

# MAKE PUBLIC EDUCATION GREAT AGAIN?

*(Or Are They Just to Big to Fail?)*



**There's a new fad sweeping the nation.**

**It's called "Educational Accountability." Here's how it works.**

**If your neighborhood school can't afford to pay its bills, just close it.**

**That's right. Don't help. Don't look for ways to save money. Don't look for new revenue. Just lock the doors.**

**It's fun! And everyone in the federal and state government is doing it! It's the saggy pants of United States education policy. It's the virtual pet of pedagogical economics. It's the cinnamon challenge of learning-centered legislating.**

***Sorry, poor urban folks. We're closing your kids' school. What? Your little tots are entitled to an education! Fine! Take them to some fly-by-night charter or else they can get stuffed into a larger class at a traditional school miles away. It's really none of my business.***

**Meanwhile, as government functionaries pat themselves on the back and give high fives all around, academic outcomes for these children are plummeting.**

**Moving to another school rarely helps kids learn. They lose all their support systems, social networks, community identity, and self esteem while spreading resources even thinner at their new location often putting it on the chopping block for the next round of closings. Or worse they're subject to the unregulated whims of a for-profit company devoted to cutting student services in the name of increasing shareholders profits until some charter CEO shuts the building, himself, and sneaks away like a thief in the night.**

**But what else can we do? If a school can't pay its bills, it's got to go. Right?**

**Is it really so surprising that poor schools can't pay their bills? We force them to make ends meet by relying heavily on taxes from local residents – most of whom are dead broke!**

**How is someone who can't feed himself going to support a robust school system? How is someone working three minimum wage jobs going to have enough left over at the end of the week to fund a broad liberal arts education? How is someone with the wrong skin color who can't get a home loan or a well-paying job going to provide the capitol necessary for a 21st century learning experience?**

***But whatever. Close the poor schools and blame it on the poor.***

***Tee-Hee!***

**Chicago, Detroit, Philadelphia, Puerto Rico – You have to admit, there's a kind of glee about the whole prospect. It's one of the few things that both Democrats and Republicans agree on.**

**In fact, they love it so much they've found all kinds of excuses for shuttering schools that aren't even so obviously based on their budgets.**

**Look at how we evaluate schools effectiveness.**

**Does your school serve a mostly poor, undernourished, minority population who start kindergarten already years behind grade level? Those kids need help. They need extra assistance, tutoring, counseling, health screenings, and a whole host of wraparound services. But instead of providing any of that, we demand one factor – the school – provide everything without providing them any resources.**

**That's like judging a soup kitchen by weighing its customers before you give them any soup!**

**My God, Man! This poor fellow is malnourished!**

***Yes, he came in that way.***

**What are you putting in that soup!?**

***It doesn't matter. He hasn't had any yet. Besides. He needs more than just soup.***

**Enough of your excuses! I'm closing you down!**

**Moreover, we use the worst possible measurements of student achievement – standardized test scores – to tell if our schools are doing a good job. Never mind that these sorts of assessments repeatedly have been shown to demonstrate parental income more than academic achievement. And surprise! Surprise! They show our poor kids have poor scores!**

**And just in case a few kids somehow manage to overcome the odds, we sabotage the learning they might otherwise get from their schools with top down policies like Common Core State Standards.**

**How does this cripple educational outcomes? By hobbling the one group most in a position to actually make a difference – teachers.**

**Instructional autonomy? Bye! Bye! After all, who wants to hear from the people on the ground who can empirically judge the situation, determine what needs to be done and how best to do it? Instead, we give the power to think tanks and the testing industry to decide what is taught, when and how.**

**Common Core has never been proven to help kids learn. In fact, most teachers despise it, saying the standards are developmentally inappropriate, ill-conceived and unwieldy. Even under the best of circumstances, why would you take someone who barely has the resources to get by and then make things MORE difficult? That's like taking an 80-pound starving child and forcing him to lift a 200 pound barbell over his head in order to qualify for his dinner.**

**Put your back into it, youngster!**

*I'm trying, Sir, but I'm so hungry.*

**Just use your grit!**

*Grits! Yes, please. I'm famished.*

**So what do we do? We close their schools! That'll show 'em!**

**And somehow we call this accountability.**

**Would you solve a measles outbreak by closing the hospital? Would you solve a burning building by closing the fire department? Would you solve an asteroid hurtling toward Earth by closing NASA!?**

**NO! OF COURSE YOU WOULDN'T!**

**In fact, when the wealthy are at a disadvantage, we do just the opposite. Take the banking industry.**

**When Wall Street crashed the economy with risky speculation and absurdly short-sighted practices, did we close the banks?**

**No way! We bailed them out.**

**Why? They were too big to fail.**

**If we had let them spiral into insolvency – which everyone agrees they deserved to do – it would have had too large an impact on the country. Middle class folks would have lost their savings. Retirees would have lost their pensions. Businesses throughout the nation would have closed. The economy would have come to a grinding halt.**

**So the federal government saved the banks.**

**Now clearly there should have been strings attached to this bail out. Those responsible for the crash should have been prosecuted and forced out. At very least, the banks should have had to make concessions such as more regulation and stopping the risky practices that crashed the economy in the first place. (SPOILER ALERT: That didn't happen.)**

**However, the idea was sound.**

**But why does it only apply to the big banks? Aren't there other areas of public life that are too big to fail? And isn't public education one of them – perhaps the biggest one?**

**Heck! Unlike the banks, our schools did nothing to deserve these wholesale closures. In fact, they've done an amazing job with the few crumbs we force them to subsist on.**

**Moreover, the result of letting them shut down would be just as catastrophic for our nation as a banking collapse. Maybe more so.**

**If our schools fail, we won't have educated citizens. Future generations won't be qualified for any but the most menial of jobs. They won't be able to navigate the media, commerce, politics, science or any domain of civic responsibility.**

**Without our schools, we'll calcify the economic structure. The rich will stay rich, the poor will stay poor and there will be next to no social mobility. Our country will exist as a neo-feudal state and most of us will be relegated to little more than serfs.**

**Is it too cynical to suggest that this is exactly why we haven't bailed out our schools? The overwhelming majority of our nation's wealth is held by only 1% of the population. Disinvesting in public education is exactly the kind of thing that would ensure the status quo is maintained or perhaps even tilted further in the favor of the super rich.**

**Any sane society, wouldn't let this happen. If we don't want this nightmare scenario, it's time to bail out our schools.**

**Seriously. The federal government should step in.**

**Provide a huge influx of cash to the poorest schools so every institution of learning can count on adequate, equitable, sustainable funding. Stop judging them based on high stakes test scores. Stop sabotaging them with social schemes like Common Core. Let the experts – the teachers – actually run their own buildings.**

**This is what almost every other major country in the world does. Funding is federal. Policy is local. Get with the times, America!**

**And you can pay for it by enacting a fair tax plan. Worldwide, American companies keep 60 percent of their cash overseas and untaxed. That's about \$1.7 trillion annually. Imagine what that kind of revenue could do for our public schools!**

**Imagine if we taxed risky Wall Street speculation. Imagine if we made the super rich pay their fair share with tax rates similar to those we had when our national economy was at its best – the 1950s and '60s.**

**You want to make America great again? This would do it? You champion personal responsibility? This is what responsible government would do.**

**After all, what's the purpose of government if not to create a level playing field for the next generation?**

**Call it a bail out, if you want. Or more accurately call it being answerable to the future, taking charge, rising to meet our duties, true accountability.**

**Stop closing public schools. Save them.**

---

**NOTE: *This article also was published in the LA Progressive.***