovert, wears sandals in the summer or goes barefoot, takes a shower once a week or once a day, or goes in the military, off to college or off to a job. It shapes personal manners, how one views police officers, literary interests, conscience

pangs, empathy strains and whether one leans left or right politically.

Paideia informs one's music tastes, career choices, and whether one becomes a Packer or Bears fan. It helps determine faith commitments and nutritional convictions as well as cleaning routines and sleeping habits.

The old *paideia* was centered around traditional families linked with the extended family, rooted in the homestead, hometown and homeland. It was all about a strong work ethic, neighborhood schools and traditional book-learning. Moral virtues, sexual boundaries and marital fidelity was the norm; your word was your bond and a handshake was your word. Love of country, life-long friendships, church attendance, civic involvement and common sense prevailed – the opposite did not.

The new *paideia*, conversely, became all about sexual freedom, personal rights, defining your own identity, broken marriages and families, entitlement, obsession with success, fame and riches, secularism, progressive education and crazy ideologies.

Every Western generation and society from the time of Christ to the early nineteenth century were very familiar with *paideia*, as a word and as a concept. This Greek term used by the Apostle Paul in his first-century epistle to the Ephesians (6:4) was as common to the people of his day as “democracy” or “education” is to us today.

The Apostle Paul wrote, “And fathers ... bring [your children] up in the training (*paideia*) and instruction of the Lord.” In terms of the parenting of children, this is the most well-known New Testament passage, and the key word of this key verse is *paideia*.

During that time period, *paideia* was heavily laden with meaning. As “... the entire process whereby the ideal citizen was raised for the ideal state,” for the Greek it was about much more than mere book-learning. It included “... every input and influence that came into a child's life,” and involved the comprehensive “... development of a child from a baby to a man or a woman.” (Kevin Swanson, *Upgrade*, p. 9)

Obviously, the way the great Apostle used *paideia* was distinct from the usage of the Greek people of that time. He referred to parenting the child in the *paideia* of the Lord. Consequently, Paul's usage initiated a Christian *paideia* that forged the basis for the brand of inculturation that gave rise to Western civilization.

Prior to 1820, school in America had been the domain of the family and the church, which had been the center of perpetuating the Greek/Christian *paideia* since the first century. (Hegseth & Goodwin, *Battle for the American Mind*, Ch. 3)

Our Founding Fathers relied heavily on this old *paideia* in their collective conversations

as they birthed the American republic. Citizens were inducted into it through a brand of classical education that was rooted in the Judeo-Christian worldview.

This ancient Greek word had a wide-ranging influence in history as well. During the Golden Age of Greece, the Greeks wondered if it might be possible to cultivate a *paideia* that sustained a self-governing society driven by the divine ideal. (Hegseth & Goodwin, *Battle for the American Mind*, Ch. 3)

Plato's school, *The Academy* (4th & 5th Century B.C. Athens), started with the question, "What kind of *paideia* is required for the people to govern themselves, to think for themselves, to enjoy the pursuit of divine truth, to think freely rather than to merely accept the dogmas of their day?" (Hegseth & Goodwin, *Battle for the American Mind*, Ch. 3)

With that, the Western Christian *paideia* was born.

Ultimately, at the very center of any culture's underlying *paideia* is a worldview. Whether it's a communist worldview, a Buddhist worldview, a progressive worldview or a Judeo-Christian worldview, this is the heart and soul of any institution or civilization's *paideia*. So for a school to have a rock-solid identity, it must have a clear *paideia* which, in turn, must be based on a coherent worldview.

Worldview Coherence

No individual or institution can be worldview-neutral any more than they can be value-free. To think otherwise is self-defeating and self-deceiving. If ideas have consequences, then we always reap what we sow. Good ideas reap good consequences and bad ideas reap bad consequences. Since those of us who work in the field of education deal with facts, knowledge, truth and ideas, if we ignore, avoid, deny or try to escape the consequential nature of these ideas, we become remiss in our responsibility as teachers and unfaithful to our calling.

Moreover, individuals who embrace conflicting worldviews will eventually self-destruct and institutions that do so will eventually implode, because "a house divided against itself cannot stand."

The timeless view of education contended that a student's thoughts had to be grounded in good soil (truth and wisdom) before they could bear good fruit (virtue and character), which brings us to the heart of the conflict in American education: the clash of worldviews.

We're all quite familiar with the culture wars in this country and how education has become the tip of the spear, with our schools now serving as one of the prime

battlegrounds. The reason, of course, for all of this is an unmitigated collision of two conflicting worldviews and value systems (two *paideias*) that have been unfolding in this country for many decades. (We could say it goes all the way back to the 1960s and the sexual revolution, but actually, the seed-thoughts were planted many years before that through nefarious thought-leaders like Nietzsche, Marx, Freud, Darwin and Dewey.)

Of all the competing life philosophies that humankind wrestles with at this time in history, at the very base there are only two, and those two are completely antithetical in their most fundamental presuppositions. Therefore, they will always conflict and contradict.

The one says there is a transcendent authority, the other says we are that transcendent authority. The one believes in freedom *of* religion, the other believes in freedom *from* religion. The one thinks human beings are fundamentally flawed, the other thinks they are inherently good.

The one worldview claims parents are the owners of our schools, the other worldview sees the state as the owner. The former says all ideas are *not* equally valid and, therefore, it *does* make a difference what you believe; the latter says all ideas *are* equally valid, therefore, it does *not* ultimately matter what you believe.

The one says truth is absolute, meaning there are some things in life that are absolutely and always true, for all people in all places at all times. The other says truth is relative, so we each decide for ourselves what is true and false, which means we each decide for ourselves what is good and bad, and therefore, what is right and wrong.

So at the core, you have this unavoidable and inescapable clash because the two narratives disagree on the very nature of truth itself. The one holds to a timeless, historic perspective while the other embraces a brand new “postmodern” view.

And because of this inherent clash between the two in their most basic presuppositions, they are fundamentally incompatible.

Moreover, the only way they can co-exist is to compromise their core identity by compromising their core values. If they don’t choose that route, then in time, one will move to the front which by definition means the other recedes to the back, or the other narrative will become the dominant worldview of society while its antithesis is relegated to the sidelines. It is certainly not rocket science to understand which scenario has been unfolding in our own society over the past seven decades.

In a word, for a school to know who it is, it must know which *paideia* it operates by and

the worldview that fuels it. Ignoring this creates a vacuum that a destructive *paideia* will fill. The progressive architects of the early twentieth century were savvy, strategic and intentional about dismantling the old *paideia*, seeing it as the one obstacle to their progressive version, which would create the new milieu for their coveted social order.

Organizational Objectives – aiming at and hitting the target

To keep the focus clear and simple, an organization's objectives always come down to mission, culture and operations. First, it's all about defining, articulating and fulfilling the school's mission; second, it's about cultivating, protecting and preserving a healthy school culture, and third, linked to both are the efficient daily operations of the school.

Those are the essential objectives of any successful organization, but especially of an effective educational organization: (1) having the school's mission clearly in sight is critical to fulfilling this focus; (2) prioritizing the development of a healthy school culture will help fulfill the mission; and (3) becoming good at how the school functions operationally will be integral to the mission and culture.

Let's take the school mission first ... what is it and is everyone clear on what it is? It goes without saying that before you can fulfill your school mission, you have to have one. To articulate the school mission, therefore, a mission statement is needed, and when it comes to developing a school mission statement, the first rule to follow is to keep it concise. Long mission statements blur the focus, are easily forgotten and impossible to fulfill. So the challenge will be to keep it pithy, which is to say, concise and forcefully expressive!

The best way to do that is to answer four central questions: (1) *Whose mission is it?* (the name of the school), (2) *What is the mission?* (the school's purpose) (3) *Who is this mission for?* (who the school serves) (4) *Why do we have this mission?* (the reason for the school's purpose?) Answer those questions and you have a mission statement.

For example, **The Washington School** (the name of the school) exists to **provide a premium K-12 classical education** (why the school exists) to **the children of Washington County families** (who the school serves) to **produce thinking and caring American citizens and leaders** (why the school does what it does).

In sync with the school mission, then, should be the school culture. This must be an intentional endeavor and reinforced through well-structured accountability. Though difficult to achieve and sustain (human nature being what it is), it is not complicated. Be careful, therefore, not to over-complicate it by overthinking it. Keep the focus of a healthy school culture simple by making it crystal clear.

For example, the clarity of simplicity starts with **the goodwill principle**. *Building a healthy school culture is accomplished by building goodwill*; to counter this is to damage the same. That's it, pure and simple: building goodwill is how you build a healthy school culture. Easy to say, of course, harder to do, because the trick is that it requires everyone – a few bad apples really can spoil the whole bunch.

The challenge to *building a healthy school culture by building goodwill* must become a vital organizational expectation and the unqualified commitment of its employees. A healthy community is built (or rebuilt) through *trust* which comes by building goodwill. Anything that violates goodwill violates a sense of trust which ultimately violates the community.

Disparaging other staff members violates the community because it doesn't build goodwill. Gossiping, lying about or misrepresenting other employees violates the community because it violates goodwill. Drawing false conclusions based on erroneous assumptions or skewed perceptions hurts community because it damages goodwill.

Stirring or poisoning the pot against someone in the community or holding resentments against other staffers is detrimental to a healthy culture because it chips away, little by little, at any semblance of harmony, respect and trust. And like a cancer, it grows if it is not addressed.

There are a number of ways to build goodwill and there are a number of ways to trash it. One of the most consequential ways to build goodwill is to talk to people when you disagree with them rather than about them. Conversely, one of the most consequential ways to trash goodwill is to talk about people when issues arise rather than to them.

Disagreement and conflict go with being part of a community. A false sense of unity, reflected in a sentimental view of community or superficial version of harmony, is not the same as authentic community, nor does it produce the same. True community, healthy community, does not avoid conflict or become passive-aggressive when in disagreement mode.

Conflict and community go hand-in-hand – you can't have one without the other. But there is a healthy and proper way to do both and there is an unhealthy and improper way. As already mentioned, talking *to* people with whom you conflict, rather than *about* them, is one of those healthy and proper ways.

One of the jobs of leadership in any organization is to protect the community, even from

itself. That means, amongst other things, it must protect the community from those who would violate the community by violating trust, which violates goodwill. So the job of leadership, just like the job of parents in a family, is to protect their community. When someone in the family becomes conflictual in a toxic manner, it falls to the heads of the home to intervene so as to hold the family community together. (Sometimes, to be sure, it can work in reverse as well.)

To be clear, it is not the conflict or the act of disagreement that is the problem. The problem is becoming conflictual in a way that violates goodwill. So when people in the organization (board, administration, teachers or staff) become toxic, divisive, hostile or hurtful, they cease to build goodwill and are sowing, therefore, seeds of ill-will. When that happens, cracks are starting to form and the community is starting to come apart.

It is now the leadership's responsibility (if it is even semi-healthy) to keep that from happening. Undergirded by a no-tolerance policy for violations of trust/goodwill/community, the leadership must have the courage to address it when it happens. If leadership avoids this, it is contributing (albeit unwittingly) to an emerging unhealthy school culture.

A school's goodwill policy might read like this: *all employees will be expected to build the community by building goodwill. School employees who choose to do the opposite will be held accountable.*

Additionally, if we are to take seriously the responsibility of building a healthy sense of community within our school, this policy proposal must be adopted and adhered to by each employee as both an expectation and a commitment. Short of that, a school will go the way of many other institutions of learning, becoming a hotbed of rancor and strife, where no one will want to work.

What this will mean for a well-functioning school, operationally speaking, cannot be overstated. Conversely, operational efficiency plays no small role in achieving a healthy school culture as well – both effectively feed and fuel the other.

So a healthy school culture, where people feel safe and enjoy being, is effectively built by building goodwill with all that that means, including a crystal clear mission as well as efficient operational systems. It's a never-ending effort, and the school leadership must take great pains to be proactive and intentional about keeping it front-of-mind as one of the school's central organizational objectives.

Educational Distinctives – of models and methods

Unique Models

Unique school models in America today run the gamut and there have never been more opportunities than there are presently at this time on the historical education landscape. From the old school (one-room country schoolhouse) to the new school (the five-day district public school), from homeschooling to distance learning to some creative hybrids, there are scores of scholastic models now competing in the American education marketplace.

For example, we have the Montessori Schools founded by Frenchwoman Maria Montessori in 1907 and the Ambleside Schools based on the work of Englishwoman Charlotte Mason (1842-1923). In the last 30-40 years, a host of network charter schools have sprung up, from Great Hearts and BASIS (out of Arizona) to the private Association of Classical Christian Schools out of Idaho to the Hillsdale College charter schools out of Michigan. In addition, we also find a myriad of online schools like the K12 virtual school (started in 1999 by William Bennett) or The Freedom Project's distance learning school (Appleton, Wisconsin.)

Suffice it to say, the list is endless and the options are many. This is exciting on many fronts because competition is good for education. If what the neighborhood school is doing (or not doing) is compromising quality and results, parents now have a sundry of choices. Here is a brief overview of the selective models *School of Thought* promotes:

The Micro-School ... as a modern version of the colonial schoolhouse, this model involves hiring a professional teacher to teach a small group of kids, either from one family or from several families. It can be more expensive for the parents, given there are fewer students pooled together, but the benefits are that the teacher works very closely with each student and gets to know them well. For this model, less is more. Another benefit is how the older students can help the younger students, just like in America's historic one-room schoolhouses! There is also much closer communication in this model between teacher and parent, and the students get to know their teacher well. This will be a good thing if the teacher is mature, balanced and psychologically healthy – if not, the downside is that this model will expose those deficiencies.

The University-Model School ... headquartered in Venus, Texas, it holds much promise for the education renewal process for at least three reasons: (1) Combines the best of the best – couples 2-3 days in the central classroom (at school) with 2-3 days in the satellite classroom (at home), balancing and complementing the best of both worlds; (2) parent involvement increases precipitously because parents oversee the work at home

guided by the classroom teacher; (3) with a faith-based worldview, faith-formation is the essential element in a child's overall development, and not relegated to the sidelines or elbowed out of the process. (This is the missing piece in the public school paradigm, intentionally extracted from our schools by the progressives.)

In fact, the parents who founded the University-Model were so convicted about the critical importance of their involvement in the education process, particularly the faith-formation piece, that they birthed a new vision for a kind of schooling that involved the parents as much as the teachers. Also, the unique scheduling model cut tuition prices in half, making private schooling much more feasible for more families.

Virtual Online Schools ... offered on the web by states in conjunction with their public school curriculum or by private organizations, this schooling model is sometimes known as "distance learning." The setting can be at home alone, a church building with any number of other students or in a storefront with other classmates.

Some online schools have live teachers with immediate access, while others issue their lessons via taped presentations. Some are accredited, others are not. Some students prefer this model and do better with it than the classroom model, other students do poorly for any number of reasons.

Traditional Day Schools ... whether charter or private, Christian or public, classical or progressive, traditional day schools are obviously the most common in America. Most are five-day schools, however, four-day schools are becoming more popular in certain states or within some districts. They give teachers that fifth day (Friday) for classroom preparation, professional development or a well-deserved day off, while they give students and their families more family time with a three-day weekend!

More and more teachers prefer this alternative (four-day) scheduling model (understandably), but often parents don't have the flexibility given their work schedules and/or limited options for child supervision on Fridays.

School of Thought is partial to the four-day schedule simply because less is more! It frees up one more day for the child and family to spend together, and it provides a great "catch up" or rest day for our exhausted teachers.

Also, more and more, with five full days in the classroom and the ever increasing number of activities outside the classroom (sports, after-school activities, etc.), students and parents become fatigued with too much time at school and not enough time at

home; and (2) it's best for the teacher to have that fifth day for lesson preparation, professional development or personal rest.

Ultimately, *School of Thought* commends home-schooling as the very best of all schooling options and models, *if you can do it well and do it right*. If not, the strong recommendation is to go private over public, charter over district, classical over progressive, and sectarian (faith-based) over secular.

Private because schools are supposed to be an extension of the home, not the government. Public district schools will say they are an extension of the home, but if they are tethered to the state legally and financially, that will be where their accountability ultimately lies.

If your state has passed a good ESA (Education Savings Account) bill, sending your child to a private school becomes even more viable and possible, because the tax money will follow your student to whatever school you choose. Be careful, though — some ESA bills that have been passed are very weak or flawed. A good ESA bill should include language saying specifically that the funds can be used for religious instruction and curriculum. (Check with a state legislator that you trust for clarification.)

If public school is the only option, it is best to go with a charter school over the district school if you can (exceptions notwithstanding), because again, less is more. Less students, therefore, a better teacher-student ratio. Also, less government regulations and bureaucracy to deal with (although in some states, because of abuses, it's actually become more), which might mean less woke ideology to have to contend with.

And it should be clear by now (if you've read the preceding pages) that the classical model is far preferred and recommended over the progressive model. But if that is not clear, or more reasons are needed, stay tuned – more reasons will be laid out in forthcoming pages!

Finally, choose sectarian (faith-based) schools over secular ones for one simple reason: if education really is about “teaching thinking,” then that can't be done apart from “thinking God's thoughts after Him.” To become more than a cold, utilitarian process, it has to deal with questions about what it means to be human, which can't be done apart from age-appropriate considerations of the divine.

Distinct Methodologies

In terms of instructional methodologies, the reader can be sure that there are as many

teaching methods as there are teachers. Some of the more formative ones, however, include those that should be *integral schoolwide* (i.e., used in every classroom by every teacher) and those that are more *classroom incidental* (used selectively by certain teachers in specific classrooms).

Regarding those in the *integral* category, *School of Thought* commends Mortimer Adler's "three columns" as the pre-eminent classroom teaching methods to develop:

(1) **the didactic method** – "teaching by telling" or lecture-oriented instruction; utilizes textbooks and focuses on knowledge, facts and information.

(2) **the tutorial method** – one-on-one teaching by coaching and mentoring; focuses on learning habits to form thinking skills.

(3) **the Socratic method** – teaching by questions and discussion-driven; focuses on ideas, beliefs and values.

For those *incidental* methods that are more classroom-unique, *School of Thought* recommends some of the following:

(1) **The mimetic method** – memorization and drill exercises developing basic skills. Recitation exercises employ this method as well as memorizing math facts, parts of speech, states and capitals, or memorization of biblical passages, poems or historical documents.

(2) **The mathetic method** – stresses learning by doing and self-exploration via lab demonstrations, experiential projects and hands-on learning activities. Math manipulatives, the scientific method, academic games as well as reading and writing projects accomplish this. One of the best ways to learn something is to actually do it!

(3) **Waves and layers** – an approach that structures the lessons and content to wash over the students regularly and cyclically, laying down another layer each time. This should be a daily, weekly, monthly and yearly reinforcement. This technique, which the author calls "repetition-review reinforcement," is the idea that core knowledge content and intellectual thinking skills are reinforced through consistent and regular repetition and review. It corresponds with the immersion-saturation method ...

(4) **Immersion-saturation** – the idea of total concentration, utterly "soaking" the student in the content or skills being taught; this is how some schools teach a foreign language. Working on a play or musical piece for a significant period of time does this, as does reading a good book or doing a project-based learning initiative. The best math

curricula (i.e., *Singapore Math*) effectively use this method as well with math concepts, where mastery is essential and anything less is unacceptable.

(5) **Need-created learning** – utilizing various techniques that create a natural incentive for the student to learn the concept or content, stimulating a child’s curiosity. Well-conceived questions that raise an issue or dilemma accomplish this, as well as tantalizing lesson introductions that wet the appetite or set the stage.

(6) **Scheduled flexibility** – employing a daily or weekly classroom schedule that has flexibility built in, so it is predictable but not rigid. This allows room to breathe for both teacher and student, removing unnecessary pressure (i.e., the tyranny of the urgent) from both. The scheduling side keeps both teacher and student accountable, while the flexibility side anticipates the unforeseen needs or challenges that a teacher has to sometimes flex for to effectively service the entire class or specific students.

(7) **Structured creativity** – this is the complementary twin to “scheduled flexibility” – the structure can be the design of the lesson, the daily/weekly schedule, or the scope and sequence of the curriculum. The idea is to follow the structure, but to keep it colorful and fresh through varying styles, approaches or methods. For example, structure requires certain concepts following other concepts, but creativity prompts the teacher to teach and reinforce different lessons or concepts in different ways (lecture one day, a game the next; manipulatives for one lesson, group work for the next; quiz team competition at the end of one week, quizzes/tests at the end of the next). Each day at a certain time, the same subject (structure), but each day during that same time, a different method or approach or activity (creativity) for the lesson concept of the subject.

(9) **Subtle-teaching** – Winston Churchill said, “I like to learn, I just don’t always like to be taught.” Most students feel the same way. So any time a teacher can employ subtle-teaching, where they learn something without knowing it is happening, it’s a big win. This can happen through classroom discussions, stories, sports or even through other students. Guest speakers can achieve this as well as field trips. Even disciplinary moments provide an opportunity for subtle-teaching, where no lesson was planned, but something permanent was still learned – maybe for a lifetime! I still remember to this day certain times when I was disciplined by a teacher in elementary school, and the inadvertent lesson that I learned as a result. And it wasn’t even in the lesson plans! It’s the old cliché that some things really are better caught than taught. The more the teacher can create an environment where that can happen, the more “subtle-teaching” can be employed, and the deeper student learning can go.

(10) **Self-teaching** – in my mind, this is still the best form of teaching and the best way to learn. It is also what classical education is all about and what it ultimately produces.

Students who learn to think for themselves are eventually able to teach themselves! In fact, when one wise old veteran teacher was once asked how he got his students to learn things so well, he simply said, “I never teach them anything they can learn for themselves.”

All said, it is through well-defined institutional perspectives, organizational objectives and educational distinctives, that a *School of Thought* will capture the vision for a timeless tradition worth preserving and a relentless mission worth fulfilling.

A Vision for the Board

Robert Gale, the former president of the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, said that “of the some thirty-five nonprofit boards I have served on, only one was truly effective.”

Peter Drucker, modern management theory’s most respected expert, went even further: “The decline of the board,” he said, “is a universal phenomenon of this century.”

“Among the board of directors of Fortune 500 companies, I estimate that 95% are not fully doing what they are legally, morally, and ethically supposed to do. And they couldn’t even if they wanted to.” (H.S. Geneen of ITT)

So what is the problem?

Juran and Loudon identified it succinctly when they said, “It is an astonishing fact that the job of the board of directors is, in proportion to its intrinsic importance, one of the least studied ...”

They continued, “As a consequence, the job of the board of directors has received neither the benefit of the broad exchange of practical experience nor the intensity of study which has been available to other corporate activities.”

So the second aspect of educational health and restoration involves **a vision for the board** in terms of a governing polity that is perpetuated by (1) *the board model* (defined and supported by policy governance writings and teachings); (2) *the board members* (vetted and trained by policy governance processes and precepts); and (3) *the board meetings* (ordered and guided by policy governance practices and categories).

The Board Model – defined and supported by policy governance writings and teachings.

John Carver’s magnum opus, *Boards That Make a Difference*, summed it up well: “Though possessed of ultimate organizational power, the governing board is understudied and underdeveloped. Here we confront a flagrant irony in management

literature: *where opportunity for leadership is greatest, job design for leadership is poorest.*" (Carver, p.8)

His conclusion: "Governance is overdue for a rebirth." It is this rebirth to which a *School of Thought* gives itself and hopes for, and it is the policy governance model (if adhered to with integrity) that will provide it. The night-and-day difference it will make for those school boards that see the need cannot be overstated.

John Carver is to board governance what Einstein was to physics. His policy governance model is a stroke of genius, and has greatly helped every kind of board imaginable. From major corporations to major banks – from local, state and federal governments to grade schools, high schools and universities – any board that gets immersed in his training AND adheres to the principles of his plan with fidelity, becomes remarkably healthy, effective and high-functioning.

Carver says, "A model of governance is a framework within which to organize the thoughts, activities, structure, and relationships of governing boards. A designed model yields a new nature of governance ... " (Carver, *Boards That Make a Difference*, p. 17)

So what is this "new nature of governance"? What is the *policy governance* model? At the risk of oversimplifying, here is a cursory synopsis:

First and foremost, the policy governance model is an entirely new vision for board governance. It is counter-intuitive and does not adhere to the traditional board governance constructs by which most boards operate.

If it is appropriate for the ownership of any organization to expect a board to operate in a coherent and cohesive manner, then Carver maintains that those expectations should include a systematic structure for vision-casting, a focus on values, and a look outward at the needs of the market – all rooted in and driven by the school's core mission.

Moreover, we should be able to expect a board to differentiate between primary and secondary issues, demand long-term thinking, lead more than react, become one voice without stifling dissent, stick to their job description, become discerning and selective about what information is needed (and what is not), avoid both "rubber-stamping" and "meddling," and efficiently steward board time. (Carver, pp. 17-18)

Unique to the policy governance model, a board governs by policies that will fall into one of four distinct categories: (1) The Ends, (2) The Executive Limitations, (3) The Board-Executive Relationship, and (4) the Board Process.

The Ends Policy Category: Here the board develops *policies regarding the Ends to be*

achieved by your school. It's all about focusing on the results which requires the board to clarify and sustain the school's mission.

Carver says, "The most important work of any governing board is to create and re-create the reason for organizational existence." (Carver, p. 50)

He continues, "It is a perpetual obligation, deserving of the majority of board time and energy. It is far more important than any other board undertaking, including budgets, personnel issues, risk management, and even choice of chief executive." (Carver, p. 50)

It is through this Ends policy category that boards begin to give more attention to the world outside the school than the one inside, which should be the board's main focus.

The Executive Limitations Policy Category: Here the board creates policies *regarding the means to the ends.* It's all about setting limits on the school executive, requiring explicit ethical boundaries. As long as those boundaries are respected, the principal is free to run the school.

Carver explains why this policy category is needed: "The board must have control over the complexity and details of staff operations. It is also important for a board to be free from the complexity and details of staff operations." (Carver, p. 74) So through Executive Limitations he makes the case for *freedom through limits.*

The fine line that Executive Limitations walks is, on the one hand, making sure nothing goes amiss while, on the other hand, allowing as much unrestricted space for the principal and staff to operate as is possible.

The Board Executive Relationship Policy Category: Here the board makes policies that *govern its relationship with the school principal.* It's what Carver deems the most important relationship in the entire school organization because it bears the greatest potential for such incredible or horrible outcomes.

Though it is often said that a school board's most important decision will be the choice of its school leader, Carver says there is one thing more important even than that: the quality of the relational dynamics between the principal and the board. (Carver, p. 101) "Good CEO's have been rendered ineffective as a result of poor relationships with their boards. Poor CEO's have been allowed to remain because of inadequately structured relationships with their boards," declares Carver. (Carver, p. 101)

To do this requires astute awareness of the inexorable link between the board's

responsibilities and the school leader's responsibilities. A strong school board requires a strong school executive (and vice-versa), and one way to know you have both in sync is when both operate in a complementary rather than conflictual manner. Only a clear understanding and faithful implementation of policy governance can make that happen.

