

ESSAYS FROM

# The Objective Standard

## FREEDOM OF EDUCATION



C. BRADLEY THOMPSON

BRYAN LARSEN  
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# Freedom of Education

## CONTENTS

Introduction	4
The New Abolitionism: Why Education Emancipation is the Moral Imperative of our Time	7
Education in a Free Society	27
Endnotes	43
About C. Bradley Thompson	50
About The Objective Standard	51

# Introduction

**T**he most important change we can make toward a dominantly rational and politically free society is twofold: the abolition of government-run schools and the establishment of a fully free market in education. Toward that end, the key objective is to reach active-minded people with the essentialized, fact-based arguments on the matter. And toward *that* end, there is no better means than C. Bradley Thompson's *Freedom of Education*.

In part one, “The New Abolitionism: Why Education Emancipation is the Moral Imperative of Our Time,” Thompson tackles the problem that is the so-called public school system in America. Providing myriad facts showing that government-run schools are, by their very nature, corrupt, incapable of delivering proper education, and unfixable, Thompson calls for readers to join him in a concerted effort to abolish them.

Thompson acknowledges that the task is daunting, but, he argues, this is no excuse to refrain from doing what a clear-eyed examination shows to be morally right. And, after providing such an examination, Thompson harks back to an earlier abolition movement for moral guidance and spiritual fuel:

Who would have thought in 1830—with the notable exception of one man, William Lloyd Garrison—that slavery could be abolished in America? Garrison and his followers ultimately succeeded because they were right in principle, they knew it, and they proceeded accordingly. We who recognize that the government schools are fundamentally immoral and impractical must take the same principled course with respect to our cause. We must be the New Abolitionists. We must identify ourselves as such. We must unabashedly speak the truth. And we must uncompromisingly call for ending government schools.

In part two, “Education in a Free Society,” Thompson asks and answers questions such as: What would a fully free market in education look like? How would it work? Would it provide quality, affordable education for all children, including those from lower-income families? If so, how?

In addressing these questions, Thompson marshals ample evidence that a free market in education in America would provide higher-quality and lower-cost education for virtually every child in the country. Here’s a representative passage:

For the past twenty-five years, [professors James] Tooley and [Pauline] Dixon have been studying education in Africa and Asia, and what they have found is remarkable.

In the shantytown slums in Lagos, Nigeria, and Hyderabad, India, surprisingly large numbers of poor parents are sending their children to unregistered, unregulated private schools despite the existence of “free” government schools. In the slums of Hyderabad, 80 percent of all children attend private schools; in the shantytowns of Lagos, more than 70 percent do. These slum areas house scores of private schools, which sometimes charge little more than \$2 per month in tuition—around 10 percent of average income in the area.

How is this possible? Why do people start and operate these schools? People start and operate them to meet a specific need. The government schools fail to provide good education, so education entrepreneurs have moved in to fill the void and deliver quality education. The schools range from partnerships in small schoolhouses with fifty students to single-proprietorships in huts with a shingle on the door and five students.

Why are desperately poor parents paying for private education when state schools are available for “free”? The answer may surprise defenders of government schooling. The parents of these students—like parents everywhere (with very rare exceptions)—love their children and will go to great lengths to ensure that they get a good education.

Not surprisingly, the children in these private schools score considerably higher on achievement tests in math and English than do the children attending the “free” government schools, despite the fact that the teachers in the government schools are paid at least four times more than those in the private schools. The private schools are far more effective at a fraction of the cost, precisely because they are accountable to customers who can, at any time, withdraw their children and put them in competing schools. And because teachers in these schools are accountable to principals who can fire them at any time. And because principals in these schools are accountable to owners of the schools, who can fire them at any time. In essence, these schools are free from government—which means, free to educate children.

One parent summed up the difference between these shantytown private schools and the government schools with a succinct analogy: “If you go to a market and are offered free fruit and vegetables, they will be rotten. If you want fresh fruit and vegetables, you have to pay for them.”

Given that private schools can meet the needs of these children despite their extreme poverty and despite the continued existence of government schools, imagine how much better fully private education could meet the needs of American children—including the poorest children—given the much greater resources available here.

There are many more gems where that came from.

Combined, these two essays (each of which was originally published in *The Objective Standard*) lay out the essential case for the abolition of government schools and for the establishment of a fully free, fully private market in education.

Study this vital book. Share it with friends. Join the New Abolitionists.

*This is the way forward.* —Craig Biddle

# The New Abolitionism: Why Education Emancipation is the Moral Imperative of our Time

I begin with my conclusion: The “public” school system is the most immoral and corrupt institution in the United States of America today, and it should be abolished. It should be abolished for the same reason that chattel slavery was ended in the 19th century: Although different in purpose and in magnitude of harm to its victims, public education, like slavery, is a form of involuntary servitude. The primary difference is that public schools force children to serve the interests of the state rather than those of an individual master.