The Board Process Policy Category: Here the board writes policies which deal with *the board's responsibility for itself*. Because policy governance is all about the redesign of the board job, the board must "deal explicitly with how it governs its own process, including a job description by which the board can discipline its time and action." (Carver, p. 120)

The starting point for formation of Board Process policies is what the board's overall reason for existence is, because the best process test is whether this reason is accomplished or not. The board's job description, then, forms "the bridge built between those to whom the board is accountable (*the school owners*) and those who are accountable to the board (*the school leaders*)." (Carver, p. 130)

Because "the board job description is thus the central factor in board process," we outline here Carver's "irreducible trio" relative to what the bridge between the school owners and the school leaders produce:

- (1) The board's accountability to the ownership.
- (2) The board's explicit governing policies.
- (3) The board's assurance of executive performance.

There could be more than these three, but there can be no less – these are the bare minimum. As Dr. Carver says, "The board may add other products to this list, but it cannot shorten it and still responsibly govern." (Carver, *Boards That Make a Difference*, pp. 132-133)

Since board accountability is all about how the owners are represented and how strategic leadership is provided, the burden of responsibility for good governance, Carver explains, is on the governors themselves. Therefore, the board's underlying values and perspectives as it relates to their job description must be codified and reflected in the policies of the Board Process. (Carver, p. 120)

The Board Members – screened and trained by policy governance processes and precepts.

It was not too many years ago that the founder of a school in Wyoming one day said to me, "You know, whenever a school goes off the rails or belly-up, 95% of the time

the problem is with the board.” That raised my eyebrows, but I didn’t respond because I had never heard that before. Though I didn’t dismiss it out-of-hand, I found it a little shocking and wondered if it was mere hyperbole (exaggerating a point to make a point), which is very common in the education world.

Then I heard it again, repeated by the same person, but also subsequently by some other educators. I began to wonder if there was anything to it. *Had these folk read something somewhere that I missed?* So one day while sitting in my office, I decided to check it out. I called several well-respected education consultants that I trusted.

When they answered the phone, I cut to the chase. “I’ve recently heard this statistic that when a school goes south, 95% of the time the problem is with the board ... is that true?”

Without any hesitation, equivocation or qualification, every one of them responded in the affirmative. “Yes, that is absolutely true,” they said.

I was astonished, but the reality was beginning to sink in.

“Why is that?” I asked.

Synthesizing their replies, it essentially came out like this: “Well, with few exceptions, it’s generally not because of the individuals on the board.”

“What?!” I thought.

“That’s right,” they said, “the individuals serving on most boards are well-meaning, good-hearted people who just want to make a contribution and do right by their school. They’re smart, they generally raise good kids, are successful in their careers, and are often devout people of faith ... so it’s not the individuals on the board.”

“Then what is it?” I pressed.

They said, “It’s how these individuals operate when they come together and form a board.”

“How do they operate?”

“However they want!” they exclaimed.

“Why is that?” I gasped.

They said, “Because they’ve never been trained how to be a board ... or they’ve been poorly trained, or they’ve been trained in a sub-par governance model where they think the buck stops with them.”

“Who does it stop with?” I probed.

“The owners.” they said.

“Who are the owners?”

“It depends on the institution,” they said. “For the Green Bay Packers, the owners are the people of Wisconsin. For corporations, the owners are the stockholders. For a democratic republic, the owners are We The People.”

“What about for schools?”

“The parents!” they said, “for schools, the owners are the parents.”

What a novel idea, I mused, and in that moment the fog lifted and common sense was restored. But with clarity comes a good deal of reflection, and my renewed understanding of the role of our schools and their relationship to the institution of the home made me wonder how I missed this! How did I come to see school boards (public or private) as the ultimate owners of our schools? One answer, I quickly realized, was obvious: *that’s how most school boards saw themselves.*

And how did they come to see themselves that way? Quite simply, that’s how they were trained – or, in the absence of training, that’s what they came to believe from watching other boards operate or from serving on other boards.

In stark contrast, a vision reset in our schools will only begin by acknowledging the parents as the owners of our schools. The parents are the boss, so it is the parents we serve – not the teachers, not the principals, not the board themselves, not the education establishment, and not the state. When the truth of this reality takes hold, it not only re-orientes one’s approach, but it also has a wonderful humbling effect.

And though this view makes some board members nervous, a few even angry, equivocation is not an option. It is unlikely that this conviction will ever be embraced by the education establishment and will be rejected by the elitist social engineers. Nonetheless, most board members would absolutely concur if they just knew their role.

Because it all boils down to the most pivotal element in the entire education equation ... *trust*. Schools lose their social license to exist when parent trust is broken.

Board members are called “trustees” because in such a role, they hold a position of trust. Whether that involves holding property, authority or a position of responsibility, it is all about trust for the benefit of another.

Note the two key parts here: (1) a position of trust, and (2) the benefit of another. It is these two core elements that give definition to an organization’s entrusted stewards. This is especially true for K-12 education institutions because they deal with underaged youth who are still under the auspices and authority of their parents at home. If a board understands its role and faithfully fulfills it, a trustee’s most important capital (trust) will grow – if not, it won’t.

When problems emerge in terms of the school board and its relationship to the owners (the parents), it’s not by accident. But if this epidemic dilemma in board governance is not fundamentally a people problem, what kind of problem is it?

Answer ... a board vetting and training problem.

Sequentially and logically, the recruitment and vetting process should come before the training, which must be both rigorous and vigorous if it is to fulfill its purpose. Selecting the right people must replace the easy shortcuts of filling vacancies, because getting unqualified, untrained or uncommitted people can quickly paralyze a board and derail a school’s mission and effectiveness.

This invites a set of thoughtful *recruitment requirements* and should be developed and recorded as a Board Process policy. Carver says the following five qualifications are essential for prospective board members:

- (1) A dogged commitment to the ownership and the mission.*
- (2) A strong propensity to think in terms of the whole rather than the parts.*
- (3) A natural ability to deal with values, vision and the long-term.*
- (4) The ability to participate assertively in deliberation.*
- (5) Willingness to delegate and share power.*

There are certainly more that can be added and each board should do so as they see the need. But these five qualifications are the top five and, therefore, the bare minimum for any prospective school board member. (Carver, pp. 203-204)

No words can describe the painful consequences that can develop from the dysfunctional group dynamic in the absence of a proven and highly effective board-training paradigm, and most board-training paradigms are neither proven nor highly effective.

How can a board know how to operate if it has never been trained properly in how to do so? Because like anything else, there is a right way and a wrong way, and as most board members will tell us, it is not as easy as it looks.

So at the very least, the board training process* should include the following regimen:

- Read carefully and completely Carver's two definitive works on the subject: *Boards That Make a Difference* and *Reinventing Your Board*.
- The Carver online course or the in-person training in Grand Rapids, Michigan (or even better, both!).

**[This training requirement too should be written into policy under the Board Process category.]*

Furthermore, it is better if the board goes through the entire training process together rather than apart as individuals. This not only maintains engagement levels but ends up being a richer experience for all involved when done in community. Through the group interactions, questions and clarifications, an "iron-sharpening-iron" dynamic ensues which helps reinforce the concepts taught. This is the first step to the board working together as a unit.

The Board Meetings – ordered and guided by policy governance practices and categories.

The title of Patrick Lencioni's book, *Death By Meeting*, says it all and Roberta Flack's 1973 hit song, *Killing Me Softly*, could have been referencing many a school board meeting. It is all too often the one place where institutional vision gets buried, meeting its untimely death.

If a board has never been properly and thoroughly trained in the policy governance model, the first place it will show is in how long the board meetings go. Carver identifies a short agenda as the most obvious feature of a well-run board meeting and maintains that a lengthier agenda is a sign of just the opposite.

"Instead of facing a plethora of issues," Dr. Carver says, "the board encounters a much shorter, though deeper, list." The idea (like most everything in education) is that *less is more*. During board meetings, boards should not be getting into the weeds of the daily management of the school – that's what they hired the principal to do. Boards are to deal with the big picture, i.e., the long-term strategy and school vision fueled by the board's values and perspectives that give life to the board's policies.

Another feature of a high-functioning board is that attendance is high; board meetings are the highest priority and not optional. If the meeting is run according to policy

governance practices and policy categories, board meetings are engaging, interesting, highly consequential and refreshingly efficient!

In a policy governance meeting, time is of the essence. There is no room (because there is no time) for the laundry list of operational issues, staff show-n-tell or what a board member heard from the latest complaining parent.

Says Gene Royer, "Surely our forebears did not envision our taking on all these combined chores and cramming them into a two-hour meeting once or twice a month" (Royer, 1996b, p. 61) Dealing with maintenance issues, comparing medical insurance rates or selecting security systems (all management tasks) leaves no time for the long view.

So the board meeting becomes the place where board dialogue is managed, board issues are selected, board agendas are formed, the board process is initiated, and board consensus is achieved. According to the policy governance paradigm, this is the meat of a board meeting.

Managing board dialogue requires a disciplined board, focusing on what is discussed, how it is discussed, and when it is discussed. Random conversations are ichabod. This means screening the issues before the board meeting, which should be clarified through the Board Process (Carver's fourth policy category).

The first screening question: What policy category does each particular issue fall under, Ends, Executive Limitations, Board Process, or Board-Executive Relationship? The second screening question: Whose issue is it, the board's or the principal's? The third screening question: What has the board already said in this policy category and how is this present issue related? (John Carver, *Boards That Make a Difference*, p. 174)

Planning the agenda starts with the question, "What do we have to do this month?" When boards allow this question to be answered by the school principal or driven by staff issues, they not only lose sight of what a board issue looks like, but the followers are telling the leaders what their job is.

Carver explains why the board agenda must be tethered to the long-term vision and the importance of using the Ends (the mission) to justify the meetings. With the former, it's all about the perpetual agenda versus the immediate agenda, which is dictated by the board's basic job description: (1) accountability to the school's ownership, (2) forming governing policies, (3) monitoring the principal's performance. (Carver, p. 132) Carver says "the central organizing factor is the never-ending focus on mission and other Ends policies. (Carver, p. 183)

Furthermore, Carver emphasizes how crucial it is that this whole process starts with securing each board member's commitment to the policy governance model, which won't happen apart from comprehensive, quality training in the model. Without that rock-solid commitment, this will likely be a short-lived effort at best. (Carver, p. 185)

From there, the board begins developing policies from scratch, which should happen, Carver explains, even before the school ownership and school principal dynamics begin. When consensus is achieved centered around the four board policy categories (Ends, Executive Limitations, Board-Executive Relationships, Board Process), the board can then move forward with policy expansion (Carver, p. 186-187).

Finally, the primary goal in a board meeting under the policy governance model is to see multiple voices become one. This means *E Pluribus Unum* (out of many, one) and requires both pursuing pluribus and reaching unum.

Pursuing pluribus means disagreement is not only tolerated but welcomed, even encouraged. Divergent viewpoints are relished because it mines the collective wisdom of the governing body.

Reaching unum means ultimately achieving consensus and coming out of the meeting as one united voice. As Carver describes it, "When the vote is taken, the official pronouncement is as firm as if there had been no disagreement at all." (Carver, pp. 188-191)

A Vision for the Administration

The third part of this blueprint involves **a vision for the administration** in terms of a cohesive continuity achieved by (1) the leadership *selection process* (worldview alignment, clear definition, thorough background checks); (2) some core *supervision principles* (well-trained, connected, organized, balanced, principled and visionary), and (3) a well-worked *succession plan* (talent identifications, team cultivations and timely transitions).

Selection Process – you get what you vet.

In the principal selection process, *aligned worldviews* are the most critical factor and should be given the highest priority. A worldview is the lens through which one understands not only education but all of life. It is the rudder on one's ship and the "true north" of one's compass that provides ultimate discernment and direction. Moreover, it is the anchor that keeps an individual or institution grounded and rational if consistent with truth and reality; conversely, it is the fog that clouds one's vision if not.

When all the layers are peeled back, the two leading worldviews are philosophically, practically and permanently incompatible. Not only is there a great gulf fixed between them but never shall the twain meet. For example, what follows are some of the core areas that are diametrically at odds:

- View of God (*theism vs. atheism*)
- View of human nature (*inherently flawed vs. basically good*)
- View of truth (*absolute vs. relative*)
- View of morality (*objective vs. subjective*)
- View of human sexuality (*historic vs. postmodern*)
- View of religion (*freedom of vs. freedom from*)
- View of government (*limited vs. centralized*)
- View of the family and marriage (*traditional vs. alternative*)
- View of education (*classical vs. progressive*)

To try to accommodate both of these worldviews within a school at the same time will be an exercise in futility and cognitive dissonance. It produces little more than mixed signals, muddy waters, conflict and a veritable identity crisis. Although riding the fence and keeping the peace seems easier, in the long run, it only drags out the inevitable.

To move forward with a secure institutional identity which provides both stability and continuity, simultaneously protecting the school's future, a school needs worldview clarity and alignment. Which worldview it embraces, and how it communicates the same effectively to the rest of the school community, will be the key.

To redeem American education, the *School of Thought* proposition is to expressly adopt the historic Judaeo-Christian worldview as its foundation, anchor and "true north". After that has been duly clarified and secured, it is the role of the school board to find a school leader with the same worldview. This will be the most important decision a school board will make and it is imperative they get it right.

The next crucial piece is a clear-eyed *definition of leadership* itself. Differentiating between what it is and isn't helps the board steer clear of the culture's dominant (albeit superficial) notions. For example, leadership is **not** a position, a title or a string of degrees. Moreover, to simply hire a "manager" is an equally big mistake.

The three-fold leadership cord is conduct, character and compassion. Conduct is what the leader does through influence, investing, service, example and envisioning. Character is who the leader is in the form of integrity, humility and maturity integrated with wisdom and courage, while compassion is how well the leader cares, which starts with listening and is followed by understanding, empathy and tough love.

Leadership is essentially a gift and a calling, and as two sides of the same coin, the board must seek clear evidence for both. A principal is the “headmaster,” the head of teachers, and should, therefore, possess the dual gift-set of both leadership and teaching. Anything less will short-change both the school and the teachers.

Finally, a thorough *background check*, if done right, will serve to get a handle on the principal-candidate’s personal character and professional reputation. While this begins with both professional recommendations and personal references, legal background checks as well contribute to the overall picture. This of course takes time, but the peace of mind through confirmation will be worth it. Impatience becomes the enemy of wise hiring practices and prudence demands there is no stone left unturned.

So the central elements of the leadership selection process must include aligned worldviews, a clear leadership definition and comprehensive background checks. Anything less puts the school at considerable risk.

Supervision Principles – the principal's principles.

Leadership is lonely and difficult. Principled leadership is exceedingly lonely and extremely difficult. It takes an individual of strength and maturity to be principled in any role, but it takes a person of unparalleled character to be effective as a school leader.

Because a school leader works with so many emotionally invested parties, the demands are great and the responsibilities enormous. School leadership requires work with the board, the administrative team, parents, teachers, staff and students, not to mention the community at large. To do this consistently and effectively requires a unique set of personal qualities, character traits and professional skills. The selection process ascertains the presence or absence of these critical attributes, but it is a certain body of supervision principles that give the leader direction. We might call them the “principal’s principles,” and the first one is to simply be (you guessed it) ... *principled*.

For every true leader, there are some things that *are* a high enough hill to die on. These convictions are the leader’s non-negotiables, and they are ultimately defined by the leader’s value system. To live by them faithfully requires both integrity and courage. Integrity is moral uprightness and the quality of being honest. Courage is the ability to do something that scares you or the strength one exercises in the face of pain or grief.

A leader without integrity is the worst kind of leader and a leader without courage is not a leader at all. What distinguishes leaders from followers is a set of principles and the courage to live by them. In fact, the words I once observed on the wall of Fire Station 21 in Wichita, Kansas said it best, “Courage is the ladder on which all other virtues mount.”

The second supervision principle of a high-quality school leader in a credible *School of Thought* is that he or she must be *well-trained*, personally and professionally. This involves not just a college education, but an education in classical education. Apart from this, the potential school leader is not well-trained.

Though this will be offensive to some and make others bristle, there can be no vacillating on this point. It is so important, in fact, it must be reiterated for clarity's sake: a budding young principal trained in the progressive approach to education is *not* well-trained, because the progressive approach is not good education, as the first part of this book attempted to illustrate. Pulling punches here would be disingenuous.

The third supervision principle of an effective school leader is the principle of *connection*. The best school leaders are visible, responsive and accessible, committed to consistent communication with parents, teachers, students, the board and the community. In short, successful school leaders are well-connected. They are “people people” because they not only like people but have a sixth sense of how important regular communication with people is.

The fourth one is the *organization* principle. Though this does not come naturally to every good leader, every good leader instinctively works at it. Knowing organization relieves stress, effective school leaders either get organized or delegate to those who are. This primarily centers around organizing two key administrative areas: the leader's schedule and the leader's job description. Time management is half the job, job management is the other half. Both overlap, but also require separate attention.

Balance is the fifth “principal's principle.” To achieve temperamental balance as well as work-life balance demonstrates not only maturity but wisdom. People feel safe with a balanced temperament; conversely, they feel unsafe with the opposite. This is not the line of work for “hotheads,” impatient or moody personalities.

Additionally, being a workaholic is not something to be proud of, nor is it the example school leaders want to set, if they care at all about their own families, not to mention the message and unspoken expectation they're communicating to the rest of the staff.

And school boards may need to help principals set these boundaries if they can't (or won't) themselves! A good school leader is a very conscientious professional and not afraid of hard work or long hours, so going home by 5:00 pm is not an easy call when there is still so much work to do. But school boards protect their principals when they communicate both their expectations and concern for their leader's work-life balance.

There are, of course, seasons in every school year that require overtime hours, but this should not become the norm. And this is one of the major reasons there is a massive exodus from school administration across the country. It's just too much. School heads not only often feel like they can do nothing right (granted, some are very inept), but they're overwhelmed and approach burnout fast because of it. A caring school board will do everything they can to protect their principal from this fate.

Finally, the *visionary* principle. A school leader must be a visionary, not just a manager. He or she must see things others don't see and envision possibilities that others don't envision. Dreaming big is a "principal's principle" that every school leader should live by.

Additionally, a true education visionary understands the wisdom of knowing not only the school's specific history but also the general history of American education. Believing context and perspective best inform the future, visionary school leaders are forever looking back before they look forward.

Moreover, the school leader's vision must be formed and informed by the school's stated mission right alongside the challenge of developing a healthy school culture as well as operational efficiencies. The latter two (school culture and operations) are not the strong suit of far too many schools, and for that reason alone, should absorb the greater part of a principal's vision.

Finally, though not the fun part of a school leader's vision-casting responsibilities, it must include and involve a vision for future *fiscal challenges* (a balanced budget, robust donor base, federal independence), *optional choices* (various school models, schedules, curriculum) and *legal changes* (from government control to constitutional protection, tax-funded to tax exempt, religious cancellation to religious liberation.) Each of these are covered in more detail in the *Vision for the Future segment* (pp. 105-136).

These are the "principal's principles," and though not exhaustive, they are the essential six for effective school heads. The best school principals are, first and foremost, principled in their convictions, decisions and interactions. After that, they are well-trained, connected, organized, balanced and visionary.

Succession Plan – passing the baton without dropping it.

One of the most overlooked components of the entire school leadership construct is the transition from the person in charge to his or her successor. Handing off the baton successfully requires some real preparation. Many schools experience high leadership turnover or suffer from devastating trainwrecks because they did not have a proactive, intentional and long-term succession plan.

Thoughtful foresight raises the specter significantly for “a good fit” as well as a seamless transition, therefore, it is incumbent on the school’s board of directors to develop a strategic succession plan in terms of *talent identification*, *team cultivation* and *timely transitions*.

A school’s leadership succession plan begins with identifying leadership talent years before it is needed. Typically, this would be a 5-10 year process and, ideally, this talent should come from the school’s own teaching faculty for a number of reasons:

(1) Promoting from within rather than importing from without has proven to be the best way to go, exceptions notwithstanding. This of course requires investing in your own people, but it’s an investment worth making because it bolsters trust and respect amongst the troops, not to mention motivation. Ambitious teachers who have leadership potential need to be encouraged and rewarded with the prospects of advancement, and it builds a stronger sense of community and loyalty when teachers know they will be looked at first before an outsider.

(2) A top-notch school principal should be, first and foremost, a master teacher. A “manager” who functions primarily as an administrator creates an unwitting separation between the administration and the classroom, and compromises the respect that is needed between the classroom teachers and the “headmaster” (head teacher). Hiring a principal whose first love is teaching should not be the exception but the rule. Conversely, a school leader who has little or no experience in the classroom, or lacks a passion for pedagogy, will also be void of the energy and focus needed to keep teachers sharp and challenged.

(3) Promoting from the ranks of your teaching faculty has proven to be the best way to reinforce and sustain the cultural DNA of the school as well as its mission and vision. On the flip side, bringing in outside leadership raises the prospects of disrupting or controverting the same. Having observed this too many times to speak of, unfortunately, such a dilemma seems to be more the norm than the exception. It can be mitigated, however, by developing those who are already part of the team, as so many schools have discovered.

Therefore, classroom teachers who have the gift and passion to move into leadership roles can find a path through a leadership succession plan. When the process of building and training a leadership team is part of the vision, every person on that team is incentivized to be a potential prospect for the top job someday.

It is not overstating the proposition to say that mentoring future leaders is one of the most important tasks of any school leader and, perhaps, one of the most enjoyable!

Because it has so many far-reaching and rewarding ramifications, reproducing oneself as a leader should be a leader's top priority.

The training might include a systematic focus on every area of school leadership, including operations, teacher supervision, school finances, budget management, curriculum development, marketing, community involvement, board policy governance, parent interactions and accountability, long-term strategic planning and oversight/compliance demands as well as (you guessed it!) leadership development.

When the time is right and ripe (and that day will come), the transition will be much more seamless than it would have been without a succession plan. Wise school leadership takes the 20-year view and prepares carefully for that day. To be able to look under your own nose and find future leaders waiting in the wings — ready, willing and fully prepared to take the baton — is a huge blessing to any outgoing school leader, and it should be the rule, not the exception.

When it is not, we know we have a problem and probably helps explain, at least in part, how and why our schools were overtaken by the progressive offensive that was launched at the beginning of the 20th Century.

A Vision for the Parents

Beethoven's music teacher said of him, "As a composer, he is hopeless."

Winston Churchill failed the sixth grade. Einstein could not speak until he was four years old and did not read until he was seven. Caruso's music teacher told him, "You can't sing, you have no voice at all."

Leon Tolstoy flunked out of college. Louis Pasteur was rated mediocre in chemistry when he attended Royal College. Isaac Newton did poorly in grade school.

Thomas Edison's kindergarten teacher dubbed him "retarded." His mother, however, quickly discerned it was not her son's mind that was deficient but the teacher's mindset, so she taught him herself ... at home. The rest, as they say, is history.

While it is true that what happens at school matters, it is what happens at home that absolutely makes the difference. Parents are their children's first and best teachers.

That's why, again, in the great education triad (parents, teachers and students), the parents come first. The kids we teach are *their* kids; they pay the taxes which pay our salaries, so we as educators work for them — not vice-versa.

Maintaining and protecting parental authority in our society, therefore, begins with doing so in our schools. When that happens, the notion of the parents as the owners of our schools becomes a commitment we champion and celebrate, rather than one we resist or endure. On top of that, this conviction must be restated and reinforced over and over again not only because of the times we live in, but also because of a counter perspective that has been simmering beneath the surface for over a century.

Remember Elwood P. Cubberly? As the author of college textbooks that were used by generations of educators in this country, it was no less than prophetic when he envisioned back in 1909 a new era in public education that would become “*paternalistic, even socialistic*” and believed that each year the child was “*coming to belong more and more to the state, and less and less to the parents.*” [Elwood P. Cubberly, *Changing Conceptions of Education* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1909), pp.44, 61-63.]

The only antidote to this lingering statist impulse is **a vision for the parents** in terms of the ultimate authority sustained through (1) *parent responsibility* (the parents for their children via increased involvement); (2) *school accountability* (the school to the parents via communiques & feedback); and (3) *teacher accessibility* (the teachers to the parents via reasonable availability expectations).

Parent Responsibility – affirming the child’s first teacher.

Let’s clarify first what we mean by parent responsibility and what we do not mean ...

What this does not mean is that we will accommodate every squeaky wheel or entertain every petty criticism. It does not mean we won’t support our teachers if they are unfairly or unduly accused or harangued. And it does not mean established protocols get ignored or professional boundaries get obliterated – a teacher’s personal time must be respected and protected.

What this does mean is that we will not slip something suspect into the curriculum unbeknownst to the parents, raising sensitive, difficult or inappropriate issues with the students that should be left to the parents to discuss with their kids at home. It means we will not hide something from the parents regarding their child’s temperament struggles or identity issues that they (the parents) should know about.

But it also means that if the parents are ultimately responsible for their children, then the parents must *take* responsibility – the school cannot do it all, nor should it try. Teachers are leaving the profession in droves, and one of the main reasons cited is that they’re now expected to do everything and be everything. It’s not only unrealistic and unreasonable, it’s impossible.

So parent responsibility means parents are their children's first and best teachers, which means they must step up and be intimately involved in their child's education. The best place to start, of course, is at the beginning (K-2nd grades), and the best subject to start with is reading. For example, consider the following ...

Only one in five eighth graders read for fun anymore, while 65% watch three hours or more of television each day. Incredibly, the average kindergarten graduate has already seen more than five thousand hours of television in his or her young life (more time than it takes to earn a degree). In fact, the television industry estimates that over two million children under the age of eleven are still watching TV at midnight each night.

These statistics do not bode well for a literate American populace when the studies show that reading proficiency declines as TV viewing gets up to the three-hour mark. The read-aloud guy, Jim Trelease, was unsurprisingly unapologetic in his claims that in its short lifetime, television has become the major stumbling block to literacy in America.

But if the purpose of education is "to learn to think," and the electronic drug is producing lamebrains, how do we change their minds? Trelease said, just turn off the TV, get out a good book, and read aloud! Ever the optimist, he believed that a nation where 90 percent of the children can read and choose to read, instead of the present 40-50 percent, is not inconceivable. This is where the parents come in, he said, and the earlier you start, the better. Because, Trelease reminds us, the issue is not understanding but conditioning. The child gets used to the parent's voice and the entire reading experience, and something deeply relational begins to develop.

From personal accounts, we know this home habit is a way of life for many families, and how encouraging it is that a growing number of young parents nowadays are seeing the importance and seizing the opportunity. Recognizing literacy as the foundation every child needs to soar in life is critical.

Parents should be assured that as this foundation is laid at home, we will be committed to strengthening the same at school through the comprehensive approach of an Orton-based method that teaches the logic and code of English through the time-tested journey of "spelling to reading."

We know that if children can spell a word, they can read it, but just because a child can read a word does not mean he or she can spell it. So the science of reading tells us to begin with phonology (the sound structure of words) and orthography (the spelling system of English) and give children all the tools they need for encoding (spelling) words. This will automatically transfer, then, to decoding (reading) words.

As parents read to (or with!) their children at home, and we pursue the path to strengthen all things literacy at school, we can anticipate the exponential fruit it will bear. Young people who love to read are usually well-read, and young people who are good at reading are much more likely to do it. The end result will be a literate citizenry, and the end result of that will be a thinking people – education’s ultimate purpose.

School Accountability – parents as the owners of our schools.

When it comes to our schools and the accountability issue, the highest levels of angst come from the parents who feel like now they can’t fully trust their schools and have to watch them like a hawk. This to me is the most troubling part of this entire dilemma – the effect it is having on the parents. This is why the stakes are so high.

No effective or responsible education institution can avoid this issue or side-step it by looking the other way or invoking a neutral position. As the owners, we are accountable to the parents and, therefore, we must listen closely to them.

Those who serve on school boards are not the owners of our schools, they are merely the agents or representatives of the owners.

Those who serve in government are not the owners of our schools; they are only guardians of society placed there to protect parental authority and local control.

And those of us who teach in the classrooms are not the owners of our schools – we have simply been hired by the parents to work for the parents in educating their kids.

So when the parents feel like they’ve lost control, or are being ignored, or worse yet, are viewed as the enemy, we know we have a problem, and things have gotten out of whack. Hence, the reason for the exploding homeschool movement as well as the exponential rise of private and charter schools in this nation.

As an educator, I tend to view this entire issue (primarily) through the lens of a parent simply because I am, first and foremost, a parent of seven children. Secondly, through the lens of a teacher, because I was a classroom teacher for seventeen years. Finally, through the lens of a student, because I was a student for many years as well (grade school, high school, college).

So the great educational enterprise is the triad of parents, teachers, students – in that order. We work *with* the teachers, we work *with* the students, we work *for* the parents. To confuse that order and blur that focus is when things start to go awry.

Policy-formation has been delegated to the board, it is true, while daily management of the school has been delegated to the administrative team. Similarly, academic instruction has been delegated to the teachers. But therein lies the point: it has been *delegated*, and the delegators are the parents. Consequently, a commensurate spirit of deference and humility requires us as educators to listen carefully to them, because as the owners, they're the boss.

Teacher Accessibility – maintaining that personal touch.

Parent responsibility and school accountability is best reinforced through teacher accessibility. Whether it's answering emails within twenty-four hours or being available at the start or end of the school day, teacher-accessibility is a teacher's most important asset and, for most parents, it will cover a multitude of pedagogical sins.

Personal and professional boundaries must be maintained to be sure, but teacher-accessibility builds trust faster and better than anything else, making parents feel respected, safe and liked. Though this may be the most difficult part of the job, this is the part that every teacher must prioritize and get really good at, because success here means success in so many other areas.

Conversely, teacher inaccessibility will build frustrations and tension faster than any other single thing in the teaching profession. Understandably, there are few things that can dysregulate a parent quicker than being in the dark about homework or not knowing why Johnnie is struggling.

Because the job of a teacher is so difficult and all-consuming (next to parenting, the hardest job on earth), this emphasis and expectation does not necessarily go without saying. Some teachers intuitively sense how important this is, so naturally gravitate towards it. Other teachers either don't get it, want to avoid it like the plague, or have been encouraged to do so (intentionally or unwittingly) by other teachers or school leadership with negative comments about "hovering parents," "parent pests" or the like.

While it is true that every teacher will have to deal with one or two parents each year who are cut out of difficult cloth, most parents are reasonable, respectful and positive. But whether they are supportive or conflictual, we in the education field must be reminded a thousand times that these are their kids – so whether toxic or healthy, accessibility is the right and best way to go. When inaccessible, the toxic parents just become more toxic, and if communication is not regular and timely, even healthy parents can become feisty, understandably so.

Now at the risk of stating the obvious, we would be remiss not to mention the three best teacher accessibility modes. They are (1) in person, (2) on the phone, and (3) in writing (personal notes, confidential letters, class newsletters, emails or texts). And it is still best practice to prioritize them in that order and practice them in that sequence.

Face-to-face, in-person accessibility is always the most effective because it is the most human and, therefore, the best received – nothing beats human presence. It is definitely (at times) more difficult to manage and can be less efficient because most teachers are “people people” and therefore like to talk, so it can become more time-consuming. With experience, however, teachers can become very good at maintaining that personal touch while being time-efficient as well. The potential “timesuck” notwithstanding, it’s still worth the price because it is the best way to build goodwill, which is the best way to build trust, which is the best way to build that all-important parent-teacher relationship.

Strengthening accessibility systems that help support and regulate availability expectations is what many teachers do well while others struggle. Constructing habits, routines and rhythms into one’s daily or weekly schedule will establish and reinforce strong accessibility systems, even on the teacher’s busiest days.

These accessibility systems, unique to each teacher’s daily/weekly schedule, will also help train the parents in terms of the teacher’s personal and professional boundaries, which is the final and (for some) the most difficult piece of this parent focus.

In the parent-teacher relationship, boundaries must strike that fine balance between being firm and being flexible. In finding that balance, though often a judgment call, there are some basic principles that can help guide the delineation of appropriate and reasonable boundaries. One of those is the “off-limits” principle (weekends, personal cell phones, summer vacations, etc.). Another one might be the “24 hour” principle (returning all voicemails and emails within 24 hours). Beyond those, the school administration and classroom teacher should establish their own specific boundary-principles to communicate.

The key with being accessible is in a teacher’s attitude towards the parents they serve. Some teachers (for a variety of reasons) may have developed a negative attitude towards the parent community at-large; others struggle with ambivalence towards the same. Thankfully, most teachers do well with conveying a positive attitude because they know intuitively how important it is to build goodwill with their parents.

As teachers are gracious and accessible within their boundaries, most parents will be gracious and respectful in return. But it stands to reason that if parents are both the

owners of our schools and the customers we work for, the right attitude is one of respect, kindness, support, flexibility, grace, humility and patience. Anything less will not work and, therefore, will not do. Just as no teacher relishes dealing with a smothering parent, so no parent wants to deal with an inaccessible teacher.

A Vision for the Teachers

Dr. Thomas Sowell once said, “Teaching is the hardest job in the world if you care, and the easiest if you don’t.” A school is only living up to its mission, then, when it is populated by a line-up of teachers who care about their craft, the subject matter they teach, and most of all, about their students. This is the only way to become a powerful and effective *School of Thought*.

Moreover, this is the marked difference between teaching as a calling and teaching as a job, between someone who has the gift of teaching and someone who has only the training. And if it is at all true that people don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care, then it is certainly most true in the classroom.

But this only begins to set the stage, because **a vision for the teachers** is truly fostered by a stratified panoramic view, that includes at least three scenes in terms of an inspired instruction: (1) the *promotional elevation* scene (how we view and value our teachers); (2) the *professional propagation* scene (how we recruit and retain our teachers); (3) the *pedagogical supervision* scene (how we cultivate and critique our teachers).

Promotional Elevation – how we view and value our teachers.

There are few professions today which uniquely contribute to the very fiber of our country. The farmer has been called “the backbone of America.” Our military holds the security of the nation in its hands, and the preacher determines the moral and spiritual temperature of the land. Their paycheck is small; their contribution is great.

In the same company with this elite group should be found the teacher, but all too often this has not been the case. As the saying goes, “Those who can, do; those who can’t, teach.” The teaching profession sometimes gets about as much respect as comedian Rodney Dangerfield said he once got.

However, in some European countries, teachers are considered to be in the same league as doctors and lawyers. In Asian countries, they are respected and revered as much as their national leaders and put on a higher pedestal than even their athletes or celebrities. Taiwan, for example, has no mass teacher-shortage crisis like America

because everyone there wants to be a teacher! And the vetting process is so intense, less than 1% make the cut. Literally, the pedestal they place their teachers on makes it the most coveted profession in their society, attracting the best and the brightest from amongst their ranks for the classroom.

Viewing teaching as the most important profession in our society and valuing teachers as the most important professionals in our community is at the very heart of a serious *School of Thought*. Because how we view and value our teachers reflects how we view and value our children; the degree to which we care for those who care for our kids is inevitably and inexorably linked.

But to be clear, how we elevate our teachers must come through in very tangible ways or it doesn't come through at all. How we *invest* in them, *compensate* them, *recognize* them and *promote* them is how we view and value them. Conversely, how we don't invest, compensate, recognize or promote them reflects something less.

The teacher *investment* process comes through things like continued education, regular training workshops and staff-wide book-reading assignments along with the pedagogical supervision cycle mentioned above. And this investment becomes even more hardy when it comes from not only outside sources but from some of the school's own teachers as well.

Teacher *compensation* comes financially through the most generous salaries our budgets can realistically and reasonably provide along with bonuses at least once, if not twice a year. These bonuses might be based on performance, committee contributions, or a combination of both. Stipends provide another form of compensation, in payment for added responsibilities assumed beyond the teacher's job description (coaching, lunch or after-school duty, tutoring or other tasks that go above and beyond).

Recognizing teachers in meaningful ways is the most important way to show how school leaders, board members and parents view and value them. Regular ad hoc praise when good work is spotted is of course the best, but then from there, hand-written notes and emails as well as parent gifts, dinners, awards and other gestures of appreciation are extra special, keep it personal and extremely encouraging.

Finally, institutionalizing ways to *promote* your best teachers is very important. Whether it be to make them committee or department heads, or move them onto some level of the administrative team, a program must be developed that gives teachers plenty of incentive to do good work and rewards it when they do. (See "*Vision for the Administration*" section/*Succession Plan*, pp. 58-60, for more on this.)

A major magazine carried an article some years ago about the jobs in America that had the highest stress levels. First on the list was brain surgeons, second was air-traffic controllers, third was teachers ... and only a teacher knows. But with the vision of promotional elevation, we can give honor to whom honor is due, invest in our teachers through an “iron sharpening iron” dynamic, and see their legacy live long and get passed onto the next generation.

Professional Propagation – how we recruit and retain our teachers.

There are many factors and variables in finding and keeping the best and brightest teachers for our schools and our students. Investing in our teachers through extensive training and robust financial compensation packages are the most obvious. Beyond that though, wisdom and some painful stories have highlighted the need for a more strategic recruitment and retention plan.

Exceptions notwithstanding, a school’s *recruitment* plan is most efficient when it systematically employs the mechanisms of teacher referrals, a student-teacher program, job postings/interviews, and the teacher apprenticeship model.

Teacher referrals are a great resource because teachers know teachers. They generally know the difference between a good teacher and the opposite. Because they have an inside track, already knowing the culture of the school and the personality of the teacher being referred, they generally have a good sense about whether this hire would be a good fit or not.

If there is a downside to referrals, it might be that with friendships come blindspots – your own teacher might be very aware of the referral’s strengths but might be equally unaware of his or her weaknesses. Nonetheless, teacher referrals still remain one of the tried-and-true best recruitment methods. Soliciting referrals from your teaching staff coupled with a bonus stipend for successful hires can be a win-win deal for all parties.

A *student-teacher program* is an important piece to this puzzle as well. The school gets to observe the student-teacher for at least a semester in conjunction with his or her college education program. This gives administration and staff plenty of time to get to know the teacher in terms of personality, character traits and work ethic as well as teaching and people skills. Such a context provides the necessary levels of vetting and training for this young teacher, and serves to determine the “fit” dynamic for the future.

Job postings/interviews are the most standard way to hire teachers, and they often produce good results. They can also be a two-edged sword, and therefore (sometimes), a real crap-shoot. Most everyone can do a good interview and personal references as

well as professional recommendations are generally easy to come by. Which means, if this is the only mechanism of hire, both parties won't know for sure if this is a good fit until they actually work with each other for a year or two.

In addition, the risk level rises precipitously if the hire is hasty (i.e., during the final weeks before school) or if the school leadership has not been able to observe the teacher-candidate in action, for example, through an actual mock lesson.

Finally, one of the most creative, recent and promising teacher recruitment developments is what has become known as *the teacher apprenticeship model*. The unprecedented mass exodus of teachers in this country leaving the education profession in the last several years has been unlike any other time in American history. As it creates the context for a serious crisis in the integrity of the K-12 education fabric, the quality of the student learning process becomes potentially compromised.

With the bewildering loss of experienced teachers comes a detrimental effect on professional mentoring efforts in our schools as well as the maturity and skill gleaned only from years in the classroom. This setback can also affect schools financially given the amount of training that goes into preparing new classroom teachers.

The first step, of course, is to address some of the reasons why this is happening. Though the causes may differ from school to school, district to district and community to community, there are some common threads: low salaries, conflictual student attitudes and behaviors, lack of administrative support, poor teaching conditions, society's culture wars, difficult parents and teacher burn-out.

But who better to ask than the teachers themselves? This makes exit interviews essential and moves them front-and-center in a focused teacher propagation vision. Every teacher who leaves your school or the teaching profession should be interviewed, both on paper and in person. What you will discover is always helpful and often mind-blowing, even if at times, negative. Not only that but it communicates how much you care about two things: their opinion and improving the school.

The second step is to institute a well-conceived teacher apprenticeship program. If necessity is the mother of invention, then mass teacher vacancies have created much necessity across the nation. In the state of Tennessee, this need resulted in the invention of a teacher apprenticeship program that was nothing short of genius.

In January of 2022, the Tennessee Department of Education, under the leadership of Education Commissioner Penny Schwinn, unveiled its new teacher apprenticeship

initiative to pioneer a novel way for developing a new teacher pipeline. As such, they became the first state approved by the U.S. Department of Labor to birth a seminal “grow your own” model. Said Commissioner Schwinn, “Tennesseans are innovating to provide the opportunity to become teachers for free while earning a wage.”

Beginning with the Clarksville-Montgomery County School System and in cooperation with Austin Peay State University's [Teacher Residency program](#), Tennessee launched the first registered Teacher Occupation Apprenticeship program in the country. Facilitating cooperation between school districts and Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs), this initiative would promote the state’s efforts to address teacher shortages.

Apprenticeship programs are designed to be work-based and industry-driven pathways that provide prospective teachers with hands-on work experience while earning a wage. According to Tennessee Labor and Workforce Development Commissioner Jeff McCord, “Apprenticeships are a long-proven method to grow a skilled and qualified workforce. This innovative approach will serve to recruit new talent and help to create a workforce pipeline into the state’s school districts for years to come.” (*Tennessee Department of Education, January 13, 2022*)

For schools seeking to implement this kind of program, there are now innumerable online teacher-training programs offered by accredited colleges and universities that offer teacher-friendly EPPs in terms of scheduling and flexibility. Given the success of Tennessee’s program, many other states were inspired to follow suit, including the State of Wyoming where this author served as State Superintendent in 2021-2022.

Suffice it to say, a concerted effort is needed to address the teacher shortage crisis, especially if it is impacting your own community or region. The apprenticeship model has emerged as one of the most promising ways to do so and is endorsed enthusiastically by *School of Thought*.

Subsequent to a solid recruitment plan, then, should be a proactive and intentional teacher *retention* plan. Keeping good teachers takes work, especially if there is some serious competition in the area. It is worth it, though, to put in the effort, not only for professional and practical reasons, but for personal ones as well:

First, it saves the school money. [Research](#) suggests that the cost of replacing a single teacher can range from \$9,000 for rural districts to more than \$20,000 for large urban districts. Second, retaining teachers provides students with experienced teachers, and third, it reflects your school’s commitment to valuing teachers via professional elevation.

Teacher retention plans are most successful when they come infused with the following

ingredients: a healthy campus culture, an induction/mentoring program, and meaningful professional growth opportunities.

Healthy School Culture – It should go without saying that a healthy school culture has to be at the top of the list when formulating your teacher retention plans. Rare exceptions notwithstanding, employees stay where they enjoy being, and an uplifting, happy culture is where people want to be. This happens through positive working conditions which include safe and clean facilities, reasonable student--teacher ratios, sufficient support personnel and a staff that proactively works at building goodwill.

Induction & Mentoring – Research points to several key elements of high-quality induction programs, including the provision of a mentor from the same grade level or department, planning time with other teachers in the same subject area, and regularly scheduled collaboration time with other teachers. Typically (and unfortunately), only a small proportion of new teachers receive these kinds of supports. Nonetheless, studies show that teachers who participate in a high-quality induction program stay in the profession at rates that are twice as high as those who do not.

Something to note: the *Center on Great Teachers and Leaders* has developed a [Mentoring and Induction Toolkit](#) to strengthen this part of the school's retention plan. These toolkit resources provide research summaries, applicable examples, best practices and implementation steps. It would be worth checking out.

Professional Growth Opportunities – Like any other profession, teachers need to constantly improve their knowledge and regularly sharpen their skills. Serious professional development is committed to providing a robust package of opportunities to learn new skills and best practices, better equipping them to teach their students.

A [2017 Learning Policy Institute analysis](#) of 35 studies found seven shared features of efficacious professional development. According to the study, the best professional development regimen (1) focuses on content, (2) incorporates active learning, (3) encourages collaboration, (4) uses effective practice models, (5) provides coaching, (6) offers feedback; and (7) is ongoing.

Though professional development often gets shelved by budget and time constraints, nonetheless, quality teacher-training opportunities can provide experienced teachers with high-impact occasions to deepen their skills, develop their leadership and, often, result in a salary increase or bonus.

In conclusion, school leadership (board and administration) that takes the vision of professional teacher propagation seriously will never regret it because of the incredible

long-term results (both tangible and intangible) it will reap. Moreover, this focus dovetails powerfully with the first and third commitments of *promotional elevation and pedagogical supervision*. To sustain and fulfill a clear vision for your teachers, this three-sided emphasis is crucial.

Pedagogical Supervision – how we cultivate and critique our teachers.

While most teacher supervision paradigms focus on just the observation/evaluation piece, experience shows that teacher supervision happens best through a well-structured, three-part supervision cycle: 1-equipping/training, 2-mentoring/monitoring, 3-evaluating/grading.

This cycle effectively focuses on the “who” of teaching as well as the “how,” the personality and presence of the teacher as well as the presentation and pedagogy. It blends ongoing teacher-training with teacher-coaching and culminates with teacher-observation. These three components comprise the totality of a thorough teacher supervision cycle.

Regarding the third part of that cycle (evaluating/grading), *School of Thought* strongly recommends not only utilizing some of the best evaluation instruments on the market (see Danielson and Marzano below), but also developing a series of original evaluation tools in-house. Through a committee of your own classroom teachers, customized evaluation instruments become very valuable, not only because they’re tailor-made, but also because home-grown teacher input is invaluable.

So part of the vision for our teachers sees a professional development paragon most effectively implemented through a teaching development pentagon. Such a five-dimensional system includes *personal* (self-critiques), *pedagogical* (peer appraisals), *parental* (parent observations), *pupil* (student surveys) and *principal* (administrative assessments) evaluations.

In concert with this teaching evaluation pentagon are two of the leading teacher assessment tools on the market: (1) the *Framework for Teaching Evaluation Instrument* developed by Charlotte Danielson and (2) the paradigm-shifting approach of the *Marzano Teacher Evaluation Model*. (Both of these can be Googled for their specific websites, available resources and training.)

The Danielson Framework for Teaching is a research-based evaluation method that addresses the key components of teaching. It consists of the evaluation instrument itself which assesses Danielson’s four domains of teaching (i.e., planning and preparation, classroom environment, instruction and professional responsibilities). It also includes the specific elements which detail the actual expectations for teaching and

learning, the rubrics for how a rating is determined, and the different types of artifacts and evidence that can be included in an evaluation.

The Handbook for Enhancing Professional Practice – Using the Framework for Teaching in Your School (written by Danielson) is a great companion to study in conjunction with the Danielson instrument.

As an alternative to Danielson, the *Marzano Teacher Evaluation Model* presents 60 different aspects of effective teaching that school leaders can use to guide the pedagogical supervision process of classroom teachers throughout the school year.

Marzano's book, *Improving Teacher Development and Evaluation: A Guide for Leaders, Coaches and Teachers*, should also be used in tandem with the Marzano Model because of its unique approach to teacher development and evaluation.

The authors share research-based steps for improvement, unpack the principles for effective observation, and provide a series of protocols to help implement the book's key suggestions. These include understanding the deficiencies of past evaluation approaches, appreciating why teacher development is critical to fulfilling the school's mission, discovering the impact of teacher self-rating on improved pedagogy, reconstructing classroom evaluation to improve classroom teaching, and assimilating more reliable methods for grading teaching performance.

Every evaluation should begin with a 15-minute pre-evaluation conference (between evaluator and evaluatee) followed by a 30-minute post-evaluation conference. Teachers are understandably most receptive when they are part of the process, when they know what is coming and when they get honest, constructive, evidence-based feedback about tangible ways to hone their skills and improve their craft.

Research shows the vast majority of professional teachers actually do prefer an in-depth and comprehensive teacher supervision regimen. Not only that, but teacher turnover is greatly reduced when this investment is made.

Suffice it to say, fulfilling the "supervision vision" with a rigorous supervision cycle is not only consistent with the promotional elevation and professional propagation commitments, but also heartily advances pedagogical development as well.

A Vision for the Students

Young people who can think independently grow roots; young people who can think

innovatively grow wings. A critical thinker discerns while a creative thinker discovers. The one sorts it all out, the other “senses” it all in.

Convergent thinkers are more logical and analytical, and divergent thinkers are more imaginative and intuitive. The former works from the outside in, starting with a series of facts that lead to an answer; the latter works from the inside out, starting with a question which leads to a series of ideas. What a combination to find both in the same package. What a well-trained mind that has developed the capacity to think both ways.

Roots and wings, critical and creative thinkers – a teacher’s mission, a parent’s dream, a child’s deserved inheritance.

The challenge to do right by our students is contingent on the mission to raise up a generation of young people who have been given this inheritance. Growing student roots through family and faith while sprouting student wings through community and country is a tall order, but it can be filled. A proactive focus on producing learned thinkers and thinking learners gives rise to producing serious citizens and great leaders.

The sixth look, then, is **a vision for the students** in terms of the highest priority pursuant to (1) *classical scholarship* (producing great thinkers); (2) *thoughtful citizenship* (producing great citizens); (3) *honorable leadership* (producing great leaders).

Classical Scholarship – producing formed & informed thinkers.

At the core of the classical approach to education is what *School of Thought* likes to call “the Big Five” or the 5 L’s: *Literacy* (reading and writing), *Literature* (the Great Books), *Language* (national and global) anchored by *Latin* (and eventually Greek), and *Logic* (the laws of thinking).

These are the academic commitments that distinguish classical education from the ever-changing progressive approach. Both teach math and science, but the historic approach provided the tools for classical scholarship. Take logic for example ...

If education’s timeless purpose really is teaching thinking, then it is only logical that this would include the teaching of logic through a formal logic course, because logic is simply the “rules of thinking.” But the discipline of logic is not easy because thinking is not easy.

In fact, as Henry Ford once said, “Thinking is the hardest work there is, which is probably the reason so few engage in it.”

Thomas Edison agreed: “There is no expedient,” he said, “to which a man will not resort to avoid the real labor of thinking.”

Which raises the following question: is education about putting it on the bottom shelf where they can reach it, or on the top shelf where they have to stretch for it? This was the question I often wrestled with as a classroom teacher. On some days I concluded it was the former; other days, it was clearly the latter.

Eventually I decided it was a both/and proposition rather than either/or, depending on where the student was at on any given day and what he or she needed. Though we as teachers can fall off either side of the horse, the trick is to stay on the horse, so this seemed a sensible stance to take.

With more time and growth, however, I realized it could be argued that while a balanced approach is usually the safest, it is not always the best. So if I was to error on one side or the other, when in teaching mode, I began choosing the side of placing it on the top shelf, i.e., making them stretch.

Though agonizing at times (for both student and teacher!), long-term it generally produced better fruit. This I discovered was not only consistent with the classical traditions of the liberal arts and general sciences, but also with education’s ultimate purpose: *to learn to think*.

Therefore, because learning to think *is* the singular transcendent purpose of classical education, we serve our students best by making them stretch (exceptions notwithstanding), not by putting everything on the bottom shelf.

This tension admittedly produces difficulties, but we do our kids no favors by removing all obstacles and making it easy for them. Because the local community schoolhouse helps prepare our young for life, school is the place where this struggle should begin, and nothing develops both mind and character more than struggle. If we remove it, we unwittingly rob them of growth.

Equipping students to pursue truth means equipping them to comprehend the nature of truth. This is a very deep ocean requiring a very deep dive, and it remains the essence of classical scholarship. Understanding the nature of truth as objective, exclusive, absolute, immutable, parallel and antithetical is one of education’s most rewarding discoveries.

And the entire process begins with facts, because “facts are a stubborn thing.” It then continues with knowledge, which is what the word science (or scientia) means. From there it graduates to reason based on logic, because the laws of logic produce the rules

of reason, and it ultimately concludes with wisdom, because wisdom always leads to that which is true, good and beautiful.

Facts, knowledge, reason, logic, and wisdom ... the substance of classical scholarship and the signposts that lead to truth. If we're truly open-minded, we'll wrestle with that truth. If not, we may discard it, and many do. What we can't do, though, is redefine it.

Truth has a very secure identity and exists entirely independent of personal opinions or subjective viewpoints. It is as solid as a rock, and will support us if we accept it or indict us if we don't.

After turning that corner, we can move to some important practical considerations: how do we best promote, strengthen and reinforce classical scholarship at school? The *School of Thought* proposition offers three possibilities: school *assemblies*, scholarship-focused *activities* and student *awards*.

Well-crafted school assemblies that feature an engaging speaker (principal, teacher, outside guest) who unpacks the nature and philosophy of a classical scholarship, month after month, will stoke the flames as they cast the vision. The idea is that as we educate our students classically in the classrooms, and we educate them *about* classical education in these assemblies.

After twelve years of this, we will not only graduate students who are classically educated but who have an in-depth understanding of what a classical education is. Long-term, this will bear fruit, because once they've had steak, they will be less likely to go back to hot dogs – or feed the same to their own children someday.

In the first month's assembly, give a short speech about the purpose of education; the next month could be about the role of education in our society. Another assembly could address why we study Latin and Greek, another one about the history of the arts and sciences.

The topics are endless, and truly, this is such a deep ocean, you will never get to the bottom of it. But a ten-minute talk (that's all it takes!) each month in these school assemblies will make them educated about the kind of education that produces classical scholarship. Where roots grow deeper, wings fly higher.

In addition to these assembly challenges, the provision of special scholarship-driven *activities* (at school or in the community) would also help beef up this "vision for the students." As a sports game is to athletics, so would these events be to academics.

Anything from Quiz-Team competitions to Spelling Bees to Special Debates; from

Science Fairs and STEM projects to Music and Speech recitals. Additionally, to achieve the same status as a sports event (being extra-curricular in nature), these scholarship-based activities should be competitive, fun, organized, well-planned and well-promoted.

Finally, along with these special *assemblies* and *activities*, to heighten this focus on yet another level, be sure to create an array of student scholarship *awards*. This would not only include the traditional honor roll awards along with the Highest GPAs or Most Improved Student awards, but also the trophies for the Quiz-Team champions at each grade level or the 1st, 2nd and 3rd place medals for the Spelling Bee. School-wide or classroom-based, these awards could include individualized Reading and Writing awards as well as those for individual Science projects or history diorama winners.

The sky (and your imagination) is the limit, but the key is to keep the focus on significant academic accomplishments and progress. These awards will reflect that. With the law of increasing entropy, mission drift is always the natural institutional tendency, so assemblies, activities and awards are three tangible ways to stay vigilant!

In conclusion, the first focus of “a vision for the students” is *classical scholarship*. If you (like me) were not educated in the deep tradition of a classical education, then you (like me) were educated by the uneducated. Once that dawns on you, it may cause quite a jolt to your system – it did me.

Such a realization did not hit me until I was a full-grown adult well into my career. The more I brushed shoulders with classical education, however, the more I realized how poorly educated I was. Most of my teachers were wonderful people and certainly meant well; they did their best with what they were given, but you don’t know what you don’t know. Most of us were educated by uneducated people because most of the people who educated us were not educated classically. ‘Tis sad (and painful), but true.

The *School of Thought* proposition seeks to chart a new course.

Thoughtful Citizenship – producing caring & thinking citizens.

The author of the Declaration of Independence challenged us to “Educate and inform the whole mass of the people ... they are the only sure reliance for the preservation of our liberty.”

Jefferson knew that citizenship and a proven *paideia* were two sides of the same coin because American liberty would only be sustained through generations of rightly

educated Americans. The older he got, the more mindful he became of the inexorable link between democracy and a thoughtful citizenship. (Incidentally, Jefferson also once quipped that “the man who reads nothing at all is better educated than the man who reads nothing but newspapers!”)

But to reiterate earlier points, at the heart of every *paideia* is a worldview, and out of every worldview comes a value system. Moreover, when we have two that contradict, we’re left with a choice – it’s either/or, not both/and. Flawed worldviews are notorious for sleight of hand and replete with contradictions.

Relativists get themselves a seat at the table first by pushing a mealy-mouth both/and accommodation, but quickly move to an either/or stance, because to be consistent, they have to — it’s what any antithetical position requires.

For example, if one belief system (we’ll call it “X”) values hard work, and its opposing belief system (we’ll call it “Y”) values laziness, you can’t espouse both “X” and “Y” – because of their contradictory nature, you can’t teach both as viable, admirable or acceptable. If one nutritional philosophy says the best diet should consist of high carbs and low fats, and the other one advocates for low carbs and high fats, you can’t practice both.

If we believe in a phonics-based reading approach based on the science of reading, we cannot simultaneously (in the name of “balance” or “tolerance”) advocate for the whole language method based on pseudo-science.

Cries for balance or tolerance are manipulative, because it’s not about either – it’s about identity, values and logic. It’s about knowing who you are and holding to it (identity). It’s about knowing what you believe and practicing it (values). And it’s about being consistent, not self-contradictory with both (logic).

During the Clarence Thomas hearings back in the 1980’s, one senator on the panel actually conjectured that maybe the accused and the accuser were *both* telling the truth, even though they were testifying to the exact opposite. Such is the spirit of the age, and it *is* “a sign of the times.”

If one value system finds objectionable certain library books that sexualize our children in the most graphic and offensive manners imaginable, and the other value system thinks these books are not only okay but actually helpful for some kids, you have a clash of worldviews, not just two different opinions.

If one worldview says gender is fluid and the other says it’s binary, they’re not both right.

Either one is right and the other is wrong, or they're both wrong. But they can't both be right, contrary to the gospel of postmodernism.

So to produce a thoughtful citizenship, we have to teach our kids how to think, and if we're teaching our kids how to think (which *is* the timeless purpose of education), we start by teaching them the nature of truth, that it is absolute and antithetical, or it's not truth. The nature of water is H₂O. If it's not two parts hydrogen and one part oxygen, it's not water.

Abraham Lincoln was once asked how many legs a dog has if you call his tail a leg. Lincoln said, "Four. Saying that a tail is a leg doesn't make it a leg."

Lincoln understood the game and was not willing to play. Neither should we be. Reconstructing reality does not change it. Redefining truth as something subjective and personal does not make it so.

So for our purposes here, there is a true north; the question is, to what extent we embrace it. We have a moral compass and we have a worldview from which we get our value system. Honest consistency and intellectual integrity requires we either hold to it, or give it up altogether. We either stiffen our spines, or we become as C.S. Lewis once prophesied, "men without chests." The decision we make, the direction we go, becomes our lens and our filter, not only for what we will teach our students, but what we will not teach them.

Wordsworth said, "the Child is the father of the Man." He meant of course that the education we give our children, whether at home or in school, shapes both the character and the future of our adults. That is to say, when we teach our children well (both the head and the heart), a great host of social problems can be headed off at the pass.

For example, a child who cannot read when he leaves the eighth grade is much more likely to end up in the unemployment line or the police lineup than his classmates who can read. Prevention truly is the best medicine, which is what Louis Pasteur meant when he said, "chance favors the trained mind ..."

Another example: during election season, a truly thoughtful citizen is guided more by principles and policies than by political parties and partisan personalities. He or she knows that to base it on the latter will potentially leave one disappointed, embarrassed, or disillusioned.

When we remind our students the reason they go to school is to learn to think, we

remind ourselves that education is that uniquely parallel process that pursues both knowledge and wisdom – the learning side is about knowledge while the thinking side is about wisdom. To grow students who are both knowledgeable and wise, then, is the makings of an educated mind and the substance of thoughtful citizenship.

Finally, as mentioned above, we can emphasize and reinforce “thoughtful citizenship” through three very tangible mechanisms: our school *assemblies*, citizenship-focused *activities*, and student *awards*.

With a proactive citizenship focus, school *assemblies* can regularly feature meaningful talks that cultivate (over time) a truly thoughtful brand of citizenship. (What a refreshing change in our society that would be!) Through a 10-15 minute talk on a monthly basis, students could be confronted with the rights and responsibilities of Wyoming and American citizenship.

This would be a good time to bring in some of the community’s most reputable and consequential citizens, whether that be the mayor, city council members, community leaders or state legislators. This would also be a great time to tell the stories of past and present citizen heroes who made a remarkable difference in their community, state or country.

The goal here would be to paint a beautiful picture, one stroke each month, on what a thinking and caring citizen looks like. This is when we make the case (with age-level messaging) for constitutional government, the rule of law, the importance of voting, the electoral college, an informed citizenry, and our rights and responsibilities as citizens.

Then, to give students plenty of outlets, we put legs to the citizen vision that is being cast in these assemblies through special citizenship-based *activities* (at school or in the community). These activities can include such things as student government, entrepreneurial ventures, inventions, volunteer work in the community, church or mission work, coaching younger athletes, tutoring younger students, or other various mentoring efforts.

Finally, both the *assemblies* and the *activities* can then be accented by a variety of student-citizenship *awards*, including the school’s Thoughtful Citizen Award, the Edison Award (recognizing student inventions), the Entrepreneur Award (for successful business launches), the Teacher’s Award (for effective student tutors or aspiring classroom teachers), the Distinguished Volunteer Award (for community volunteer work), the Coaches Award (for athletic mentoring) and the Ministry Award (for faith-based endeavors).

These awards should be presented by the school leadership, but also having civic dignitaries make the presentations will bring an added degree of honor to the award. Whether presented at these assemblies, during graduation ceremonies or other special school-wide gatherings, these awards keep the spotlight on our budding young leaders and their development with strong priority messaging.

Honorable Leadership – producing good & wise leaders.

Abraham Lincoln reportedly once said, “The philosophy of the schoolroom in one generation becomes the philosophy of government in the next.” In that timeless piece of social prophecy we were given both a reminder and a warning. The reminder, worldviews matter; the warning, ideas have consequences. Therefore, good schools undergirded by a coherent worldview prepare the soil for the growth of a great leader.

Preserving the historic imagination of the Founders is critical to our future as a people. Consequently, because “everything rises or falls on leadership,” a certain kind of leadership is required as guardians of our American ideals.

To be well-schooled in a reading and writing regimen grounded in the arts and the sciences are the building blocks for a quality future leader – the kind that leaves an enduring legacy at home and at work. Moreover, since honorable leadership is incubated in our homes, schools and churches, it is critical for these three institutions to be working together, because “a threefold cord cannot be broken.”

In a *School of Thought*, great leadership is both good and wise, which is to say, it is honest and honorable, ethical and discerning, respected and respectful. It values civic virtue and emulates the same; it esteems moral character and personifies the same. It lives by a higher standard and pursues a nobler cause. It does not obfuscate, manipulate or prevaricate; it disdains duplicity and abhors dishonesty. It is “the real McCoy” and doesn’t know how to pretend or be pretentious.

Finally, a school that produces honorable leaders must be led by honorable leaders; the best way to train has always been by example. Students are always observing us and nothing is lost on them regarding our character (or lack of it). They need to see good and wise leadership up close and personal. This model starts at home to be sure, but it then continues at school.

Beyond that, developing mature, honorable young leaders should be emphasized and reinforced through school *assemblies*, special leadership-focused *activities* and student *awards*.

With an intentional leadership focus, school assemblies can regularly feature high-impact talks that challenge and develop leadership aspirations and skills. Once a month for 10-15 minutes, students could be hearing about what a good leader looks like, what an honorable leader is and how to become one.

Typically, it does make a bigger splash if these school leadership talks come from the school leader. But if that's not possible, then administrative assistants or classroom teachers should be the rhetoricians who are next in line to cast the leadership vision.

You can also keep the leadership spotlight bright by bringing in outside people (business leaders, pastors, public servants and gifted guest speakers) on a regular basis, with each message addressing another layer of honorable leadership.

But whoever does these leadership talks, the important thing is to present leadership challenges and material in two ways: consistently and passionately. The students have to walk away with the clear message that in a *School of Thought*, no one is being prepared to become invisible or irrelevant once they graduate.

As a veritable leadership training camp, in a school with this vision for the students, every student is in training to become a high-impact, honorable leader – at home and at work as well as in one's faith and civic community. This is the bar we must raise, and we must hold it up high!

To reinforce these assemblies, then, they should be coupled with and complemented by special leadership-oriented *activities* (at school or in the community) to help foster leadership aspirations in students and develop their leadership skills. These activities can include such things as reading leadership books, conducting leadership interviews, demonstrating leadership initiative or shadowing industry, government, community, healthcare, education or sports leaders on a regular basis.

Finally, both the *assemblies* and the *activities* can then be accented by student leadership *awards* of different kinds. Whether presented at these assemblies, during graduation ceremonies or other special school-wide gatherings, special awards keep the spotlight on budding young leaders and their development with priority messaging.

Individual teachers can certainly do the same in the classroom, rewarding such leadership traits as initiative, integrity, courage, moral fortitude, responsibility, compassion, perseverance, hard work and mentoring. The more we "give honor to whom honor is due," the more we encourage the desire to be honorable.

If this scholar/citizen/leader ground is difficult to plow at times, don't be discouraged and never quit – if it is for our children, it is a frontier worth forging. And if there is anything

fertile about this soil, we will grow what we sow. They will plant their roots deep in it as they learn to think critically and they will soar high over it as they learn to think creatively. They will dwell deeper and fly higher than we ever did. They will dwell deeper and fly higher than we ever imagined they could.

A Vision for the Curriculum

It has been said that if you repeat a lie long enough, people will eventually believe it. In some Middle Eastern countries for example, the school curriculum excludes anything about the Jewish holocaust because, they tell their students, it simply didn't happen. Ponder the implications: if that was the narrative you were raised with since grade school, think how natural it would be to adopt it as one of the core presuppositions of your own worldview.

In like manner, if our students attend schools with curriculum that teaches (overtly or otherwise) that truth as a category does not exist, then it will not be long before every generation and social institution believes the same. But the unwitting boomerang effect on educators should not be lost. Over time, the sword will cut the hand that wields it, and learning itself will lose its authority. So the obvious answers to the most basic questions of life become thoroughly confounded.

As one cultural commentator put it, "The very scholars who taught their students to question authority are themselves disparaged by the same measure. No one knows what to believe as true anymore, and if anything is believed, the burden of justification has been removed."

The acceptance or rejection of absolute truth provides the painful tension in this country's identity crisis. Meanwhile, Lincoln's axiom is inescapable: "A house divided against itself cannot stand."

The challenge is apparent: we must tell our students the truth about truth. This is the heartbeat of all genuine learning and the cornerstone of American freedom. As Neil Postman warned, "There is no liberty for a community which lacks the critical skills to tell the difference between lies and truth."

Knowing the truth – and the nature of truth – not only sets people free, it keeps people free. Consider the antithesis.

The seventh focus, then, conveys **a vision for the curriculum** in terms of a content clarity consistent with (1) *a literacy legacy* (lingual, cultural, biblical, constitutional and financial); (2) *the core courses* (a general/liberal curriculum-continuum of the arts and sciences); (3) *a literary library* (the Great Books of the great ideas of the great thinkers).

Literacy Legacy – the five cords of a deeply formative literacy curriculum.

Lingual literacy (the first cord) is the basis for a long-term literacy legacy and makes all the difference in the world between a satisfying educational experience and a frustrating one. None other than St. Augustine himself acknowledged the same in an excerpt from *The Confessions* over seventeen hundred years ago:

“Those early lessons in literacy were unquestionably more profitable because [they were] more dependable; by means of them I was gradually being given a power which became mine and still remains with me: the power to read any piece or writing I come across and to write anything I have a mind to myself. Far more useful, then, were those studies than others ...” (Book I, p. 25, paragraph 20)

In real estate it’s location, location, location; in education it’s literacy, literacy, literacy! If the purpose of education is teaching thinking, then it begins with teaching reading. That’s why the foundation of the entire academic enterprise is the literacy of every child in every classroom at every grade level.

Indeed, because reading and writing is the foundation, we can’t afford to get this wrong or experiment with it anymore. Literacy curriculum must be based on real science, not pseudo-science. Moreover, it must be structured and explicit, consistent with (rather than contradictory to) conclusive research findings.

The good news is, we know how to teach kids how to read well – it’s no longer a mystery or debate. We know what works and what doesn’t, and we have known for decades. The jury is in as well as the verdict, and the verdict is unflinching: structured literacy based on the science of reading through the phonetic approach bears much better fruit and produces far better results than its flawed “whole language” competitor.

For the sake of our young learners, therefore, a serious *School of Thought* would be compelled to exercise zero tolerance for the whole language or (so-called) “balanced literacy” approach because it is nothing less than educational malpractice. A literacy legacy in America will continue to evade us if we are shy about eliminating a reading approach that fails to teach children how to read.

Inexplicably, though the research is overwhelmingly in favor of phonics, many educators still cling stubbornly to the debunked whole language method. Even though it has produced eighty-plus years of dismal reading scores, with up to 40% (or more!) of our students consistently below proficiency levels, unbelievably, the mirage endures.

Furthermore, although completely discredited by Emily Handford’s riveting “Sold a Story” podcast, and in spite of the fact that Columbia University Teachers College sent

Lucy Calkins (progressive education's literacy guru) packing as well as her curriculum, some classroom teachers remain undeterred and fully determined *NOT* to be confused by the facts – our children's futures be damned, not to mention their self-esteem. Against all reason and common sense, teaching students how to “guess” (via whole language) rather than how to “think” (via phonetic decoding) is still being defended and practiced.

A united and unanimous front is needed, therefore, that categorically rejects the whole language approach in our schools once and for all and only endorses schools that teach structured literacy based on the science of reading. If this really is about our children, we would be reckless beyond words to do anything less.

Cultural literacy (the second cord) is taken from the title of E.D. Hirsch's blockbuster by the same name. It highlights the importance in a democratic republic of raising a generation of young people who know a certain body of knowledge, in each of the core disciplines of the classical arts and sciences, to be considered culturally literate.

Without this, a culture begins to fragment and fracture, because it lacks a common language, history and cultural knowledge which socially binds us together. Hirsch's Core Knowledge curriculum responded to this vacuum and was followed by a torrent of other curricula addressing the same issue, including our state and federal governments (not to be left out), establishing academic standards for each discipline in each grade.

A classical, general/liberal education produces cultural literacy; a progressive education does not. We only need look at plummeting test scores and how American students have dropped in international rankings over the past several decades to prove that.

Cultural literacy of course includes art, music and literature as well as math, history and science. And originally, many moons ago, it did require becoming well-acquainted with philosophy as well as theology, which leads to the following core literacy cord.

Biblical literacy (the third cord) ... If our literacy efforts fail to include the crown jewel of a literacy legacy in Western Civilization, then it will have failed. We're referring of course to biblical knowledge. It has been the foundation of our moral teachings for two millennia and has informed the basis for the Judeo-Christian worldview.

To remove it by legal manipulation, under the false pretense of a wrongly understood Constitutional doctrine of “separation of church and state,” was not only a dark day for America spiritually, but also culturally. No work of literature has had a greater influence on Western Civilization than the Bible. To bar students from its formal study is to rob them of their intellectual, cultural and spiritual birthright.

Progressives knew it was standing in the way of their own secularized vision and that it had to be removed to replace the old paideia with the new one. But if our students are not biblically literate, they are not culturally literate. In short, a legitimate literacy legacy falls dismally short if it ignores, avoids or eliminates biblical literature.

Constitutional literacy (fourth cord) is the next literacy link that is missing in much of secondary education curriculum today. But integral to an American citizenry that is truly literate must be a working knowledge of our national and state Constitutions, and mastery versus survey should be the goal.

The fact that few Americans know what their state and federal Constitutions say, much less what they mean, is a crisis in democracy. And given the condition of our republic at this stage in the game, a mere semester class or singular chapter in the textbook will not cut it anymore. This must be a deep dive, i.e., a saturation approach that starts in elementary school and goes through high school, each year peeling back another Constitutional layer.

Immersing students in various elements and aspects of the Constitution, including its formation history, founders' biographies, a probe of the Federalist Papers as well as a study of the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights, for twelve to thirteen years, will get the job done. It will also bear enormous fruit in terms of the kind of Constitutionally-literate citizens produced in a serious *American School of Thought*.

And last but not least, financial literacy (the fifth cord) ... like reading and writing, it is a gift that will not stop giving. How I wish comprehensive financial education was available when I was in school. I would have avoided some serious fiscal pitfalls and been miles ahead when it came to making money-related decisions. The majority of adults I've talked to on this subject feel the same way.

Teaching students from the earliest grades about all things financial gives them an enormous head start in life as well as in our market-driven society. To not do so is to relegate them to a trial-and-error existence, riddled with mistakes and poor judgment, simply because they didn't know what they didn't know.

How to balance a checkbook, for example, or understand compounded interest and the wisdom of a savings account is enormously empowering for a student. In addition, becoming familiar with both micro-economics and macro-economics, basic principles of investment as well as the differences between capitalism and socialism will set our students up for success, whether they go into business or not.

Thankfully, groups like Junior Achievement, Khan Academy or Dave Ramsey's organization are making significant inroads, producing wonderful financial curriculum for schools all over America. But while we're starting to make a dent, we're nowhere near yet where we need to be.

To become financially literate, the saturation-immersion approach is again needed via "waves and layers." From primary school to secondary school, another wave of fiscal knowledge should wash over the students month by month, while another layer of financial wisdom gets laid down week by week. Then, year by year (over many years), our students will become truly financially literate and (someday) thank us for making them so. That is a legacy we don't want to miss.

Altogether, these five literacy cords contribute to a robust literacy curriculum that is not only deeply formative, but manifestly enduring. Anything less would be a compromised, diluted and second-rate education.

Core Courses – a general/liberal curriculum-continuum of the arts & sciences.

Young people need a *generalized* education first before getting a specialized education, because it develops and prepares the mind comprehensively for any field of specialty, providing the foundation needed for civic responsibility as well as the maturity of thought that every vocational specialty requires.

Likewise, our youth need a liberal education before getting a vocational education. The liberal arts (from *liber* meaning free) are the "liberating arts," sometimes called the arts of freedom, and young people need a *liberal* education because it liberates the mind not only from ignorance but from a litany of "mind blinds" which only serve to ensnare, deceive and destroy. It also eventually liberates them from being forever dependent on their teacher. Through the liberating arts, the student becomes equipped to study, learn and teach himself, ultimately learning to think for himself. When this becomes the norm and the standard again, education will have re-entered its "golden age."

G.K. Chesterton said way back in 1930, "People are inundated, blinded, deafened and mentally paralyzed by a flood of vulgar and tasteless externals, leaving them no time for leisure, thought, or creation from within themselves."

But the antidote for this ever-worsening dilemma is a general/liberal education, also sometimes called a classical education. A general education provides breadth while a liberal education provides depth. A general education helps children grow roots while a liberal education helps them grow wings. To move children too quickly into either specialized or vocational education is to rush the maturing process, robbing the child

and society of the well-trained mind that can only come from a general and liberal curriculum-continuum via the classical arts and sciences.

These “thinking arts” serve as the fuel for a free society because they provide the kindling for a constitutional republic while fanning the flames of civic virtue in pursuit of the true, the good and the beautiful. They were “intended to train man in the use of his freedom, and to prepare the student for the higher study of philosophy and theology, through which one may become truly free, fully human.” (Caldecott, *Beauty for Truth’s Sake*, p. 20)

In fact, “the classical ‘Liberal Arts’ tradition of the West once offered a form of humane education that sought the integration of faith and reason, and that combined the arts and the sciences ...” (Caldecott, *Beauty for Truth’s Sake*, p. 12) So much so, that according to T.S. Eliot, we need to revive this tradition to find the “wisdom we have lost in knowledge,” the “knowledge we have lost in information.”

The Arts

The contemporary connotative meaning of “the arts” invokes images of a painting or sculpture, with brush or chisel nearby. But a broader historical context expands our understanding: the Latin word **ars** means skill, craft or ability – so one would hear of a soldier learning the art of war or a doctor the art of healing. Similarly, in the classical tradition, these thinking arts (also called the humanities) comprised multiple branches, including the language and fine arts as well as the literary and philosophical arts.

Language Arts (*focuses on literacy*)

Whether it’s the national language, classical languages, or a global language, the core four domains of the linguistic arts are **reading** (decoding, fluidity, comprehension), **writing** (cursive, spelling, syntax), **listening** (attention, reception, comprehension), and **speaking** (recitation, declamation, elocution). As it includes age-appropriate historical contextualizations, each of the four domains would require and produce *cognitive and communicative thinking*.

Fine Arts (*focuses on creative works*)

Different from decorative or applied art, the basic aesthetic expressions of the fine arts are **music** (classical, jazz, folk, country, contemporary), **art** (drawing, sculpting, photography), **drama** (theater, mime, puppetry, video) and **dance** (tap, ballet, jazz, line, ballroom), with each one requiring and producing *colorful and creative thinking* (sometimes called divergent or horizontal thinking) because of how they ignite the imagination. A brief history of each would also enhance a depth-and-breadth focus.

Literary Arts (*focuses on literature*)

Dedicated to the literary library of the Great Books via imaginative (fiction, drama) or expository (history, philosophy) literature – whether biblical/classical or European/American – the central genres are **poetry, short story, essay** and **novel**, which require and produce *contemplative and communitarian thinking*.

Philosophical Arts (*focuses on human thought*)

The key subjects of the philosophical arts are **epistemology, ethics, logic** and **metaphysics**. Altogether, they require and produce *coherent and convergent thinking* (or vertical thinking) via deductive, inductive and abductive reasoning. The history of philosophy, with a special focus on some of the great philosophers of history, would necessarily be integrated as well.

Historically, the “circle of learning” (from *encyclopedia*) had nine fields of study in the first century after Christ, and was subsequently pared down to seven by Augustine and others, which were divided into two groups: the trivium (three ways) consisting of grammar, dialectic and rhetoric, while the quadrivium (four ways) consisted of arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music. (Caldecott, *Beauty for Truth’s Sake*, p. 22) As an age progression, the trivium emerges through the stages of the lower school (*grammatics*}, the middle school (*dialectics*), and the upper school (*rhetoric*).

The first stage (grammar) is the “building blocks” stage. This refers to the foundational knowledge of each academic discipline, the basic informational facts that students must learn, not analyze (not yet!). Additionally, in this model, becoming well-versed on a specific body of knowledge happens primarily through memorization, repetition and recitation, something young children are good at and love to do.

The second (dialectic) stage is when students begin to exercise and develop their analytic and reasoning skills. This involves both logical and critical thinking, discerning which arguments hold water and which ones don’t. This is the time when students start connecting the dots, seeing links between words and their meanings as well as between cause and effect, especially in terms of the events of history and scientific realities.

In the third and final stage (rhetoric), students begin expressing their own views related to the knowledge they learned in the first stage and the analysis they conducted in the second stage. Through “third stage” speech and writing, students articulate their own emerging opinions and convictions regarding the things that matter most.

These three *artes sermocinales* (“language studies”) “ ... would enable a student to express himself, to communicate with others, and to argue effectively for a point of view.” (Caldecott, *Beauty for Truth’s Sake*, p. 23)

The Sciences

The modern rendering of “science” is synonymous with such subjects as astronomy or physics. But again, a little Latin helps expand both our understanding and our vision: **scientia** means knowledge or body of knowledge. In that context, civics or economics could be as much a science as biology. A richer historic orientation, therefore, saw the natural sciences as only one branch of the various sciences of thought, with some of the others including the mathematical, cultural and theological branches.

Mathematical Sciences (*focuses on numeracy*)

Considered the purest of the sciences, the essential four disciplines of mathematics are **arithmetic** (the study of numbers), **geometry** (the study of shapes), **algebra** (the study of equational generalizations), and **calculus** (the study of continuous change); This mathematical quadrivium requires and produces both *computational and conceptual thinking* via concrete, pictorial and abstract concepts, integrating elements of math history as well as financial subject matter and computer science.

Natural Sciences (*focuses on works of creation*)

Involves the **life sciences** (biology, zoology, botany), **physical sciences** (chemistry, physics, astronomy), **health study** (nutrition, fitness, wellness) and **nature-study** (conservation, agriculture, weather), including a cursory history of some of the natural sciences as well as the differences between real science and pseudo-science; requires and produces *curious and critical thinking* via observation and experiment, synthesis and analysis, interpretation and application as well as exploration and inference.

Cultural Sciences (*focuses on culture*)

A systematic study of **local, regional, national** and **global** cultures (elementary school through high school) requiring and producing both *chronological and contextual thinking*, this branch pairs history with polity, biography with geography, civics with economics and worldviews with world religions.

Theological Sciences (*focuses on divine thought*)

“The queen of the sciences” requires and produces *convictional and conversional thinking* via **dogmatics** (knowing one’s beliefs), **apologetics** (defending one’s beliefs),

hermeneutics (biblical interpretation), and **homiletics** (rhetorical edification). This branch too would involve both the history of theology in various faith traditions as well as an overview of some of the most consequential theologians of religious history.

As with the arts, each of the above branches of science are also subject to the trivium progression, similarly translated through the ancient process of the grammatic/dialectic/rhetoric stages in sync with the lower/middle/upper school phases. They simultaneously encompass a quadrivium within each branch as well.

Sixteenth century philosopher Francis Bacon once wrote, “Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested.” Bacon was suggesting different kinds of books deserve different levels of attention.

Tasting, swallowing and digesting reflected the three-part trivium process of classical schooling during the 1500’s. First was gaining basic knowledge of the subject matter (taste), second was evaluating that basic knowledge (swallowing), and third was formulating your own views (digesting). (Bauer, *The Well-Educated Mind*, p.18)

The second academic group of the quadrivium that made up the sacred sciences were known as the *artes reales*, or *physicae*. These in fact comprised the subject matter through which Plato contended “the inner vision of the soul could be awakened.” Factually, they did go back before Plato because it was actually the Pythagoreans who initially grouped the quadrivium the way they did. (Caldecott, *Beauty for Truth’s Sake*, p. 23)

How the quadrivium is incorporated may differ from its medieval model (as it has for centuries), and Caldecott wisely points out the need for flexibility here: “It is fairly clear that if the Seven Liberal Arts model is to become an adequate basis for education today, whether in colleges or in less formal settings, it needs to be broadened and adapted. Even by the thirteenth century the Liberal Arts were bursting at the seams trying to incorporate new knowledge.” (Caldecott, *Beauty for Truth’s Sake*, p. 27)

A broader adaptation is what *School of Thought* employs, through the four branches of the preceding arts as well as the four branches of the succeeding sciences.

To seal the deal, then, we reinforce the trivium/quadrivium system with a multi-layered teaching methodology (i.e., Adler’s three columns): (1) *didactic instruction* via lectures and classroom lessons (thinking content), (2) *tutorial instruction* via mentoring and coaching (thinking skills), and (3) *Socratic instruction* via discussion and questions (thinking development) These three complementary teaching methods should be

applied age-appropriately, in every class of every subject at every grade level. To see this through, constant training and supervision must be provided.

Taken together, the trivium and quadrivium, through the arts and sciences, provided the content and process through which the Western Christian *paideia* could be passed on. *School of Thought* represents an adapted version while retaining the essential elements, coherent structure and timeless wisdom of this classical education tradition. We would be remiss if we failed to preserve such a powerful intellectual treasure and derelict if we did not pass it on.

Literary Library – the Great Books of the great ideas of the great thinkers.

It is no hyperbole to say that a good book is like a good friend. Great literature provides children with a very unique form of companionship that is not only satisfying and enriching, but enormously comforting as well. No doubt this is why Thomas Jefferson said, “I cannot live without books.”

Other than the inexpressible graces that come from a life of faith, the gift of a solid family foundation or the blessings of freedom, there are few things on this earth more cherished than a good book.

That’s why a very crucial part of a person’s childhood is stolen when this is not provided and nurtured. If a non-reading habit is formed, often the die is cast. In fact, one study showed that nearly 60 percent of adult Americans never read (even sporadically) if reading was not cultivated in their childhood. [*Books That Build Character*, p.21]

There are a number of reasons why a regular reading regimen is so important to a young child’s development, but the two most obvious have to do with *imagination* and *conscience*. Working together symbiotically, the great works of children’s literature fires the imagination like few things can and stokes the conscience like few things do.

For example, Dr. Paul Vitz shared an array of psychological studies in *American Psychologist* (June 1990) which highlighted “the central importance of stories in developing the moral life.”

Stories connect children emotionally with goodness through good characters. The power of the imagination joins the reader with the characters experientially and vicariously, and from the story’s narrative, an “image’ (the root word of imagination) is literally printed on the child’s mind. Because we think more in pictures than in statements, a moral truth shapes the conscience through these imprinted images.

As writer Flannery O'Connor put it, "A story is a way to say something that can't be said any other way ... You tell a story because a statement would be inadequate."

And according to Plato, for the development of both imagination and conscience, children should be raised in such a manner that they grow to admire virtue and abhor vice. This happens best, he contended, through the timeless children's stories. Other than the influences of the family and society, this is the prime way a child's moral sense is formed, and how they determine what is admirable and what is deplorable.

Because "the new illiteracy is *moral* illiteracy." [Kilpatrick and Wolfe, *Books That Build Character*, p.19], we are now up against a dilemma in this country of epidemic proportions, with a host of young students who are now illiterate on three levels: (1) they cannot read well, (2) they cannot distinguish what is worth reading, and (3) they don't know the difference between right and wrong. Dare we wonder if these three are linked?

No doubt the modern emergence of television, the entertainment industry, computers, cell phones and social media are some of the major reasons for this trend. Few would argue anymore that screen time does little to stimulate the imagination. Conversely, an increasing number of experts agree that extensive exposure to gratuitous sex or violence has a numbing effect on our youth, profoundly impacting their attitudes, ideals, values, choices and behaviors.

It is the simple things in life that make a difference, not all the bells and whistles, not the glitz and gold, and certainly not more stuff. Kids don't need to be wowed or entertained or constantly catered to. It is the responsibility of parents to make their kids healthy, not happy. This requires good food, quality food – not just physically, but intellectually, emotionally and spiritually. This is why a literary library, from whence children can quickly and easily find a good book, is the heart of a *School of Thought*.

The books listed below provide a starting point. Though a mere sampling, they introduce the student to a good diet. The literary landscape is vast and it can overwhelm. Starting slow and starting small will wet the appetite and establish a solid base for a growing literary library from which to expand.

What follows can be broken up into three sections: The 1st Section is for elementary age students (K-5 grades), the 2nd Section for middle schoolers (6-8 grades), and the 3rd Section are some of the Great Books for high school students (9-12 grades). Each section represents a continuum of difficulty, from easy to more challenging. Books may

be moved from one section to another, based on parental and pedagogical discretion. Some of the books in the first section might best be read to the lower grade students and processed with them through some Q & A dialogues.

Finally, the books in each section are divided into various categories according to their respective literary genres. Not all categories are age-appropriate, so not all categories will be represented in each section. These literary categories include myths, fables or tales, fiction, historical/cultural and informative books.

1st Section – Grades K-5

Myths, Fables or Tales

Aesop, *Aesop's Fables*

Hans Christian Andersen, *Andersen's Fairy Tales*

Bernarda Bryson, *Gilgamesh*

Carlo Collodi, *The Adventures of Pinocchio*

Harold Courlander, *The Piece of Fire and Other Haitian Tales*

Walter De La Mare, "Little Red Riding Hood" and "The Turnip" from *Tales Told Again*

Charlotte Dixon, "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves" from *Tales from the Arabian Nights*

Bernard Evslin, *Signs and Wonders: Tales from the Old Testament*

Bernard Evslin, *The Epics of Achilles and Ulysses*

Jacob & Wilhelm Grimm, *Grimm's Fairy Tales*

Nathaniel Hawthorne, *A Wonder Book and Tanglewood Tales*

Joseph Jacobs, "Jack and the Bean-Stalk" from *English Fairy Tales*

Randall Jarrell, *The Animal Family*

Andrew Lang, *The Blue Fairy Book*

Charles Perrault, *Puss in Boots; Cinderella*

Beatrix Potter, *The Tale of Peter Rabbit; The Tale of Benjamin Bunny*

Arthur Ransome, *Old Peter's Russian Tales*

Adrien Stoutenberg, *American Tall Tales*

Leo Tolstoy, *Fables and Fairy Tales*

Yoshiko Uchida, *More FolkTales from Japan*

Fiction

Joan Aiken, *The Kingdom Under the Sea and Other Stories*

Peter C. Asbjornsen, *East of the Sun and West of the Moon*

Richard & Florence Atwater, *Mr. Popper's Penguins*

Albert Cullum, *Aesop in the Afternoon; Shake Hands with Shakespeare*

Roald Dahl, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory; James and the Giant Peach*
Meindert DeJong, *The Wheel on the School*
P.D. Eastman, *A Fish Out of Water; Sam and the Firefly; Are You My Mother?*
Walter Farley, *The Black Stallion; Little Black, a Pony*
Norton Juster, *The Phantom Tollbooth*
Charles Kingsley, *The Heroes*
Albert Lamorisse, *The Red Balloon*
Hugh Lofting, *The Story of Doctor Doolittle*
A.A. Milne, *Winnie-the-Pooh*
Watty Piper, *The Little Engine That Could*
Wilson Rawls, *Where the Red Fern Grows*
H.A. Rey, *Curious George*
Barbara Robinson, *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever*
Felix Salten, *Bambi*
Dr. Seuss, *Green Eggs and Ham; Cat in the Hat*
Mildred Taylor, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*

Historical/Cultural Books

Joy Adamson, *Born Free*
Tony Allan, *The Time Traveller Book of Pharaohs and Pyramids*
Heather Amery, *The Time Traveller Book of Rome and Romans*
Leonard Baskin, *Hosie's Aviary*
Anne Civarde, *The Time Traveller Book of Viking Raiders*
J.B.S. Haldane, *My Friend Mr. Leakey*
William Jaspersohn, *How the Forest Grew*
Mervyn D. Kaufman, *Thomas Alva Edison*
Alice Walker, *Langston Hughes, American Poet*
Elizabeth Yates, *Amos Fortune, Free Man*

2nd Section – Grades 6-8

Myths, Fables or Tales

James M. Barrie, *Peter Pan*
John Bierhost, *The Red Swan: Myths and Tales of the American Indians*
Robert Browning, *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*
Thomas Bulfinch, *Age of Fable*
Paul Gallico, *The Snow Goose*

Leon Garfield & Edward Blishen, *The God Beneath the Sea*
Margaret Hodges, *The Other World: Myths of the Celts*
Robert Nye, *Beowulf*
Howard Pyle, *The Merry Adventures of Robin Hood*
Rosemary Sutcliff, *The Sword and the Circle; The Light Beyond the Forest*

Fiction

Louisa May Alcott, *Little Women*
Hans Christian Andersen, *It's Perfectly True and Other Stories*
L. Frank Baum, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*
Ray Bradbury, *The Stories of Ray Bradbury*
Frances Hodgson Burnett, *The Secret Garden; Little Lord Fauntleroy*
Sheila Burnford, *The Incredible Journey*
Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland; Through the Looking Glass*
James Fenimore Cooper, *The Last of the Mohicans*
Stephen Crane, *The Red Badge of Courage*
Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*
Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*
Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*
Kenneth Grahame, *The Wind in the Willows*
E.E. Hale, *The Man Without a Country*
Rudyard Kipling, *The Jungle Books*
Jane Langton, *The Fledgling*
C.S. Lewis, *The Chronicles of Narnia*
Jack London, "Call of the Wild" from *The Best Stories of Jack London*
Marjorie K. Rawlings, *The Yearling*
John Steinbeck, "Flight" from *The Long Valley*
Robert Louis Stevenson, *Treasure Island; The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*
Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*
J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit*
Leo Tolstoy, *Master and Man and Other Stories*
Pamela L. Travers, *Mary Poppins*
Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer; The Prince and the Pauper*
Jules Verne, *Twenty-Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*
E.B. White, *Stuart Little; Charlotte's Web; The Trumpet of the Swan*
Oscar Wilde, *The Happy Prince*
Laura Ingalls Wilder, *Little House on the Prairie; Little House in the Big Woods*

Historical/Cultural Books

Abigail Adams, *Letters*

Richard Barber, *A Strong Land and a Sturdy: Life in Medieval England*

P.T. Barnum, *Barnum's Own Story*

Esther Forbes, *Paul Revere and the World He Lived In; Johnny Tremain*

Anne Frank, *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*

Geronimo, *Geronimo's Story of His Life*

John Gunther, *Alexander the Great*

Rhoda Hoff, *America's Immigrants: Adventures in Eyewitness History*

Helen Keller, *The Story of My Life*

Peter Nabokov, *Native American Testimony: An Anthology of Indian and White Relations*

Jay Williams, *Leonardo Da Vinci; Joan of Arc*

Informative Books

Norman D. Anderson, *Investigating Science in the Swimming Pool and Ocean*

Marilyn Burns, *The Book of Think: Or How to Solve a Problem Twice Your Size*

Edith Hamilton, *The Greek Way; The Roman Way*

Kenneth Heuer, *Rainbows, Halos, and Other Wonders: Light and Color in the Atmosphere*

Bettyann Kevles, *Watching the Wild Apes: The Primate Studies of Goodall, Fossey, and Galdikos*

Mitch Struble, *The Web of Space-Time: A Step-by-Step Exploration of Relativity*

Rose Wyler and Gerald Ames, *It's All Done with Numbers: Astounding and Confounding Feats of Mathematical Magic*

3rd Section – Grades 9–12

Fiction

Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice; Sense and Sensibility*

Saul Bellow, *The Adventures of Augie March*

Charlotte Bronte, *Jane Eyre*

Emily Bronte, *Wuthering Heights*

Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote*

Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield; Great Expectations; Oliver Twist*

Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*

Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*

William Faulkner, *Collected Stories of William Faulkner*

Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones*

F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*
William Golding, *Lord of the Flies*
Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*
Ernest Hemingway, *The Old Man and the Sea*
Richard Hughes, *A High Wind in Jamaica*
Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*
Henry James, *The American; The Portrait of a Lady*
James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*
Franz Kafka, *The Trial; The Castle*
D.H. Lawrence, "The Rocking-Horse Winner" from *The Collected Short Stories of D.H. Lawrence*, Vol. 3
Jean de La Bruyere, *Characters*
C.S. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet; That Hideous Strength; Perelandra*
Lucian, "The Way to Write History"
Herman Melville, *Billy Budd; Moby Dick*
George Orwell, *Animal Farm; 1984*
J.D. Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye*
John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*
Robert Louis Stevenson, "The Lantern-Bearers" from *Across the Plains, with other Memories and Essays*
Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*
Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*
Mark Twain, *Huckleberry Finn*
Robert Penn Warren, *All the King's Men*
T.H. White, *The Once and Future King*
Richard Wright, *Black Boy: A Record of Childhood and Youth*

Historical/Cultural Books

Henry Adams, *History of the United States of America During Administrations of Jefferson and Madison* (Vol. 1, Chapters I & VI)
St. Augustine, *The Confessions of Augustine*, Bks. I-VII
J.B. Bury, "Herodotus" from *The Ancient Greek Historians*
Eve Curie, *Madame Curie*
Charles Darwin, *Autobiography of Charles Darwin*
Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*
Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*
Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs*
Herodotus, *The Histories*, Books I & II

John Hersey, *Hiroshima*
Charles A. Lindbergh, *The Spirit of St. Louis*
Plutarch, *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*
Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War* (Books I & II)
Rene Vallery-Radot, *The Life of Pasteur*
Carl Van Doren, *Benjamin Franklin*
Xenophon, "The March to the Sea" from *Xenophon's Anabasis* (Book IX)

Historical Documents:

"The English Bill of Rights" (v. 1)
"The Virginia Declaration of Rights" (v. 1)
"The Declaration of Independence" (v. 1)
"The Constitution of the United States" (v. 1)

Informative Books

Mortimer Adler & Charles Van Doren, *How To Read a Book*
Mortimer Adler, *How To Think About The Great Ideas*
Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics, Book 1; Politics, Book 1; Poetics*
Matthew Arnold, *Matthew Arnold: Poetry and Prose*
Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*
Francis Bacon, *Essays*
John Dewey, *How We Think: A Restatement of the Relation of Reflective Thinking to the Educative Process*
Albert Einstein & Leopold Infeld, "The Rise and Decline of Classical Physics"
T.S. Eliot, "Dante" and "Tradition and the Individual Talent" from *Selected Essays*
Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays*
Epicurus, *Principal Doctrines and Vatican Sayings*
Euclid, Book I from *The Elements* (Vol. 1)
Michael Faraday, *The Chemical History of a Candle*
Galileo Galilei, "The Starry Messenger"
Alexander Hamilton, et al., *The Federalist Papers*, Nos. I-X
David Hume, *Writings on Economics*
Thomas H. Huxley, *Man's Place in Nature and Other Essays*
William James, *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy*
Thomas Jefferson, *The Life and Selected Writings of Thomas Jefferson*
Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace*
Martin Luther King, "I Have a Dream" in *The World's Great Speeches*
Abraham Lincoln, *The Life and Writings of Abraham Lincoln*
John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, Chapters I-IV

Thomas B. Macaulay, "Machiavelli" from *Critical and Historical Essays*
Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*
Karl Marx & Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*
John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty; Considerations on Representative Government*
John Milton, *Areopagitica*
Isaac Newton, *Optics*, Book III; *Principia Mathematica*
Thomas Paine, *Common Sense and Other Political Writings*
Plato, *The Republic*, Bks. I & II
Pliny the Younger, *Letters of Gaius Plinius Caecilius Secundus*
Ptolemy, *The Almagest* (Book 1, Ch. 1-8)
Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Social Contract* (Book 1)
Jonathan Swift, "An Essay on Modern Education"
Henry David Thoreau, *Walden and Other Writings of Henry David Thoreau*
Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*
George Washington, "The Farewell Address" in *The People Shall Judge*, v. 1
Alfred North Whitehead, *An Introduction to Mathematics* (Chapters I-III)
Virginia Woolf, "How Should One Read a Book?" from *Collected Essays*

From the "Great Books" come the "Great Ideas" that shaped Western Civilization, and the name most connected with both is Mortimer Adler. In fact, the two books that should be required reading for every high school student are *How To Read a Book* by Adler and Charles Van Doren, and *How To Think About the Great Ideas* by Dr. Adler.

It was Mortimer Adler who first recognized and enumerated a finite number of Great Ideas (103) that were found throughout the Great Books, comprising the main body of Western thinking. He worked for eight years building a comprehensive reference inventory entitled *Syntopican: An Index to The Great Ideas*.

Covering everything from the definitions of Truth and Liberty, Democracy and Oligarchy, Astronomy and Cosmology as well as Memory and Imagination, to the differences between Knowledge and Opinion, Mind and Soul, Custom and Convention or Tyranny and Despotism; from the paradox of Pain and Pleasure to the parallels of Logic and Reason, Science and Religion, or Philosophy and Theology; from the antithesis of Good and Evil or Virtue and Vice, to the conflicting realities of War and Peace or Life and Death, Adler introduces us to "the history of thinking."

Though studying the Great Ideas will stretch and stimulate the mind on a whole new level, what is curious about every discovery is that they are not new. They were present

and recognized in the ancient world – in fact, the ancient Greeks had a name for every one of the Great Ideas that Adler so meticulously and methodically catalogued. This is what Mark Twain was inferring, no doubt, when he once quipped, “The ancients stole all our ideas from us!”

These concepts represent the core questions of humanity from the beginning of time, and the Great Books that wrestled with these Great Ideas revealed both the continuity and diversity of human thought. They reflect both the conflicts of the Great Minds down through the ages, as well as their synergy.

Furthermore, the above anthology of Great Books (though just a sliver) helps us realize, according to Adler, that we are all philosophers, we all like to think – in fact, we all *do* think. How well we do it, of course, is the issue. The Great Books, along with the minds God has given us, help us do it well.

Mortimer Adler was a scholar of the highest order and the consummate educator, yet not a snobbish intellectual as one might think. He was known to be as excited about teaching the common man on the street about humanity’s Great Ideas as he was his university students. When he said, “The Great Ideas belong to everyone.” he not only believed it, he had a passion to make it so.

Because ideas have consequences, what a priceless gift Professor Adler gave us by helping us think deeply about the West’s greatest ideas and their consequences. What an immeasurable inheritance we give our children when we do the same.

A Vision for the Campus

This school campus, in most cases, is the first thing parents and students look at, so a vision for the campus is important in terms of a schematic design framed around *safety and security* (improvements, installments, investments); *buildings and grounds* (campus blueprint, charming aesthetics, careful maintenance); and *additions and accommodations* (facilities that facilitate both vision & mission).

Safety & Security – improvements, installments and investments.

As this becomes a growing concern in our society, it must be the primary concern of a school’s campus vision. Societal expectations will demand evidence that we as school leaders are fully aware of all needed safety/security improvements, installments and investments, but also that we have a plan for fully equipping the school campus.

Needed improvements could include everything from replacing toxic rubber chips on the

playground to a more secure perimeter apparatus. It might also involve things like bullet-proof windows or more secure entrance/exit gates.

The potential installment of safer playground equipment as well as a state-of-the-art camera system along with an alarm or entrance security system may be another consideration. Many schools are updating their campus-wide phone system as well as investing in a hired security presence. ALICE and first-aid trainings for school staff conducted by local police departments along with CPR professionals have become top-priority items as well for the overall safety/security paradigm of the school.

Reducing anxiety by making students and parents feel as safe and secure as is humanly possible falls to the school's administration, and must now be an on-going proactive effort. Safety and Security Reviews require annual implementation and all safety/security improvements, installments and investments should be communicated to the parents on a consistent and regular basis.

This is the first focus of the vision for the campus of a cutting edge *School of Thought*.

Buildings & Grounds – building the life of the mind in “the brain factory.”

The second focus is on the school's buildings and grounds, complete with campus attractiveness, manicured landscaping, a studious atmosphere, color design, clear signage, wall sayings, classroom “think tanks,” a literary library, fine arts complex, science lab (with live critters!), working gardens, art gallery, age-appropriate playgrounds, athletic fields, all-purpose room, community courtyard (at the center of the campus) and an outdoor amphitheater.

Comprising all aspects of the campus atmosphere and ambience of a school, the buildings and grounds help to define the school's commitments, character and identity. Similarly, if education is not only about truth and virtue, but beauty as well, then a school facility has the power to facilitate aesthetics. Through a clean and well-maintained campus as well as stimulating classrooms, the “brain factory” builds the life of the mind.

Additions & Accommodations – facilities facilitate

Facilities are built to facilitate. Houses are built to facilitate family life, sports arenas are built to facilitate athletic competition, factories are built to facilitate production, and schools are built to facilitate learning. What happens inside the building, of course, is more important than the building itself, but the building is still very important.

Family can happen anywhere, but it traditionally happens best in a house. Products can

be produced anywhere, but the factories of the Industrial Revolution compounded productivity exponentially.

The point is, it's not about the building, but the building does have an important role to play. In education, learning can happen anywhere, anytime, but a building designed and built for both learning and thinking gives it increased structure, focus and dedication.

A well-defined vision for the role of a building in the life of a school indicates an ongoing commitment to whatever additions and accommodations are needed to fulfill that vision and further the education mission. Why? Because facilities facilitate! They either facilitate apathy and mediocrity or they facilitate excellence, engagement, creativity and thought. The campus vision (or lack thereof) determines which it will be.

A Vision for the Community

A sustained visibility within the community is good for the school and good for the community. School life interspersed with community life is healthy for both, and community life intermingled with school life is critical to both. The surrounding neighborhood needs to witness the educational investments being made in its youth, and with few exceptions, it desires the same. If a great gulf gets fixed between the two, however, a vacuum will eventually form and vacuums always become vulnerable to forces that inevitably weaken that otherwise self-evident link.

For example, if our youth think the education process is all about them, not only can a latent narcissistic spirit develop over time, but a superficial (and entitled) view of citizenship can manifest that will rob them of a rooted sense of belonging, not to mention the joy of serving. In addition to that, absent the ties that bind, detachment and disconnect makes hostility towards the community so much easier.

On another level, if the community surrenders local control to the state, it will in time come to regret it, but the way back will be long and arduous, if it is even still possible. Big government does not easily give up turf it has gained control over, which is why local control remains sacrosanct in many states. It is also why the charter school movement in this country is one of the major steps Americans have taken in that difficult effort to restore the marriage between the local community and the local community schoolhouse.

So our ninth look is **a vision for the community** in terms of an increased visibility fulfilled thru (1) *expanded awareness* (traditional and social media communication vehicles); (2) *formed partnerships* (community groups, education associations and local

colleges); and (3) *shared marketing* (word-of-mouth, school and community events, and leader luncheons).

Expanded awareness – traditional & social media communication vehicles.

Expanding the community's awareness of school life is accomplished through all the traditional routes as well as the variety of social media vehicles. In the era of the internet, a well-designed website is the most obvious and essential component of all expanded awareness efforts. Anymore, this is (or should be) the hub of school life in terms of information and communication.

Some of the key features (and most accessible) of a superior school website should be a greeting/introduction letter from the principal, the school's philosophy, school registration/enrollment forms, the school calendar (including public board meeting dates) and a few rotating, carefully-selected pictures.

This will be the first thing most parents will look at. Because first impressions can make or break parent interest, therefore, it would be well worth the extra expense to get this done by people who are professional and skilled website designers. Too many schools have "bush-league" looking websites, and are not aware of the negative vibe they may be sending off.

For school leaders who like to write and are good at it, a community column in the local newspaper on pertinent education issues can gain quite a readership and really increase school visibility as well as generate conversations around the community about all things education. This is one of the most effective ways to get the attention of thoughtful parents who care about education and want to know the philosophy of the school and its leaders.

A radio program can do the same. With a creative format that may include commentary as well as interviews with parents or students, a school can host a thirty-minute slot on the local radio station that becomes the talk of the community. Launching the school's own podcast is another good idea if it can be done with excellence and creativity.

Formed partnerships – community groups, education associations, local colleges.

Sustained visibility is forged through formed partnerships, period. Whether it is various community groups, education associations, local businesses, colleges or churches, people are "softies" for schools and love joining forces with them. Moreover, the stronger this relationship becomes, the more the word gets out.

The side benefits are abundant as well. Long-term, these partnerships can become a

pool from which the school can draw for special speakers, fund-raisers or volunteers. The positive outcomes are endless and limitless in their effect. The key is to be intentional, incremental and patient. If you take the long-view and stay with it, it will bear fruit over time.

When your school cultivates ongoing relationships with community organizations, the strength of its presence grows in the community while the importance of the community grows in your school. And it will not be lost on your students, which is why thoughtful citizenship is more caught than taught!

As parents, teachers and students talk up their school with their stories, a school vision for community visibility will not only grow, but will exponentially enrich both the school and the community.

Shared marketing – word-of-mouth, school & community events, leader luncheons.

For a new school, no form of advertisement will ever beat pleased parents and happy students. Word-of-mouth is king in the world of marketing, and no vibe travels faster than satisfied customers. If this is true in the sales world, it is especially true in education. Parents talk (especially moms) and if what you're doing is exceptional, people will hear about it and beat a path to your door, no matter how far they have to travel, as the Mayo Brothers once reminded us!

School and community events are the next best way to market the school. Inviting the neighborhood to your special events and doing special events in the community (parades, fairs, local festivals), will pay great dividends. For most of us, it's usually out-of-sight, out-of-mind. So the more action you have, the more visibility you get. Energy equals excitement, and both are contagious marketers.

Besides the availability of well-designed brochures, flyers and posters, as well as such things as curb-side feather flags or messaging marquees, another helpful marketing tool is "leader luncheons." When school leaders make it a routine part of their weekly schedule to do a luncheon with a community leader, the dominoes effect is usually quite significant. The movers and shakers in the community should know your school and your school's leaders well, and leader luncheons are one of the prime ways to build a strong connection with them as well as keep them well-informed.

A Vision for the Future

It has been said that a person who drives full speed ahead without a rear view mirror is a person at risk. That's because without context, perspective will always be limited,

and few things grow our roots deeper than understanding our past, whether it be our own, our family's, our school's or our nation's.

That means, there will always be some things that should certainly be changed, but it also means there are some things that should never change. Wise are we when we know the difference, foolish when we pretend there is none. It is one of the more troubling signs of the times when the latter is no longer as obvious as the former.

C.S. Lewis said, "We are far too easily pleased." I would add that we are far too easily duped as well. Though the postmodern impulse is to upend everything a stable civilization holds dear, hopefully it will never dislodge the obvious truth that *some things should never change*.

The spirit of the age is to trash the wisdom of the ages, dissing anything from the past as outdated and dismissing anyone with timeless principles as reactionary. Whether rooted in arrogance or ignorance, a cynical view of the past not only distorts our moral compass but also blurs the lens of common sense. The notion that we are more enlightened than earlier generations is surely one of modernity's most insidious mind blinds.

So when we seek to transmit a vision for a school's future, be assured it does not include becoming mesmerized by the latest and greatest, or falling prey to incoherent and socially-destructive ideologies. To restate it, there is no clear vision of the future apart from a circumspect view of the past. The graves of yesteryear are full of gold, and we become increasingly impoverished when we don't unearth them.

Conversely, with the past as our anchor, a future focus becomes all the more animated. Relative to the *School of Thought* proposition, it not only resounds with a rallying cry, but helps sharpen **a vision for the future** in terms of a durable strategy determined by (1) *fiscal challenges* (balanced budget, robust donor base, financial independence); (2) *optional choices* (micro-schools, University-Model Schools, online learning formats, tutorial-based college ed.); and (3) *legal changes* (government control to constitutional protection, tax-funded to tax exempt, religious cancellation to religious liberation).

Fiscal Challenges – balanced budget, robust donor base, financial independence.

A balanced budget ... best understood as proactive and responsible financial planning, a budget provides a vehicle for the wise allocation of finite resources to efficiently deliver school services. In addition, school finance experts agree that budget management is the critical administration piece by which school leaders build trust.

" ... I have seen budgets make the school systems the success they are known for, and

I have seen budgets throw school systems into a tailspin. I have seen budgets that created a sense of trust and camaraderie within the community, and I have seen communities wrought with anger and mistrust, diverting the focus from student needs to adult issues that should have never surfaced.” (Malinowski, 2014)

From the US Department of Education came a [stunning report on school budgeting](#). For example, it said that 61% of secondary schools spent more than they took in during the school year (2014-2015). This meant that by 2020, US public schools would need to earn over 3 billion dollars in surplus to even come close to a balanced budget.

Poorly managed school budgets obviously compromise our ability to do right by the parents, teachers and students with whom we work. They need and expect those in school administration to be conscientious and responsible in this regard.

And with all the help out there, there is no excuse to fail them! The best practices from the best financial experts give us the best guidance. Data based on findings by The Rennie Center, Harvard Business Review, and other respected financial sources in education, shows how to balance the school’s budget effectively and still educate students successfully. Supported by a multitude of researchers and financial experts, a well-defined budgeting process of planning, priorities and practices would yield positive results.

The School Budget Planning

When preparing a new budget, the central objectives should drive the entire planning process, which means, all the unique elements of a school budget should reflect those key aims. Furthermore, paying attention to the following guideposts of school budgeting will help school leadership avoid needless mistakes and alleviate much anxiety.

The first guidepost is an unwavering commitment to a balanced budget. Normally it seems this would be a no-brainer but it is not an exaggeration to say that a lot of very bright and business-savvy education leaders get tripped up here. If your present revenue streams are to meet current school spending, you must have a balanced budget. Anything short of this should be viewed as intolerable and non-negotiable.

Second, the budget must adhere to all local, state and federal regulations. The more tied into the state a school is, obviously, the more of these laws and regulations by which they have to be shackled. Conversely, the less tied into the state a school is, the

less hampered by these legal straps they have to be. Whatever the case, the ignorance or avoidance of all applicable laws will not go well for the school.

Third, the budget must become the vehicle by which you assess not only your school's costs and services, but achievements as well. As the board's best measurement tool, it should be used as such.

These three guiding principles must be fixed before beginning the planning process. Once they are, the administrative team can continue by taking a close look at their school's spending from the previous school year. (For start-up schools, a look at the budgets of other schools of the same size, model and structure can do the same.)

Doing your homework will help you fully understand what budget data you need to create the best budget possible. It would likely include items like increased student enrollment projections, facilities impact, audit information, differentiating between instructional and non-instructional costs, and of course, understanding all expenditures (both the budgeted and the actual).

This planning period is when all preliminary adjustments are made, which means the school budget will constantly be tweaked and revised. Finding precise numbers, however, will be critical for optimum budget planning because getting a good read on where the bulk of school spending goes is School Budget 101.

Your school's previous budget expenditure breakdown needs to be clear and comprehensive, relative to personnel (salaries and benefits), curriculum, curricular and extracurricular activities, purchasing, facility maintenance, professional and physical plant development, materials and supplies, machinery and equipment, and other miscellaneous expenses.

The School Budget Priorities

During the prioritizing period of budget management, delineate your budgetary goals and break them down into precise units that are both quantifiable and reachable. Then examine those goals closely and postulate the spending priorities for the school. As you are doing this, keep in mind that these priorities must support and reinforce the purpose and requirements of your school.

Asking what the obstacles might be in reaching your goals, and what revisions need to be made in light of those obstacles, will help focus the budget as well. Academic

priorities (class sizes, curriculum, teacher training) should be factored in first and be wholly evidence-based.

As you examine your current resources and expenditures, you will need to determine the existing variables to enable goal achievement. This is accomplished primarily through cost analysis.

The steps of cost analysis will enable you to discern program spending relative to outcomes. Those steps include (1) assessing program benefits and values; (2) calculating program costs, and (3) comparing costs & benefits.

The School Budget Practices

A *strategic financial plan* becomes your long-term blueprint for putting your school's spending priorities into practice, converting the plan into specific steps that are doable and immediate.

Provided by a Forbes financial expert, these steps help a school board have all the crucial information: Step 1. *Executive Synopsis* – outlines your plan; Step 2. *Elevator Pitch* – a brief school description; Step 3. *Mission Statement* – what your school is trying to accomplish; Step 4. *SWOT* – analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats; Step 5. *Goals* – for the next five years, one year, quarter, and month; Step 6. *KPIs* – performance measurements for a school's achievements; Step 7. *Target Group*: details student, parent, community, and stakeholder needs; Step 8. *Market Analysis* – how is the niche that your school falls under-performing compared to education industry standards? Step 9. *Executions Plan* – how larger-goal projects will be completed; Step 10. *Fiscal Forecasts* – potential results for each project your school might pursue.

To achieve efficient communication between budget committee members, an organized budget document should be provided at budget meetings. This budget presentation must be well-structured and crystal clear about the challenges (student attendance, staffing issues, resource demands) and how the financial plan will address those issues.

But without sustainability, much of this is for naught. So how does a well-planned budget achieve the standard of sustainability? According to many in the school financial world, *budget flexibility* is the key to school finance sustainability, with two basic strategies for ensuring the same: (1) create a new budget at the start of the fiscal year, and (2) make mid-year adjustments. Both involve constant scrutiny and oversight (*School Planning & Management*, 2018 issue).

A school budget is a multidimensional mechanism, with many basic functional purposes accomplished through the actual budget itself and its development process. The school budget is a policy document, an operations guide, a financial planner and a communications tool, all of which reflects the school's values and priorities. When school leaders recognize the multiple functions and influences of the budget, they are more inclined to employ each one to provide the resources for others to do their work.

In a nutshell, budgeting is key to substantive school improvement when led by adept school leadership who appreciates not only the importance, but the necessity of ongoing budget evaluation. This commitment not only prevents the school as an institution from calcifying, but keeps it on the cutting edge by supplying the resources the faculty, staff and students need to thrive.

A robust donor base

The first step in developing a growing donor base for your school is to identify and secure a highly-reputable, effective and proven foundation search site. In this regard, *School of Thought* recommends an organization called *FoundationSearch*.

As stated on their website, *FoundationSearch* provides market-leading [funding information](#), fundraising education and consulting services to a growing list of over 5,000 clients. Since 1995, this organization has helped more than 16,100 non-profit and charitable organizations throughout North America raise over \$25.3 billion in funding.

FoundationSearch has become North America's leading source of funding information for non-profits and charities. Its online resource includes more than 236,000 foundations, representing billions of dollars in annual granting, and includes tools to locate grants by type, value, year, recipient, donor and historical giving trends.

In conjunction with [BIG Online](#), *FoundationSearch* is a key resource for the non-profit arena, and a critical part of Metasoft's objective to help non-profits efficiently identify, attract, and manage the relationships and resources crucial to the fulfillment of their unique vision and mission.

The following reviews were written by *FoundationSearch* clients who needed grant funding for a variety of program categories:

Rutgers University (Development Assistant, New Brunswick, New Jersey)

"I prefer *FoundationSearch* and Foundation Manager over other fundraising resources. Their database is larger than most with more ways to search giving nationally, internationally and even globally. It has proven to be a very powerful tool."

The Christian Business Men's Connection (Development Officer, Chattanooga, Tennessee)

"I cannot write enough about *FoundationSearch* ,, I've been a loyal subscriber for 10+ years via four different non-profits. Its research tools and support links cut-through-the-weeds to enable a quick understanding of a wide range of foundations from their financial stats, board of directors, granting interests and amounts to easy-access 990s. In five minutes or less, I can have a down-and-dirty profile and decide if a particular foundation is worth my time to pursue. The clincher is the fantastic customer service they provide through their relationship managers. They are on-the-spot ready to help with questions I have and are diligent to provide one-on-one training sessions so that no benefit of the subscription is over-looked. Top-notch!"

Ronald McDonald House at Stanford (Development Officer, Palo Alto, California)

"We increased our proposal submissions by over 50% and received two significant grants in just the first round. Not only were we able to raise new funds in the first year and pay for the service, but have received new funding in each subsequent year. It was an easy decision to continue with our *Foundation Search* subscription and can't imagine being without this valuable resource now."

Oklahoma Baptist University (Director of Prospect Research, Shawnee, Oklahoma)

FoundationSearch has helped us secure thousands of dollars, not necessarily all from new foundations, but by also utilizing new and updated information on foundations that have supported us in the past. Customer support is excellent, the program is continually updated and improved, and I would recommend it to anyone ... *FoundationSearch* has saved me countless hours of research and makes my job more manageable."

Fuller Theological Seminary (Director of Foundation Relations, Pasadena, California)

"Thanks, again, for making this great service available. *FoundationSearch* is my definite go-to resource for foundation relations-I can't imagine being without it!"

Friends With Jesus Inc. (Administrative Director, Bainbridge, GA)

"The services offered by Metasoft/*Foundation Search* has opened the door to thousands of new program dollars for our small non-profit ministry which includes an afterschool and summer program for at-risk and underprivileged youth, a temporary

housing program for women and their children, and a social enterprise that puts our clients back into the workforce.

The data provided allows us to quickly filter through which foundations are and are not interested in partnering with the work we do. It also provides us with information on who the decision makers are within each foundation in order to re-connect or build new personal relationships. If applied diligently, this system will definitely advance your non-profit in the connections needed to grow your income and build the relationships that are essential to sustain the life changing work you do."

University of Michigan-Flint (Foundation Relations Officer, Flint, Michigan)

"I love the reports I am able to create in 'My Reports' on *FoundationSearch*. My manager was quite impressed with what I was able to generate after only one review of the training tutorial on the site. Even though the site is intuitive to use, the tutorial showed me how to take the information to a higher level of analysis and create a concise, comprehensive list of prospective funding sources!"

The Jesuits of the New Orleans Province (Grants Director, New Orleans, Louisiana)

"We're very happy with *FoundationSearch*. We started our membership just before Hurricane Katrina, and I don't know what we would have done without it – it helped us raise \$7.5 million to assist in the rebuilding efforts of several member agencies. It was also a great help that we were able to access the membership from any computer, because after Katrina flooded our offices we had to work from our evacuation locations for months – family members' homes, public terminals and other locations. I'm always telling other organizations that they need *FoundationSearch* – there is simply no comparison with other resources."

Biblica (Director, Foundations & Corporate Relations, Colorado Springs, Colorado)

"I am new to the foundation research game, and frankly, I was intimidated by the prospect. But *Foundation Search America* has made my introduction to research easy and productive. Our organization subscribes to a couple of research engines, but *Foundation Search* is definitely my favorite. I am learning new ways to use the site almost daily, and I appreciate the personal assistance that the staff has provided me. Thanks for helping a research novice succeed!"

Habitat for Humanity Capital Region (Operations Manager, Lansing, MI)

"As the grants manager at Habitat for Humanity Capital Region, I'm excited to have

FoundationSearch in our development toolbox. The program provides a user-friendly and robust interface to incredible amounts of data about potential funding partners, and that access frees up staff time to build relationships because research is made easy. Attentive, accommodating customer service and countless training and education opportunities make *FoundationSearch* a great investment for nonprofits.

Financial independence

Is it possible to be a strong educational organization in America without government funds? Yes it is, and places like the Sunshine Acres Children's Home in Mesa, Arizona as well as Hillsdale College in Hillsdale, Michigan have shown that you can not only survive doing so, but actually thrive. Take the latter, for example ...

Hillsdale College

For this small private college from Hillsdale, Michigan, things changed dramatically in 1972 when the Education Amendment (Title IX) was passed. The federal government attempted to impose racial quota requirements which conflicted with Hillsdale's ardent nondiscrimination stance. Because some Hillsdale students received federally-funded Pell grants and student loans, the College itself became subject to statist regulations regarding hiring practices, including an account of the percentages of minority students enrolled.

These new mandates were problematic on many levels, but the most obvious was how they interfered with the College's historic "race-blind" admissions and hiring practices. The College never kept records of how many students belonged to which race, so for the College to adhere to these new government statutes would violate its founding principles of providing education "irrespective of nation, color or sex." To live up to this creed would mean that admission or hiring must be based on merit alone.

After many legal challenges over a period of twelve years, the case went all the way to the Supreme Court in the 1980s, which ultimately ruled to uphold these government regulations. In response, the school's Board of Trustees made the decision to refuse all forms of federal assistance, supplanting federal student aid with privately-funded scholarships, grants and loans.

Hence, to retain and maintain its institutional integrity, Hillsdale's Board of Trustees pledged first that the College would continue its long-standing policy of nondiscrimination, and second that it would not accept any restrictions on its independence. The commitment to resist state tyranny has been renewed several times

in subsequent years and remains the College's unwavering stance to date.

The end result has been a liberal arts college that has thrived, not just survived, offering thirty-nine undergraduate degrees as well as the Van Andel Graduate School of Statesmanship with three graduate programs, a full Division II athletic program, a robust building program, and a student body of some 1,450 undergraduates.

And incredibly, not one dime of support comes from the government, which means it can be done! Given the intense and oppressive cultural winds coming from conflicting ideological forces, the need to go this route is becoming increasingly obvious.

The *School of Thought* vision, therefore, calls on a new generation of courageous and principled educators to forge a new path for an alternate school network in Wyoming that operates entirely free of government funding. To remain free of the left's social engineering efforts that target our youth, the future of our state and country depends on these kinds of schools.

With Shekels Come Shackles

As the Wyoming Superintendent of Public Instruction (2021-2022), I fought this very thing when the Feds concocted their revised USDA Title IX guidance policy, which they had handed down to the states in May of 2021. If we at the state and district level didn't comply with their woke discrimination policies, the threat was to lose 40 million dollars in federal school lunch money.

After calling a host of Wyoming legislators, I discovered that most of them were thrilled to cut ties with the Feds in this way, and enthusiastically encouraged me to tell the Feds to pound sand.

So with the clear support of the vast majority of the Wyoming people, we drew our line in the sand and drove our stake in the ground: "We will not comply!" read the headlines, summarizing the statement I had released from the WDE. While the main resistance came of course from the press and the education establishment, no less that forty-six out of forty-eight school districts in Wyoming ultimately caved to Washington's demands because they decided they could not live without that federal money. This, in spite of the fact that the Wyoming State Treasurer (at the time), Curt Meier, assured not only the press, but the districts and the Wyoming people that the state had more than enough funds in the coffers to pay for its own school lunch money.

Suffice it to say, I learned three things: (1) how deep fed-money addiction goes, (2) how short in supply courage is, and (3) "With shekels comes shackles."

Optional Choices – microschoools, University-Model schools, online learning formats, and tutorial-based college education.

As insidious strains of progressive ideology continue to permeate the American public education system as well as our college campuses, motivation is intensifying amongst parents of all stripes to take back control of their children's educational experience. Consequently, as the school choice movement grows exponentially, it offers a variety of scholastic models, including microschoools, the University-Model schools, online learning formats and tutorial-based college education. Here is a brief look at each:

Microschoools

Don Soifer, the head of the National Microschooling Center (headquartered in Las Vegas), estimates that there are more than 125,000 microschoools where over 1.5 million students are now being educated. So with this notable education paradigm shift, as interest continues to grow, many people are now curious about what a microschoool is.

In short, a microschoool is a no-frills education model that is our modern version of the one-room schoolhouse, though it comes in many forms and labels: learning pods, the neighborhood schools, learning centers, homeschooling hybrids and Tutor Centers.

Some get accredited and some don't. But as simple academic environments, they typically operate independent of the established public systems, doing their work under the radar in collaboration with other local community groups. They meet in homes, churches, art or dance studios, empty storefronts and unused school rooms.

There are many microschoool organizations providing support to this new wave of budding entrepreneurial educators, but two that are especially effective and noteworthy are the Herzog Foundation and My Father's World, both out of Missouri.

The former, My Father's World (MFW), founded back in the 1980's, has been instrumental in starting 126 Christian micro schools across the nation to date. As they ground their curriculum in the Hebraic approach to classical education, their model holds to a distinctively biblical orientation of child-training.

Boasting their own retreat center that houses attendees, MFW provides microschoool trainings every 6-8 weeks for those interested in starting one. Each training involves two full days (Friday and Saturday), with one day on the front and back ends (Thursday and Sunday) set aside for travel.

The curriculum produced by My Father's World is highly adaptable to any school structure, and the organization's leadership and staff are incredibly responsive to offer

whatever support is needed to help eager microschool pioneers get started.

Simply go to their website (mfwbooks.com/rescue), watch all six videos produced by the founders, and fill out the Free Consultation Request at the bottom of that page. A staff member will contact you to answer all questions, and take your reservation (if desired) for one of their trainings located in Rolla, Missouri.

After viewing the videos, interacting with staff expertise and going through their on-site training, participants will be sufficiently prepared to start a successful microschool in their area.

University-Model Schools

In 1992, a group of Christian parents were caught in a quandary, between what they felt were their two deepest responsibilities. One was to play an integral part in their children's spiritual formation, the other was to be more involved in their scholastic development. As their children grew older, these passions only intensified, hence, their frustrations grew stronger.

To impact their kids spiritually, they needed more time with them at home; to invest in them academically, they needed a good school (where they would be all day, five days a week). The conundrum seemed unavoidable: Time at school stole from time at home, but the time needed at home would invariably conflict with the school schedule. For these parents, local public schools were not an option and private faith-based schools were too expensive.

Ambivalence notwithstanding, they felt there had to be a way to bring both worlds together, "... as partners instead of adversaries – a way that would blend into one balanced system the best attributes of home with the best benefits of a traditional Christian classroom." So they kept praying.

Eventually those prayers broke through and in 1991, they birthed what became the first University-Model (UM) school. By 2002, primarily through word-of-mouth, eleven schools were opened around the country. And by the end of 2014, over eighty schools in nineteen states were established. Today the movement has grown to over 88 member schools (three overseas), now comprising the umbrella association of UMSI (University-Model Schools International), a ministry of the National Association of University-Model Schools (NAUMS).

So what exactly is a University-Model School? In short, it is a school where parents

partner in tandem (not just in the background) with professional teachers in the education process of their children. As qualified educators, teachers provide all direct instruction in the *central classroom* (at school) while parents oversee and reinforce their children's coursework as paraprofessionals in the *satellite classroom* (at home).

Teachers give regular feedback to both student and parent regarding the child's progress in each subject, while parents reinforce at home all the academic content they get at school with tutoring or study skill development as well as extension activities.

To achieve this balance between home and school, UM schools have employed a scheduling structure that facilitates a measured transition from the home to the school. For instance, younger children typically need more time at home, so elementary-age students attend the central (school) classroom two days a week, and the satellite (home) classroom three days a week. When students advance to the middle school age-level, it flips – they attend the school classroom three days a week and the home classroom two days a week.

For University-Model Schools, the end goal is to provide a college-simulated environment, so upper level students (high school) attend school whenever classes are scheduled, for up to five days a week. This requires the school to schedule sixty-minute classes on Monday/Wednesday/Friday and ninety minutes on Tuesday/Thursday.

And just as the students progress from one level to the next, parent roles change as well. In elementary school, the parent's role is that of a private tutor; in junior high it becomes more of a guide. By high school the role ends up morphing into that of a course monitor, as the students have become more independent and responsible.

But regardless of the varying age-based scheduling scenarios, at no time are UM students attending classes in the central (school) classroom for four or five full days. UM leadership points out, however, that the model is a five-day academic program. That is to say, it does require five full days of rigorous instruction and consistent reinforcement through the combination of the central and satellite classrooms.

In conclusion, the University-Model schools have two fundamental objectives that drive their approach: (1) a compelling interest in preserving the God-ordained family relationship in which the Christian faith is most effectively nurtured and passed on, and (2) to provide for their youngsters the best Christian education on the planet.

Whether it is UMSI's general or classical Christian tracks, the common goal for parent and teacher alike will be spiritual formation through a well-developed and well-rooted

Christian worldview. And for an increasing number of people, the University-Model school has not only emerged as a solid *School of Thought*, it has become their treasured school of choice.

How to find one of these special schools? Simply send an email for more information to info@umsi.org or contact Shirley Smith, Executive Assistant at shirley.smith@naums.inc to schedule a conference call. To start a new University-Model school or to transition an existing school, contact Shirley for a conference call.

The organization's CEO is Barbara Nicholson Freeman and the UMSI toll free number is 888-485-8525 . To investigate further, check their website at www.umsi.or

Online learning formats

Since the launch of the world-wide web back in 1991, there have been a spate of online schools in both the public and private sectors, and the niche world of classical faith-based education is no exception. There are many great options for parents to consider and the competition continues to grow all the time.

From Wilson Hill Academy to the Logos Online School, from Schole and Memoria Academies to Liberty or Veritas Online Academy, the choices are plentiful and exciting. Most are classical in their orientation and all are distinctively Christian in their worldview. One to consider is Freedom Project Academy based in Appleton, Wisconsin.

Freedom Project Academy (FPA) is a national K-12 virtual school that has been rated #1 in best private online high schools and was also awarded best homeschool curriculum. With a tagline that says "we believe in faithfully educating America," all classes are firmly grounded in the Judeo-Christian worldview and value system,

Founded in 2011, FreedomProject Academy (FPA) provides a fully accredited classical education through live, interactive classes online to churches and private schools in all 50 states across the country and a dozen foreign countries. They also serve missionary and ministry families overseas.

Streaming their classes into a variety of brick-and-mortar learning environments allows for the rapid expansion of faith-based schools around the nation. FPA provides all class instruction, assignments, tests and grading.

FPA operates on two strong convictions that mark the school's identity: (1) God belongs in the curriculum, and (2) American exceptionalism. They claim to be 100% free of Critical Race Theory and Common Core as well as LGBT/gender ideology. As a school,

they adhere to the same principles of religious liberty as promoted in the Constitution by the Founding Fathers.

This cutting edge program boasts a team of dedicated and highly qualified teachers who value academic excellence in the digital learning environment. Live courses are presented in Central Time Zone and the course schedule is outlined clearly for each grade level under the admissions tab at their website: information@fpeusa.org Detailed information for interested parents regarding tuition, school calendar, academic tracks, book lists, school apparel, expectations and much more, is also provided there.

Tutorial-based college education

What if there was a way for a high school graduate to learn a skilled trade or earn an undergraduate degree and not have to leave town to do it? Enter, Christian Halls, an innovative post-secondary model founded and led by Dr. Nicholas Ellis.

Built on the tutorial-based system from the Oxford/Cambridge traditions, a Christian Hall is a local, independent college community that provides Socratic-styled education in the student's own hometown. Witnessing the beauty and brilliance of this method during his own days at Oxford, Dr. Ellis led the way in planting over 500 halls in Brazil, markedly changing the scholastic landscape there.

In West Texas, CHI rolled out 170 programs in one year (2024) with projections to hit 500 in the following year (2025). The 10-year goal is to have one per county. CHI is now training Directors and Tutors across four countries.

To accomplish this, Ellis contacted a dozen Christian colleges. "We acquired the rights to all of their degree programs. So we have about 500 degrees now, and about 10,000 classes—everything from dual credit through PhD," he says. "The local community can only unlock those if they're willing to go to their elders ... and say we need you to get involved in the shaping and forming of our people."

With soul formation as the ultimate goal, a Christian Hall incorporates the intellectual, spiritual and vocational aspects of accredited degree and trade-school programs where love for Christ and God's ultimate glory are the highest motivators. Accordingly, this approach affirms and relies on the irreplaceable roles of family and the local faith community in this process.

Study pathways are customized based on local needs and demands. As a Hall works with its academic partners, program blueprints meet those needs by tailoring them to

each student's individualized track. It can happen through high school dual enrollment, a Christian community college, a classical honors college, Bible college and seminary, work study apprenticeships or skilled trade pathways.

Some examples of brand new halls getting a test run are a Teacher College (training godly teachers), the Christian Conservatory of the Arts (training in the performance and visual arts), and a Civics Hall (training future local leaders in municipal governance).

To create a hall, a community only needs one tutor and three students. After signing up, they can utilize the CHI platform to choose coursework. For the trades, CHI partners with local businesses. For example, they have an oil and gas partner in Texas that needs engineering, drilling, welding, plumbing, and diesel. Through their university partners, students can get a certificate in a specific skill or build a long-term career.

CHI's West Texas program has math tutors and a retired businessman who can teach business structure and entrepreneurship. In that degree program, half is general education requirements so students can receive an associate's degree. The other half is a hands-on apprenticeship with the oil and gas company, where local trade masters come through and work with the university to certify the students' skill mastery. With each of those pieces, CHI is able to offer a Bachelor's of Business Entrepreneurship with a certificate in welding, and then install that into the local businesses.

In some states, education savings accounts can be used for eligible students to pay for CHI dual enrollment classes towards a degree. Otherwise, Ellis explains, "... we negotiate a price point for our members so that it's nondebt, pay-as-you-go subscription style member payments. We've never had any students go into debt, they've never had to sign a promissory note ... Fifty percent of the tuition goes to the university to pay professors ... 25 percent goes to the local hall to pay their tutors ... And 25 percent comes back to us at CHI to build local structures, program design, technology. So it's really a three-way partnership ..."

To join or start a Christian Hall in your area, go to their website (www.christianhalls.org) and select the tabs *Join a Hall* or *Start a Hall*.

Legal Changes – (1) from government control to constitutional protection, (2) from tax-funded to tax exempt, (3) from religious cancellation to religious liberation.

From Government Control to Constitutional Protection

The seeds to extract religious liberty from the local community schoolhouse in America were planted in 1875. Surprisingly, it was not initially about the clash between secular and sectarian education, but between Protestant and Catholic influence.

Here's how it went down: A federal politician by the name of James G. Blaine sought to pass an amendment that would stop sectarian (religious) schools from receiving any more public monies. Up to that point, faith-based schools could receive federal and state funding (inconceivable today). Blaine's amendment was ultimately defeated, but thirty-eight states were subsequently inspired to pass something similar.

Few people today are aware of this pivotal change in the law, much less the motivation behind Congressman Blaine's proposal. But it is an important turn of events to understand because it gives the context for how we got to where we are.

Incredibly, through his proposed legislation, Rep. Blaine was going after Catholic schools. The public schools at the time were run almost entirely by Protestant Americans, and with the intense antipathy between both groups in those days, this amendment was designed to defund Catholic schools, keeping K-12 education firmly in the hands of Protestants.

The unforeseen consequences, however, was that the Blaine Amendment ended up affecting all schools that included religious teaching or curriculum in the classroom, not just the Catholic institutions. Hence, the new legal structure and environment that resulted from this novel piece of legislation (wittingly or not), ultimately set the stage for the complete secularization of our American public schools. So the boomerang effect of blocking Catholic schools from receiving government funds effectively drained public schools entirely of any level of Christian influence in terms of formal content.

With these new rules, the dominoes effect began: in 1962, one Supreme Court case (Engel v. Vitale) prohibited any kind of formal prayer in public schools. During another case the following year (Abington School District v. Schempp), the high court negated compulsory classroom Bible readings in the schools.

As Corey Scott of The 508 Company observed, "Ironically, the very Protestant leaders who supported Blaine Amendments would now find themselves excluded from public education for the very same reasons that once targeted Catholics."

Paradoxically, Scott continued, “Catholic schools and other private religious institutions adapted and thrived as independent entities, free to integrate their faith into their educational mission.”

So over a period of years, a curious dilemma emerged: As schools accommodated secular government restrictions on all things religious, they sacrificed their crucial First Amendment protections that were effectively reinforced by not a few key legal wins in the courts. Through this unfortunate (albeit unintentional) compromise, these schools now lose in court time and again when sued over conflicting values. Inexplicably, some Christian education leaders seem unaware of the Catch 22 they are caught in.

The moral of the story: the way we secure our religious freedom is by exercising it, not by hiding it or apologizing for it. When we run our faith-based schools under the legal protection and provisions of the First Amendment, we are safe and our schools do well.

Moreover, with the complementary shielding of Title VII and Title IX of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, we have ancillary coverage – Title VII frees religious institutions to hire like-minded staff and Title IX allows faith-based schools to form policies consistent with their doctrinal stance, even if they conflict with the state. So the protection is there, we just have to be savvy enough to access it.

Here are some examples:

- “Hosanna-Tabor Evangelical Lutheran Church and School v. EEOC” (2012) and “Our Lady of Guadalupe School v. Morrissey-Berru” (2020), the court recognized the ministerial exception under Title VII and those schools won the case.
- In “Maxon v. Fuller Theological Seminary” (2020), Fuller Seminary was victorious when it asserted its religious exemption under Title IX per a lawsuit regarding its Biblical stance on human sexuality.
- Victories in “Billard v. Charlotte Catholic High School” (2024) and “Barrett v. Fontbonne Academy” (2015) illustrate the importance of strategic school structuring (utilizing ministerial exceptions).

In stark contrast, however, schools that function under a secular legal framework, although claiming to adhere to a Judeo-Christian base, are vulnerable because they don’t have the same safeguard. For example, charter schools are still public schools, so they are still as bound by “anti-discrimination laws” as are their district counterparts.

Bottom line: how a school is set up matters, and when it is not set up correctly, it potentially opens itself up to unnecessary, expensive and exhausting court battles.

It is critical, therefore, for faith-based schools to know that according to Section 508(c)(1)(A), Integrated Auxiliaries of churches include Religious Education Ministries, and therefore have supporting freedoms, including tax-exempt status and immunity from unbridled government intrusions. In other words, by the full protection of the law, schools that are deemed Religious Education Ministries are completely free to practice their faith and pass it on to their children without interference from the state.*

This is the path that takes us from government control to constitutional protection.

From Tax-Funded to Tax-Exempt

Former U.S. Attorney General William Barr, back in 2021, publicly denounced what he described as the “militant and extreme secular-progressive climate of our state-run education system.” He said it represents the “greatest threat to religious liberty in America today.”

Barr represents a growing cadre of reputable legal minds who have stepped forward to challenge the constitutionality of a compulsory, tax-funded education model. Barr contends that the increasing clashes of the education establishment’s worldview with that of the conservative faith community makes the existing system unconstitutional.

Renowned Columbia Law Professor Philip Hamburger agrees, citing the First Amendment’s freedom of speech clause. Hamburger claims tax-funded schools are unconstitutional because they inappropriately compel parents to adopt government speech in place of their own, even though it is speech to which they fundamentally object. He is adamant that the time has come for the courts to start acknowledging that public education is a violation of the First Amendment.

As a student of America’s educational past, Hamburger references the dark days (early 1900’s) of the progressive takeover of our schools, and the parade of nefarious characters (Dewey and friends) who unapologetically sought to capture our children – and therefore society – through government schools, inspired by the Soviet Union’s example. (See pp.1-23 for a full treatment).

Case in point: it was in Oregon about one hundred years ago, Hamburger explains, that key Democrats worked directly with the Ku Klux Klan to force all children in the state into government indoctrination centers that would teach their pernicious views. Why? To

put pressure on (read: coerce) certain Americans (Catholics and others) to buy what they were selling.

Thankfully, the U.S. Supreme Court at the time did not buy it, and in a 1925 landmark ruling (*Pierce v. Society of Sisters*), struck down this unseemly attempt to establish compulsory government education in Oregon.

According to Hamburger, the freedom of speech clause in the First Amendment best defends a parent's responsibility and liberty to educate their own children. He says education consists of speech to and with children. Moreover, it is parents who enjoy freedom of speech when educating their children in a manner that supports their worldview and value system.

But then, he continues, "The public school system, by design, pressures parents to substitute government educational speech for their own."

Many parents see it as a veiled form of bribery or extortion: Parents get subsidized education on the condition that they accept the government's progressive lexicon in lieu of home or private schooling. Professor Hamburger also calls the unethical nature of a deal that uses parents' money to teach children things the parents don't believe.

William Barr thinks tax-funded vouchers that allow parents to be more selective might remedy the situation. Dr. Hamburger similarly allows for "tax exemptions for dissenting parents," but not if it sacrifices the independence of private schools and home education.

But wait, there's more! After Barr and Hamburger, this bombshell was dropped:

In a powerful new paper, Liberty University Law Professor Jeffrey Tuomala says government education of children funded by taxes represents an unconstitutional establishment of religion and, as such, it violates the U.S. Constitution's First Amendment and protections for religious liberty.

Tuomala's conclusions join a growing chorus of world-class legal minds seeking to confront this tax-funded aspect of American education.

Writing in Volume 18, Issue 4, of the Liberty University Law Review under the headline "[Is Tax-Funded Education Unconstitutional?](#)" Tuomala sets his sites on what he describes as government schools' efforts to exert illegitimate control over the minds of students.

The explosive paper, published last year, argues that the worldview underpinning public education falsely divides reality between “secular” and “religious.” A proper definition of religion such as those offered by some of America’s founders in the late 1700s would blow up the whole system.

Tuomala claims, “The present critique is not simply based on an originalist theory of constitutional interpretation, but rather it reflects a law-of-nature principle that civil government has no jurisdiction over the mind.”

Part of the problem is the fixed confusion (public and judicial) regarding the term “religion” itself. As Tuomala explains in his paper, the U.S. Supreme Court has made little attempt to define it, at times only referencing past sources. Tuomala, conversely, takes great pains to carefully frame its meaning with the help of legendary legal minds of the past.

Two of the best were Founding Fathers Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, who labored arduously about the meaning of religion. In his paper, Tuomala underscores their views, going to great lengths to show how Virginia, with the help of both founders, instituted religious freedom in lieu of having an official Anglican Church.

This is what laid the foundation for the Constitution’s First Amendment. The notion of prohibiting federal laws from establishing an official state religion without prohibiting the free exercise of one’s religious faith, was a stretch for the colonists but a stroke of genius by the founders.

Regarding a thoughtful, accurate and working definition of the term “religion,” Madison and George Mason came up with the following, as written In the Virginia Declaration of Rights: “The duty which we owe to our Creator and the manner of discharging it.” Some would quibble with the underdeveloped theology in the statement, but keeping it clear, simple and concise, was obviously their goal.

For Jefferson’s part, he declared in the Statute for Establishing Religious Freedom that “Almighty God hath created the mind free,” making it indelibly clear that he found it abhorrent that the state would dare to impede, thwart, obstruct, frustrate or trespass on one’s conscience, speech or religion.

And yet, today, government is doing exactly that, teaching over sixty million American

children six hours a day, five days a week, nine months a year for twelve years straight, with ideas that are inherently “religious” in nature.

John Dewey, the twentieth century architect of America’s modern school system, was never reticent about admitting that his anti-religious (secular) views were deeply religious.

Which is why Tuomala is certain that “Public schools have become the chief means by which all levels of civil government have established religion in the United States,” and why he is equally convinced that “Only the model of free churches and free schools (i.e., privately funded churches and schools) is consistent with the First Amendment.”

Tuomala sees the day coming when the Supreme Court will have to address this issue, and he maintains that the only way the Court can get around the conclusion that tax-funded education constitutes an establishment of religion is through a dichotomous view of reality (‘secular’ and ‘religious’).

Like so many of us, Tuomala believes that a biblical worldview is the only foundation for real education. A clear and consistent understanding of the Scriptures, he says, “precludes civil government from exercising jurisdiction over education,” echoing a view that was once dominant in the church.

Tuomala believes the U.S. Supreme Court will likely uphold a voucher system providing equal tax funding for private and Christian schools. Nonetheless, based on the concepts formulated in the Virginia establishment controversy, the Liberty law professor concludes that the state should not fund *any* schools.

Until then, public district and charter schools must comply with state regulations to maintain their funding. In both situations, this of course means accepting the state’s value system, or compromising your own. Religious Education Ministries, however, that rely on private contributions or school choice programs are freer to pursue their mission without compromise.

But what if a voucher program or ESA bill gets passed as part of a state legislature’s school choice commitments? Though programs such as Education Savings Accounts (ESAs) and tax-credit scholarships are designed to support parents’ educational choices – including religious education, without imposing secular mandates on the schools themselves – there is still a potential downside to receiving these funds.

That's why it's understandable when significant elements of the homeschooling community remain skeptical and, therefore, highly reluctant about tapping into ESA funds if such a bill were to get passed in their state.

But this is where the rubber meets the road, because if the wording in these bills is not precise and explicit, faith-based homeschoolers could be making themselves vulnerable by accessing this money. For example, if the legislation does not expressly state application to and protection of "religious instruction and curriculum" within the private or home school context, such funding could end up being a two-edged sword that might cut both ways.

Sweden provides a sober warning. As a country where homeschooling was once legal (per their 1985 Education Act), the passage of an ESA-like bill eventually opened the door to increased government oversight through two problematic issues: (1) the conflict between Sweden's progressive priorities and the biblical values of Christian homeschoolers, and (2) accusations that Swedish homeschoolers were abusing the system (utilizing ESA moneys to buy things like pianos or gaming it by not following school attendance mandates or state education standards).

Whether these problems were real or perceived, they led to increased government scrutiny and, ultimately, to the more restrictive 2010 Education Act, which virtually outlawed homeschooling in Sweden (excepting students with unique medical or physical disabilities). So most faith-based Swedish families who wanted to educate their own children had to move to another country.

This brings us to the Christian homeschooling movement in America. Homeschoolers are right to be nervous about appropriating government funds given the regulatory restrictions being proposed by groups like the *Coalition for Responsible Home Education* (CRHE) through the Make Homeschooling Safe Act. Under the guise of "child protective measures," the CRHE bill would put us on the fast track to the slippery slope of unwieldy government control.

Just as Sweden homeschooling applications came to only approve "extraordinary circumstances," the CRHE proposal requires background checks (i.e., invasive vetting). Just as Swedish officials did "home inspections," the CRHE proposal requires mandatory home visits by social workers.

Just as Sweden required homeschoolers to "prove equivalency with public schooling,"

the CRHE proposal requires “state-approved academic benchmarks.” And just as Sweden employed detailed registries to closely monitor homeschoolers, the CRHE would centralize oversight through state-level registries, making Christian families vulnerable to progressive ideology and prejudicial policies.

It should go without saying that to introduce this level of scrutiny not only weakens flexibility and autonomy, it potentially subjects religious teaching and methods to government authority.

So faith-based homeschoolers and Christian parents are wise to be careful, knowing how government involvement and unfriendly societal values have the strong propensity to undermine religious freedoms, especially if their state government is dominated by an antithetical worldview. Because if history has taught us anything, it is that once the government regulatory train gets too far down the track, it is very difficult to back it up.

The key to reinforcing legal coverage for any faith-based educator lies under two layered protections: (1) the church as a shelter, and (2) a 508 (c)(1)(A) as an umbrella.

Most churches don’t fully grasp the critical support they could be to homeschoolers or Christian schoolers, which may explain why many (churches) are not quick to partner with them. The 508 Company of Denver, Colorado, however, provides a timely and much-needed resource for churches to understand how to host homeschool groups while maintaining compliance and legal protections.

There is no way around it: to accept government funds is to potentially invite regulation which will only weaken parental autonomy and authority. Under Section 508(c)(1)(A) of the tax code, though, churches are automatically 501(c)(3) tax-exempt.

Because the law designates churches as fiscally independent entities, they hold unequivocating First Amendment protections. So the protective shield that home and Christian schoolers need lies under the shelter of a church as well as the umbrella of a 508. (Go to www.the508company.com or call 303-900-2596.)

From Religious Cancellation to Religious Liberation

If American public schools are supposed to be an incubator for and bridge to American society, and one of the historic central tenets of that American society is religious

freedom, then shouldn't the public school be a place that both teaches and practices religious freedom?

Three things inform the answer to that question: (1) America's educational history, (2) the United States Constitution and (3) the *Guidance on Constitutionally Protected Prayer and Religious Expression in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools*, put out by the U.S. Department of Education.

Take the first one: a quick glance through the window of the one-room country schoolhouse and the days of the "common school" were laced with religious expression and religious instruction. Education historian Lawrence A. Cremin aptly demonstrated this in his treatise on *American Education: The Colonial Experience (1607-1783)*. As stated previously, it was not until the Blaine Amendment in 1875 when it all changed.

The US Constitution also is quite clear: The First Amendment prohibits the government from establishing, endorsing or embracing one sectarian denomination or faith tradition over another, while it at the same time protects religious exercise and expression from inappropriate government intrusion or discrimination.[\[1\]](#)

That means there is "nothing in the First Amendment that turns the public schools into religion-free zones, or requires students, teachers, or other school officials to leave their private religious expression behind at the schoolhouse door."[\[1\]](#)

That is to say, that "although a government may not promote or favor religion or coerce the consciences of students, schools also may not discriminate against private religious expression by students, teachers, or other employees."[\[1\]](#)

So what would this look like? Many would be surprised to learn that a document produced by none other than the US Department of Education itself offers more latitude on religious liberty in our public schools than our average public school exercises.

From its *Guidance on Constitutionally Protected Prayer and Religious Expression in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools* [latest revision: January 14, 2025], the following categories and excerpts illustrate the extent of these liberties:

Freedom of Religious Speech ...

- The Supreme Court says "**private religious speech, far from being a First Amendment orphan, is as fully protected under the Free Speech Clause as secular private expression.**"[\[1\]](#)
- Although the Constitution forbids public school officials acting in their official capacities from directing or favoring prayer, **students and teachers do not "shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate."**[\[1\]](#)
- **Students may also speak to, and attempt to persuade, their peers about religious matters** just as they may do, for example, with political matters.[\[1\]](#)
- **School employees may also engage in private religious expression or brief personal religious observance during such times**, subject to the same neutral rules the school applies to other private employee conduct.[\[1\]](#)
- Where students or other private graduation speakers are selected on the basis of genuinely content-neutral, evenhanded criteria, and schools do not determine or have control over their speech, however, **that expression is not attributable to the school and therefore may not be restricted because of its religious content and may include prayer.** In these circumstances, *school officials may choose to make appropriate, neutral disclaimers* to clarify that such speech is the speaker's and not the school's speech.[\[1\]](#)
- **Public school students have a right to distribute religious literature to their schoolmates on the same terms as they are permitted to distribute other literature that is unrelated to school curricula or activities.** (Schools may impose the same reasonable time, place, or manner restrictions on distribution of religious literature as they do on non-school literature generally, but they may not target religious literature for more permissive or more restrictive regulation.)[\[1\]](#)

Freedom of Religious Assembly ...

- **Students may organize religious groups to the same extent that students are permitted to organize other non-curricular activity groups.**[\[1\]](#)
- **Such faith groups must be given the same access to school facilities for assembling as is given to other non-curricular groups, without discrimination against the groups' religious character or perspective.**[\[1\]](#)

- **Where student groups that meet for nonreligious activities are permitted to advertise or announce their meetings—for example, by advertising in a student newspaper, making announcements on a student activities bulletin board or public address system, or handing out leaflets—school authorities may not discriminate against faith groups that meet to engage in religious expression such as prayer.** (School authorities may issue appropriate, neutral disclaimers of the school's sponsorship.)[\[1\]](#)
- Student speakers at school assemblies and non-curricular activities such as sporting events may not be selected on a basis that either favors or disfavors religious perspectives. Where a student speaker is selected on the basis of content-neutral, evenhanded criteria, and the school does not determine or have control over the content of the student's speech, **the expression is not reasonably attributed to the school and therefore may not be restricted because of its religious content and may include prayer.**[\[1\]](#)

Freedom to Pray ...

- **“Nothing in the Constitution . . . prohibits any public school student from voluntarily praying at any time before, during, or after the school day,”** and therefore students may pray with fellow students during the school day on the same terms and conditions that they may engage in other comparable conversations or activities.[\[1\]](#)
- **In contexts where a school permits teachers, coaches, and other employees to engage in personal speech, however, it may not prohibit those employees from engaging in prayer merely because it is religious or because some observers, including students, might misperceive the school as endorsing that expression.**[\[1\]](#) (A school may take reasonable measures to ensure that school officials do not pressure students to join in the private prayer of those officials or other students.)[\[1\]](#)
- **Students may pray when not engaged in school activities or instruction, subject to the same rules designed to prevent instructional disruptions that are applied to other privately initiated expressive activities.**[\[1\]](#)
- **Teachers, school administrators, and other school employees may not encourage or discourage private prayer or other religious activity.**[\[1\]](#)
- **The Constitution does not, however, prohibit school employees themselves**

from engaging in private prayer during the workday where they are not acting in their official capacities or coercing students.[\[1\]](#)

- **Before school or during breaks, for instance, teachers may meet with other teachers for prayer or religious study** to the same extent that they may engage in other conversation or nonreligious activities.[\[1\]](#)
- **Students are free to pray silently, or not to pray, during “moments of silence” or other quiet periods during the school day.**[\[1\]](#)

Freedom to Study Religion ...

- **Public schools** may not give religious instruction, but they **may teach about religion and respect for the religious views of all.**[\[1\]](#)
- **Philosophical religious questions, religious history, comparative religion, literary religious texts, and the role of religion in America and other countries are all permissible public school subjects.**[\[1\]](#)
- Similarly, **it is permissible to study religious influences on philosophy, art, music, literature, and social studies.** For example, public schools generally may allow student choirs to perform music based on religious themes or texts as part of school-sponsored events (as long as the music is not performed as a religious exercise or to promote religious beliefs).[\[1\]](#)

Freedom of Religious Expression ...

- **Students may express their beliefs about religion in homework, artwork, and other written and oral assignments free from discrimination based on the religious perspective of their submissions,** though still graded by ordinary academic standards. For example, if the assignment is writing a poem, and a student submits a poem in the form of a prayer (like a psalm) should be judged on the basis of academic standards (such as literary quality), neither penalized nor rewarded based on religious perspective.[\[1\]](#)
- **Students may engage in prayer or religious expression during instructional time to the same degree they may engage in nonreligious private expression** during such time (i.e., praying silently before taking a test).[\[1\]](#)

- Schools may not target religious attire in general, or the attire of a particular religion, for prohibition or regulation.[\[1\]](#)
- Students may display religious messages on items of clothing to the same extent and pursuant to the same conditions that they are permitted to display nonreligious messages.[\[1\]](#)

Freedom of Religious Exercise ...

- Students also may read from religious materials; say a blessing before meals; and engage in worship or study religious materials with fellow students during non-instructional time (such as recess or the lunch hour) to the same extent that they may engage in nonreligious activities.[\[1\]](#)
- Where student groups that meet for nonreligious activities are permitted to announce their meetings—for example, by advertising in a student newspaper, posting on a student activities bulletin board or public address system, or handing out flyers—**school authorities may not discriminate against faith groups that meet to engage in religious expression such as prayer.** (School authorities may issue appropriate, neutral disclaimers of the school's sponsorship of non-curricular groups and events).[\[1\]](#)
- Under the Equal Access Act, 20 U.S.C. § 4071, **a public secondary school receiving Federal funds must allow voluntary and student-initiated prayer service, scripture reading, or other worship exercise and must also allow student religious groups to use school media—including the school's newspaper, public address system, and bulletin board—to announce their meetings** on the same terms as other non curriculum-related student groups are allowed to use school media. (Schools may issue neutral disclaimers).[\[1\]](#)
- **Public schools have discretion to permit students to attend off-premise religious instruction,** provided that schools do not encourage or discourage participation in such instruction or penalize students for attending or not attending. For example, **it would be constitutional for schools to excuse students from class to enable them to fulfill their religious obligations regarding prayer, religious holidays, or other observances.**[\[1\]](#)

Guarantees of Religious Protection ...

- Public schools are also subject to requirements under Federal and State laws

relevant to prayer and religious expression. (Such laws may not remove or conflict with a public school's Federal constitutional obligations.)^[1]

- Section 8524(b), codified at 20 U.S.C. § 7904(b), requires that, as a condition of receiving ESEA (Elementary and Secondary Education Act) funds, **an LEA** (Local Education Agency) **must annually certify in writing to its SEA** (State Education Agency) **that it has no policy that prevents, or otherwise denies participation in, constitutionally protected prayer in public elementary and secondary schools** as detailed in its latest guidance document.^[1]

If America is the bastion of religious freedom on this earth, and our schools are supposed to prepare our young people for life in this religiously free America, then it stands to reason that our schools should teach and practice religious freedom. Our schools should be to America what America is to the world.

This means it falls to our public school leaders to make sure their staff and students are fully informed and well-versed about the generous allowances for and protection of our hard-won religious liberties, even as it relates to school life. Like our country, public schools should be bastions of religious liberty – not enclaves of religious suppression.

^[1] See U.S. Dep't of Educ., Guidance on Constitutionally Protected Prayer and Religious Expression in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools (Jan. 16, 2020); U.S. Dep't of Educ., Guidance on Constitutionally Protected Prayer in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools (Feb. 7, 2003); President William J. Clinton, Religious Expression in Public Schools, 2 Pub. Papers 1083 (July 12, 1995).

[The full guidance document is available on the US Department of Education's website: www.ed.gov.]

Conclusion

G.K. Chesterton once quipped, "Without a gentle contempt for education, no man's education is complete." These pages, hopefully, have demonstrated at least a gentle contempt for a brand of education in America that has done so much to compromise and diminish not only the minds of our students, but also the soul of our society.

Chesterton's sally has a parallel challenge: a true education should begin with being truly educated about what a true education is. Which begs the question, how many educators have not been educated? How many teachers, through no perceptible fault of their own, have taken into the classroom a distorted view of education, because they got a distorted view where they were trained. It would, no doubt, surprise the populace to learn that the majority of our teachers and school leaders are woefully unaware of the philosophical roots of modern education, which means they are virtually in the dark about the subversive worldviews of the infamous architects of our American schools.

School of Thought is an attempt to educate about education, especially regarding its foundations. The classical approach stands in direct contrast to the progressive model. The latter is rooted in a secular religion that has dominated the national education landscape for over a century. The former is grounded in the great Western intellectual tradition, informed by Judeo-Christian thought. The one rejects and redefines the historic role of education, the other respects and reinforces it.

This manifesto holds to education's timeless purpose (teaching thinking) by developing an imagination and cultivating a conscience, grasping the logic of good logic and the reasons for careful reasoning. It envisions and seeks to develop disciplined thinking, creative thinking, organized thinking and independent thinking in our young.

It's about memorization and meditation, comprehension and contemplation. It's about knowledge and opinion, and knowing the difference between the two. It's about recognizing wisdom, discernment, understanding and judgment, and how to exercise them effectively.

In schools that truly operate as "brain factories," students become "thinklings" and classes become "think tanks." The Great Books and the Great Ideas are the highly nutritious "food for thought" that produces great minds.

Eventually, if done well and done right, it should lead to the Greatest Mind of all – because if it does not ultimately lead to "thinking God's thoughts after Him," it's not education.

A Literate Citizenry, A Thinking People

Only 1 in 5 eighth graders read for fun anymore, while 65% watch three hours or more of television each day. Incredibly, the average kindergarten graduate has already seen more than 5,000 hours of television in his or her young life (more time than it takes to earn a degree). In fact, the television industry estimates that over 2 million children under the age of 11 are still watching TV at midnight each night.

These statistics do not bode well for a literate American populace when the studies show that reading proficiency declines as TV viewing increases. Jim Trelease, the read-aloud guy from yesteryear, was unsurprisingly unapologetic in his claims that in his short lifetime, television has become the major stumbling block to literacy in America.

But if the purpose of education is “to learn to think,” and the electronic drug (not to mention social media) is producing lamebrains, how do we change their minds? Trelease said, just turn off the TV, get out a good book, and read aloud! Ever the optimist, he believed that a nation where 90 percent of the children can read and choose to read, instead of the present 40-50 percent, is not inconceivable. Moreover, he said the earlier you start, the better. The issue is not understanding, but conditioning. The child gets used to the parent’s voice and the entire reading experience, and something deeply relational begins to develop.

Thankfully, a growing number of young parents nowadays are seeing the importance and seizing the opportunity. Recognizing literacy as the foundation every child needs to soar in life is critical, and be assured that as this foundation is laid at home, most classroom teachers will be highly committed to strengthening the same at school.

We know that if children can spell a word, they can read it, but just because a child can read a word does not mean he or she can spell it. So the science of reading tells us to begin with phonology (the sound structure of words) and orthography (the spelling system of English) and give children all the tools they need for encoding (spelling) words. This will automatically transfer, then, to decoding (reading) words. In this regard, an Orton-based method that teaches the logic and code of English through the time-tested journey of spelling to reading is the best way to go curriculum-wise.

So as parents read to (or with!) their children at home, and we pursue the path to strengthen all things literacy at school, we can anticipate the exponential fruit it will bear. Young people who love to read are usually well-read, and young people who are good at reading are much more likely to do it!

The end result will be a literate citizenry, and the end result of that will be a thinking people – education’s ultimate purpose.

America's Single Most Important Social Factor

Jim Trelease was the “read-aloud” guy, and what a guy he was. Dedicating much of his life to what he called the best kept secret in education, his message was pointed: “Reading is the single most important social factor in American life today.”

His claims were bold: “The more you read, the smarter you grow. The smarter you grow, the longer you stay in school. The longer you stay in school, the more money you earn. The more you earn, the better your children will do in school. So if you hook a child with reading, you influence not only his future but also the next generation.”

His motives were equally clear: “I read to my kids because my father read to me. I just wanted them to have the good feelings I had ...” In fact, Trelease can't remember a day when his father did not read to him. Isn't that incredible? Well done, Mr. Trelease!

Though Jim's read-aloud case was compelling, it was nonetheless a hard sell for the majority of his parent-audiences. “Most people don't believe me when they first hear it,” Trelease said. “They dismiss it for three reasons: One, it's simple. Two, it's free. Three, the child enjoys it. So how good can it be?”

But every parent who has practiced this time-honored habit knows exactly how good it can be. It's not only a powerful educational event, it's an enormous bonding experience. And the benefits are not only intellectual, psychological and emotional, but spiritual as well! In fact, there is historical evidence that the Puritan homes in New England made this a commonplace practice; John Adams himself wrote about it.

So as reading literacy remains at the foundation of a solid education, we must be forever committed to giving our young the best possible literacy teaching through the best possible literacy curriculum reinforced by the best possible literacy training. “Sold a Story,” Emily Handford's ground-breaking podcast that taught us the dangers of accepting the status quo, made us more determined to never fall into that trap again.

Our schools must require comprehensive teacher-training in structured literacy that is phonics-based and informed by the science of reading. As they do so, our parents must become equally heartened in their resolve to read to their children at home.

By teaching them how to read at school, and reading aloud to them at home, the message that reading is one of life's greatest gifts will not be easily lost. And the more this becomes a way of life for them, the more the sky becomes the limit as well.

Teaching Thinking Begins With Teaching Reading

If the education we give our children is to foster critical and creative thinking in them, then “we the people” will have to think critically and creatively about the brand of education that best accomplishes that, especially given the current cultural climate. But if we can’t even agree on the essential building blocks of the most basic proven learning dynamics, we will be forever experimenting, only to find out years later (maybe decades) how far off track we got. Such was the case with the reading wars (phonics vs. whole language) that went all the way back to the 1950’s.

Confronted with the literacy dilemma raised by Rudolph Flesch’s best-seller “*Why Johnny Can’t Read*” (1955), most people outside of education knew the answer intuitively while many in education chafed at acknowledging it.

Nonetheless, even after endless studies and the science of reading categorically supported phonics-based methods as the best way to go, it took the work of Emily Handford to fully expose the “whole language” industry for its unmitigated literacy malpractice. So shattering was Handford’s documentary (“Sold a Story”) that Columbia University’s Teacher College was forced into “dissolving” its relationship with literacy guru, Lucy Calkins. As its premiere education professor, Calkins influenced generations of American teachers to teach reading through guessing (look-say) rather than thinking (decoding).

Finally, after decades of immeasurable damage to millions of struggling young readers, Columbia was forced to shut down Calkin’s interminably flawed literacy program and send her cash-cow publishing empire packing. Notwithstanding, many schools are still clinging stubbornly to Calkin’s failed methodology.

After witnessing this spectacle, it is clear that if the restoration of education in America is to continue, it will have to come from without as resistance from the education establishment is both legendary and inexplicable.

But if it is for our children, this is a frontier worth forging. And because this soil is very fertile, we will grow what we sow – so will they. They will plant their roots deep in it (think critically) as they learn how to read efficiently, and soar high over it (think creatively) as they learn to read effectively. Learning to think starts with learning to read, and the latter will either facilitate or frustrate the former. The stakes are high and the margin of error is thin. We must get it right.

Friends Don't Need Reconciling

G.M. Trevelyan noticed trends even in his day that provoked a timeless observation: "Education has produced a population able to read but unable to distinguish what is worth reading." In a nutshell, he was referring to the age-old tension between learning and thinking.

If you remove the one, the other is bound to go. When we abandoned classical education in this country, we stopped teaching kids how to distinguish what is worth reading. No surprise then that we have also produced a population unable to read. The two go hand in hand.

Education is a parallel process involving the paradoxical dynamic of learning and thinking. Paradoxes seem to contradict. In reality, they complement. Since both dynamics are inter-related and interdependent, we would error when we focus on one to the exclusion of the other (read: swinging pendulums). Both cognitions, therefore, need to be engaged in the classroom, both processes equally active.

There will always be an inherent clash between the conventional and the creative unless and until the contributions of both are recognized. Traditionalists identify more with the learning model; innovators lean more towards the thinking model. Both paradigms, however, if implemented simultaneously, make for a healthier and more holistic educational experience. Here's why:

- In math, learning involves computation (e.g. memorizing times tables) while thinking involves application (e.g. doing story problems).
- In language, grammar mechanics must be learned, but creative composition requires thought.
- To learn in history is about what happened; to think in history is about who told you what happened.
- To learn in science means observation; to think in science means experimentation.
- The learner loves to answer questions, the thinker loves to ask questions.
- Following directions is more of a learning dynamic while making decisions is more of a thinking dynamic.

Even with Bloom's taxonomy, the lower levels (remembering, comprehending, applying) are more learning-oriented, and the higher levels (analyzing, evaluating, creating) are more thinking-oriented.

So because truth is parallel, we are required to view learning and thinking as two sides of the same coin, two edges of the same sword. When I learn about astronomy, I am "thinking God's thoughts after Him," as the legendary astronomer Johannes Kepler once exclaimed when peering at the heavenlies through a crude telescope.

When I was a child, I would incessantly think about football. I found myself driven to learn everything about it that I could. Growing up in America's Dairyland, I'd watch every Packer game, every replay, study their gameplans, read and listen to every word Lombardi ever spoke or wrote, and I'd chew it all over a million times. The more I learned, the more I thought about it; the more I thought about it, the more I'd want to learn.

Isaac Newton was asked in later life how he developed such startling discoveries as the calculus, the law of gravity and the law of motion. His reply: "By always thinking about them."

So learning and thinking are not antithetical. When I learn, I think. When I think, I learn. The two dovetail beautifully ... or they should.

Someone once asked Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the British Prince of Preachers from yesteryear, how he reconciled God's sovereignty with human responsibility. He said, "I don't – good friends don't need reconciling."

In school, as in life, learning and thinking should be good friends.

Thinking Like a Child

Someone asked the legendary Art Linkletter once how he got kids to say the “darndest” things on his very popular 1960’s TV show. His answer was simple: “Just think like they think!” The older one grows, the truer and wiser that insight becomes. It may just be one of life’s best-kept secrets and perhaps one of the great keys to happiness.

Children have so much to teach us that we “adults” would do well to wonder sometimes who is really learning from whom, or who should be. Their sincerity is refreshing, their honesty is disarming, their innocence is both.

They laugh easily, they cry even easier — and the fact that they are so vulnerable and so impressionable makes us so accountable. We never see ourselves better than when we’re looking in their faces. We know ourselves better as we get to know them. They are a reflection of what we are. This can be unsettling.

They give us hope because they have so much. They increase our faith because theirs has not yet been tainted with doubt. They renew our love because they are so easy to love.

They have a transparent quality about them that we adults seem to lose somewhere in the teenage years. They’re real. They say what they think and usually mean what they say, and yet their inherent idealism is shattered the day they discover human hypocrisy – especially if it comes from someone they love or admire.

They are priceless. So rather than trying to make them more like us, maybe we should try to be more like them, to think more like they do.

For after all, Robert Fulghum was right. All we really needed to know we did learn in kindergarten, and wisdom really wasn’t at the top of the graduate school mountain but there in the sandbox, and if all of us would have our cookies and milk about three o’clock every afternoon and then lay down with our blankies for a nap, it really would be a better world. And it is still true, that no matter how old we are, we should hold hands and stick together when crossing the street.

So let’s do our children a favor this Christmas, let’s think more like they do. We may be doing ourselves the bigger favor.

A Snowfall and a Classroom Prayer

Irina could not keep her eyes on the teacher.

Staring beyond the dirty windows of her classroom, she was mesmerized ... by snowflakes. A veritable scarcity in the coastal city of Odessa, these lacy little diamonds danced and sparkled in the dreary sky, winking at the ten-year old, teasing her mercilessly.

Snow in these parts was rarer than bread. If you stood in line long enough, you could always come away with a couple stale loaves, but these white flakes of magic could not be found anywhere, no matter how long you waited.

The young girl's heart pounded. Soon, it would be gone. Visions of snowballs and snowforts melted in her mind with the prospects of the melting snow, leaving behind nothing but the lifeless, brown earth of Odessa ... all because she and her classmates were held hostage to these mind-numbing, never-ending lectures.

This was atheist instruction class and this was Nikita Khrushchev's Soviet Union.

Education for the Communist leader represented Russia's greatest and most sustainable hope for the future. It was the mechanism that would mold young ideologues in the image of the revered Lenin and most of the schoolteachers wanting a part of this glorious destiny would preach and teach the state's doctrine tirelessly, relentlessly attacking those religious myths that, in spite of years of indoctrination, would not melt away.

The students had been told about a Baptist lady who had placed her child in an oven, roasting it to death. Some of the older students performed a piece of drama that portrayed priests as pathetic and foolish.

But little Irina was a thinker beyond her years and to her, the whole thing didn't seem fair.

"Everyone's against God," she mused. "The Young Pioneers, the teachers, the speakers on the radio – the whole country. Even in schoolyard games, we are not allowed to gang up on one person."

And it seemed unceasingly curious that they all worked so hard against someone who really wasn't there anyway.

"God doesn't exist," the instructor said again. "Only silly, ignorant old women believe that."

Can't they tell they are giving themselves away, she thought. Adults tell you there are no ghosts or gremlins. They tell you once or twice, and that's it. But with God, they tell you over and over again. So He must exist and He must be very powerful for them to fear Him so greatly.

This line of logic led her back to the subject at hand ... snow.

“Ok, God,” she said, “if You did not exist, we wouldn't have to listen to this lecture, so it's Your fault we're sitting here missing the snow.”

And then, almost as an afterthought, “If You're so powerful, make it keep snowing!”

That was Irina Ratushinskaya's first prayer ...

And that was the day white flakes fell like manna from Odessa's gray skies for three solid days. In fact, it was the city's largest snowfall in sixty years. School was cancelled and Irina and her friends frolicked in the mounds of sparkling crystals, laughing hysterically as these sweet kisses from heaven fell graciously on their glowing, red faces.

In the midst of this winter party, the young lass found her mind racing, delirious with emotion and wonder. She pondered this God that her teachers denied, the One who could make snow fall, even in official Communist airspace.

She began talking to Him, secretly, mostly late at night, asking endless questions – not politely, but with passion and persistence.

And a relationship began between a little Russian girl and the God who is there, a relationship that endures to this day.

Though prayers are outlawed in the classroom – though God Himself be outlawed in an entire country – the human spirit can still find Him if it seeks Him ... and wise men, and women, do still seek Him.

The Missing Think Link

Go to any education conference, teacher-training clinic or school convention, and what you will typically hear is some version or variation of an emphasis on the dynamics of *teaching* and *learning*. On the surface, this would appear to make sense and provide a healthy pedagogical formula. Beneath the surface, however, the most important element in the whole process is often missing: *thinking*.

As an equation, in theory it looks like this: teaching = learning. But anyone who has ever been a teacher (or student) knows, in practice, that is not true. What *is* true is this equation: teaching + *thinking* = learning.

Thinking is always the missing link in any deficient mode of education. Learning is the natural and inevitable result of teaching and thinking. Where teaching and thinking are, learning will eventually be. The first two are the forebears, the last one is the offspring. Without “thinking,” however, one will have achieved at best a synthetic form of learning.

So if we bypass “the think link” in the educational chain, trying to achieve learning in our students without it, the result can only be superficial learning experiences, thus, not really learning at all. The final product (usually) is a poorly equipped and uninspired student. If our young people aren’t thinking, then we’re not teaching and they’re not learning.

Developing citizens who are strong, capable thinkers comes from developing students who love to think – and when done right, when done thoughtfully, every student does. The so-called “airheads” of our youth ranks are usually a false perception. But if there is any grain of truth to such labels, there is usually a good reason (i.e., stinkin’ thinkin’ at home, the mindless pop youth culture, or behavioral classroom teaching methods.)

Nonetheless, it should go without saying that learning is not the objective of education. Learning is a byproduct of the objective. The objective is thinking. Active thinkers actively learn and passive learners passively think. If thinking is stimulated, learning will naturally follow; if thinking is stifled, learning will be sterile. And sterile learning produces a populace that easily swallows propaganda and indoctrination.

The Purpose of Education

The pervading and unrelenting tension in American pedagogy for the last one hundred-plus years essentially has come down to one question: *what is the purpose of education?* This set the stage for an intense face-off between America's two competing premier educational philosophies: the classical view versus the progressive version.

The classical model was deemed the tried-and-true model; synonyms were academic, traditional, scholastic or general while its advocates were called classicists or essentialists. Conversely, the progressive model was deemed the up-to-date model; synonyms were modern, industrial, utilitarian or natural while the advocates were called progressives or experientialists.

The classical approach, tracing back to the Greeks and Romans as well as the Jews and Christians, involved the systematic study of the historic arts and sciences. The Latin word *ars* meant skill, craft or ability, while the Latin word *scientia* meant knowledge or body of knowledge. In this framework, *the arts* developed intellectual skills while *the sciences* delivered intellectual content (food for thought). The thinking arts included the language arts, fine arts and liberal (liberating) arts while the thinking sciences included the natural sciences as well as the formal and technical sciences.

Altogether, they convened a passionate pursuit of truth, goodness and beauty, casting an expansive vision of what it meant to be fully human through a concerted transmission of the wisdom of the ages. It was not opposed to the practical merits of job-training, only with being considered synonymous to or replaced by the same.

The progressive model launched "student-centered" learning and what was called "natural" education. Championed by three pivotal philosophers – 18th Century Frenchman Jean Jacques-Rousseau, 19th Century Englishman Herbert Spencer and 20th Century American John Dewey – progressive education disparaged "bookish" learning and denounced teacher-directed classrooms as elitist and authoritarian. It promoted what it deemed a freer, more joyful approach of letting student interest drive the educational endeavor. With Rousseau and Spencer as the forebears and Dewey as the facilitator, the child-centered movement was born.

So the struggle began between the historic approach and the modern approach, the old school versus the new school. And the central conflict boiled down to one thing ... *the purpose of education* itself.

The reason this matters is because (as logic teaches us) errant assumptions always lead to aberrant conclusions. When the purpose of education is misunderstood or redefined, the consequences will always be adverse, for both the student and society.

When pragmatic impulses take over, academic integrity gets compromised and learning eventually gets dumbed down. Children get pushed through the system and a vacuum is created that gets filled by every educational fad imaginable.

Eventually radical ideologies emerge, destroying any semblance of what a robust education looks like within a democratic republic.

In short, when education loses its anchor, a spirit of anti-intellectualism begins to grip both our students and our country. As our children swim in the ocean of pop youth culture, without something deeper and more substantive to hold on to, they will drown.

Moreover, when schools lose their intellectual and moral compass, the educational enterprise gets hijacked by nefarious, agenda-driven forces, and schools eventually become subversive, government-controlled vehicles that ultimately end up conflicting with more rooted institutions, like home and church.

So what *is* the purpose of education? It can be summed up essentially in four words: *to learn to think* – learning a lot so the student can think a little and learning from others so students can think for themselves. That has been the purpose of education for over a thousand years, which is why 19th Century American educator William Mowry rightly called the local community schoolhouse a “brain factory.” It has only been in the last one hundred years that the progressive model has shifted the paradigm and redefined the purpose, and they have been experimenting with our kids ever since.

Louis Pasteur said, “chance favors the trained mind.” Classical education reminds us that the best way to train the mind will always be through *the arts and the sciences*. With this conviction, the classical model takes on a more expansive educational vision; apart from it, the progressive model promotes a much more restrictive and limited view.

In addition, classical education contends that a student’s thoughts have to be grounded in good soil (truth and wisdom) before they can bear good fruit (virtue and character), which brings us to the heart of the conflict: underneath the tension between both models is an inescapable clash of worldviews. The one says there *is* a transcendent authority, the other says *we* are that transcendent authority. The one espouses freedom *of* religion, its adversary espouses freedom *from* religion. The one views human beings as fundamentally flawed, the other sees them as inherently good. The one worldview claims parents are the owners of our schools, its opposite sees the state as the owner.

The one says truth is absolute, meaning there *are* some things in life that are absolutely and always true, for all people in all places at all times. The other says truth is relative, so we each decide for ourselves what is true and false, which means we each decide for ourselves what is good and bad, and therefore, what is right and wrong.

From America’s conception up until the early 1900’s, there was a consistent and universal consensus regarding what schools were supposed to do and why they existed. Through the arts and sciences, classical education not only frees the mind, it opens it. Its antithesis does the exact opposite. With a choice of this magnitude, we’re left with two questions: (1) Which model should schools embrace? and (2) Who rightly should decide the answer?

The Consequential Role of America's Schoolhouse

Historically, the local community schoolhouse was uniquely positioned between the three institutions of home, church and state. That means it functioned strategically as an extension of the family, a friend of the faith and an incubator for a free society.

This triangular relationship was what the Founding Fathers envisioned for America's schools because they understood all three institutions as God-ordained. It was not only natural that they complement each other and work together in harmony, but absolutely critical, especially for a brand new and highly fragile democratic republic.

The health and growth of a young country conceived in liberty would only be strengthened and sustained by such a relationship. Conversely, an emerging hostile or conflictual relationship would greatly weaken and potentially destroy this great American experiment. On all three fronts (domestic, ecclesiastic and civic), the Founders knew intuitively that the local schoolhouse would play a key role in America's foundation and future as well as its ultimate success or eventual demise.

Take the first one ... the schoolhouse as an extension of the family home. To the American Founders, the family was sacrosanct because it was the most basic form of community. It was where all community began and, therefore, where a child would get its first taste of community.

This meant a lot of things, but at the very least, it meant children belonged to their parents, not to the state. This by definition meant that parents were responsible for their children's education, not the church or the state. And this by definition meant the parents could delegate (not relinquish) their responsibility to educate their child. (If they relinquish it, then the parents serve the school; if they delegate it, the school serves the parents.)

So our schools were to be an extension of the family, not vice-versa, which means American school life should be reinforcing family life and values, not replacing it or working against it. When it does, the pushback should be immediate and overwhelming.

Take the second one ... the schoolhouse as a support to the faith community. As new towns were popping up everywhere in this country during its infancy, the first two structures built were usually the churchhouse and the schoolhouse (often the same building). This was neither accidental nor incidental. As a priority, in every new American community, the two were joined at the hip. And there was a reason for it, conveyed clearly by George Washington: "Religion and morality are indispensable supports of our Republic." John Adams agreed: "Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other."

How savvy, then, were the secularists in creating a false dichotomy between all things public and all things religious, and when the paradigm shift happened, they caught most Americans off guard and flat-footed.

By making the Constitution say things it never said (the “separation of church and state” clause, for example), they succeeded in muzzling all expressions of faith in a place (our schools) where our young people spend 30-40 hours a week of their developing lives, nine months out of every year, for thirteen years. (And over the subsequent 30-40 years, we watched teen pregnancies, drug use and school shootings sky-rocket while academic competencies plummeted.)

But in a free society where religious freedom is at the core of all other freedoms, the schoolhouse should be a place where freedom of religion is taught and practiced, not freedom from religion.

Which leads to the third one ... the schoolhouse as an incubator for a free society. This is the place where we either raise up great Americans, or the opposite, because as Lincoln said, “The philosophy of the schoolroom in one generation becomes the philosophy of government in the next.”

A classical liberal arts education was always about liberating the mind from ignorance, freeing the mind from “mind blinds.” The liberal arts were the arts of liberty, the arts of freedom. A free society cannot long abide without this kind of education.

It is this grander vision for our local schools to which we must return or we will crank out yet another generation who will gullibly elect big government control freaks forever hellbent on controlling our thoughts (via progressive education), our beliefs (via religious marginalization), what we can say (via cancel culture), how we buy and sell (via socialist economics), how we vote (via tampered elections) and our society as a whole (via social engineering).

Ronald Reagan’s apt warning remains ever relevant and prophetic: “Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction.” The Founders knew how true this was, and thus were keenly aware of the consequential role the community schoolhouse would play in either preventing this extinction or contributing to it.

Build Our Schools on Founding Principles

The kind of school that works best in a free society is the kind that best reflects that society. Since a democratic republic and an educated society are parallel (or should be), they ought not contradict each other. The tension comes when they do.

The failure of these two institutions (democracy and education) to complement each other is, in part, why much of our nation's education apparatus struggles to consistently bear good fruit. Respecting intellectual freedom without rejecting religious liberty is American education's inherent calling (unlike totalitarian countries), and doing so age-appropriately while deferring to the parents' best judgment is its common-sense parameters. (Sidebar: The parents are the owners of our schools, so they are the ultimate authority. The kids we teach are their kids, they pay the taxes, so we as educators work for them, not vice-versa.)

A free society is built on self-evident truth which gives birth to a body of rights and freedoms. To frustrate, ignore, twist, pervert or negate the same in our schools, to whatever degree, is to cripple our students in the functionality of their citizenry and make them less than qualified to perpetuate the legacy of liberty in their society.

Few would argue anymore that today's American youth possess a disheartened grasp of the founding principles of a free society as rooted in the Declaration of Independence and US Constitution. (If your child does, be grateful and proud, because he or she is increasingly one of the grand and rare exceptions.) This is, no doubt, because "we the people" have become illiterate ourselves in our national history and foundations. Where historical nearsightedness flourishes, cultural appreciation does not. And when one generation takes the lead, subsequent generations necessarily follow. The law of increasing entropy sees to it.

So as the struggle for the best educational model in this country continues, we seem hard-pressed to build schools that mirror the kind of society our Founding Fathers aspired to build, unlike any civilization in the history of mankind. Which begs the question, why is it not more obvious that education in this nation should shadow the democracy of this republic?

If our society was built on the First Amendment ("*Government shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof*"),

then shouldn't our schools be as well? Isn't school about preparing young people for the society they will live in? Right now, as it stands, we teach the First Amendment in our schools but fail to practice it there.

An ideologue views education as the engine that will drive their own agenda. They're bent on shaping kids (or society) in their image, believing America would be better off if they could just make young people think the way they do? Coming out of the average university's teacher-training program, they obviously did not get the memo that *that* is not their job. No surprise, of course, since the average university believes it is.

Educators can be very opinionated (our liability) with an insatiable hunger for knowledge (our asset), and, as a result, we sometimes convince ourselves we have all the answers. The zeal that flows out of that condition drives us to share what we know with others (our students).

This passion is then fueled by the comparative human tendency of viewing the average layperson as not nearly so enlightened. The dilemma in this scenario emerges when the "unenlightened" ones' views are not respected, or conversely, when the "enlightened" ones' views are legislated, be it through the vehicle of journalism, government or ... a la education.

These marketplaces thrive only as they breathe freedom, which means they must never be relegated to the dark dungeon of thought control or religious cleansing. When they do, they go beyond the misuse of freedom; they become painfully guilty of liberty's wholesale and unmitigated abuse.

It becomes more clear, then, why we have produced so many young citizens who haven't a clue as to what a free society is, or their place in it. How can they if we don't? Control freaks always reproduce after their own kind, and neuroticism is the fruit that is borne thereby.

The point is, our schools must insist our kids wrestle long and hard with the founders' view of freedom. Though it's a very deep ocean, the bottom of which they'll never reach, at least we can take them deeper than where they are now. *And we must.*

Liberty literacy is built on founding principles. Our schools must be as well.

Why Johnnie Can't Think – Pt. 1

Back in 1955, Rudolph Flesch wrote a landmark book entitled *Why Johnnie Can't Read*. Someone now needs to write a book called *Why Johnnie Can't Think*. It's not only a real thing, but as many college professors and business owners can testify, it's a big problem. The reasons are multi-layered and multi-dimensional; here is the first one ...

First, Johnnie (or Janie) can't think because we don't teach logic anymore.

We live in a politicized, polarized culture. Consequently, we are baited by “applause lines” delivered by people on “our side,” dismissing with contempt those who speak contrary. But as educator Douglas Wilson says, “We may often take sides in such a process, but it cannot be called thinking. People can say many true things couched in atrocious arguments, and they construct valid arguments in the cause of error.”

Logic is about the assessment of those arguments, and every subject involves them, i.e., reasons for believing something. An argument is an answer to a “Why?” question, and it requires dual components: (1) a group of one or more premises, and (2) a conclusion. The premises form the links in a chain on which the conclusion hangs.

But not just any link will do; the links of an argument can either be good or bad, solid or flawed. Logic is the discipline which shows our young people how to judge whether an argument is good or bad, whether it links together properly or not.

In classical education, logic was one of the staples of the curriculum. In fact, in medieval times, logic was part of the Trivium (the key three thinking stages) which equipped young scholars with a structure that enabled them to think effectively before they entered into the Quadrivium (the core four thinking subjects).

Without those basic tools of thinking — apart from the basic “rules of thinking” — they were deemed uneducated and, therefore, unworthy of one's attention, no matter how much knowledge, status, power or wealth they accumulated.

In modernity's progressive education models, logic is only mildly toyed with, if at all (usually not at all). But apart from logic, there is no “progressive” education because the kiddos can only regress in their thinking, becoming passive, gullible and emotional, believing whatever and whoever. They need tools – logic gives them a whole tool box.

So that's the first reason Johnny can't think. We no longer teach logic as both a formal scholastic discipline and core pedagogical thinking stage. The second reason is we no longer teach classical rhetoric.

Why Johnnie Can't Think – Pt. 2

The first reason Johnnie can't think is because we don't teach logic as both a formal discipline and as a pedagogical stage. The second reason is like unto the first: we don't teach rhetoric (i.e., communicating one's thoughts logically and persuasively) in the same way (as both a discipline and a stage). So what we're left with, and what we've left our youth with, is a lot of emotional manipulations, sentimental nonsense and irrational bullcrap.

There was a time in education when logic and rhetoric worked hand-in-glove together. For the ancients, you did not (because you could not) separate the two. One could not display good rhetoric without good logic and vice-versa. In most circles today, however, the word "rhetoric" has become a dirty word, and understandably so. But not to worry. Such an image has plagued this discipline for thousands of years, literally. In fact, Plato and Aristotle went 'round and 'round about it.

Plato thought the orators of his day were too concerned with style and eloquence, to the point of submerging truth and content in it. Aristotle countered by declaring that even the soundest of logic is incommunicable without the skill of persuasive public speaking.

This debate has echoed down through the ages even to the present. With few exceptions, however, the attack on rhetoric is generally made with great eloquence, proving its complete necessity.

So Aristotle wins this one. And one can't help but agree with the old sage when he pointed out how limited the choices are: either we persuade by trial-and-error, or we think about what we are saying and attempt to refine and improve how we are saying it.

That is why Aristotle put rhetoric and logic in the same boat as both an art and a science. With rhetoric, communicating becomes an art; with logic, thinking becomes a science; Together, for both to be employed (and enjoyed!) synchronistically, they must both be developed concurrently.

Finally, it must be said that the logician and rhetorician are not inventors of logic and rhetoric any more than a historian is an inventor of history or the grammarian an inventor of grammar. As Augustine said, "... the validity of logical sequences is not a thing devised by men, but is observed and noted by them that they may be able to learn and teach it, for it exists eternally in the reason of things, and has its origin with God."

The saint of Hippo continued, "... as he who points out the stars and their movements does not point out anything that he himself or any other man has ordained; in the same way, he who says, 'When the consequent is false, the antecedent must also be false,' says what is most true; but he does not himself make it so, he only points out that it is so."

Teaching logic is logical, and the case for teaching rhetoric is more than just ... rhetoric. Young people will scarcely be able to point out what is and is not so if they lack the most basic building blocks. Without them, Johnnie can't think.