These are—to be sure—radical claims, but they are true, and the abolition of public schools is an idea whose time has come. It is time for Americans to reexamine—radically and comprehensively—the nature and purpose of their disastrously failing public school system, and to launch a new abolitionist movement, a movement to liberate tens of millions of children and their parents from this form of bondage.<sup>1</sup>

Twenty-first century Abolitionists are confronted, however, by a paradoxical fact: Most Americans recognize that something is deeply wrong with the country’s elementary and secondary schools, yet they support them like no other institution. Mention the possibility of abolishing the public schools, and most people look at you as though you are crazy. And, of course, no politician would ever dare cut spending to our schools and to the “kids.”

For those who take seriously the idea that our public schools are broken and need to be fixed, the most common solutions include spending more money, raising standards, reducing class size, issuing vouchers, and establishing charter schools. And yet, despite decades of such reforms, our schools only get worse.

The solution is not further reforms. The solution is abolition.



Just as antebellum Americans in the North had to be roused, educated, and radicalized on the evils of government-sanctioned involuntary servitude and on the need to abolish slavery, so too 21st-century Americans need to be shown the horrors of government-run, involuntary schools and persuaded to abolish them. Americans must come to see not only that the public school system is failing, but also that it cannot be reformed—because, like slavery, it is fundamentally immoral. Abolition will not be achieved anytime soon, but we must work tirelessly, step by step, to achieve that goal.

The purpose of this essay is to inspire a revolution in the minds of the American people—to shake them of their sentimental attachment to the public school system—and to convince them to unify into an unstoppable movement toward the eventual abolition of public schools. To that end, we will examine what the “public” schools are, why they are immoral, why they are impractical, and why the only rational, moral course of action is to eliminate them.<sup>2</sup>

## The Coercive Nature of Public Schools

When we talk about the public school system, what exactly are we talking about? What are its defining characteristics and purposes?

The public school system is a government-created, government-run monopoly that fills its classrooms with tens of millions of students through compulsory attendance and truancy laws and that pays for its operations with money coercively taken from American taxpayers. Government bureaucrats dictate what is taught in the classrooms and how it is taught. Government-trained or government-certified teachers run the classrooms, where they are required to use government-approved curricula, lesson plans, and textbooks. The so-called “public” schools are therefore more properly called *government* schools; and, because their essential characteristic is *force*, they are properly classified as *political* institutions.

From the time your children are five-, six-, or seven-years-old until they are at least sixteen, you are legally required to send them to a government-run or government-approved school.<sup>3</sup> In some states today, there are attempts to establish compulsory, universal day care or preschool, which means that the age of compulsion could be lowered to four, three, or even two years of age. At the other end, some states are considering legislation that would raise the age of compulsory attendance to eighteen. Support for this idea comes from the top: In his 2012 “Remarks on the State of the Union,” President Barack Obama proposed that

every state in the union pass a law requiring students to stay in high school until they graduate or until they turn eighteen.<sup>4</sup>

Because the government forces parents to send their children to government-run or government-approved schools, the government school system is properly classified as a form of *conscription*. Failure to comply with compulsory attendance laws means you can be harassed and interrogated by the government; your home can be subject to government inspection; you can be fined and jailed; and your children can be taken from you, evaluated by government psychologists, and put in the care of government social services workers.<sup>5</sup>

As an illustration of what compulsory attendance laws mean in practice, consider that in Texas this year, a seventeen-year-old honor student, Diane Tran, was jailed and fined for missing too much school. In addition to being a straight-A student, Tran works two jobs during the school year to support two dependent siblings.<sup>6</sup>

Homeschoolers, too, must comply with government demands. In 2008, Judge H. Walter Croskey of the Second District Court of Appeals in Los Angeles ruled (as *Time*'s Kristin Klobberdanz summarizes) "that children ages six to 18 may be taught only by credentialed teachers in public or private schools—or at home by Mom and Dad, but only if they have a teaching degree." Croskey stated, "California courts have held that under provisions in the Education Code, parents do not have a constitutional right to homeschool their children." Furthermore, Klobberdanz reports, the judge held that "if instructors teach without credentials they will be subject to criminal action."<sup>7</sup> Croskey partially reversed his ruling later in 2008, finding (in Klobberdanz's words) "that as long as parents declare their home to be a private school, they may continue to homeschool their children, even if the parents do not have credentials." However, Croskey continued to hold that parents may homeschool their children only at the indulgence of the legislature, which may grant, alter, or revoke permission to homeschool at its discretion.<sup>8</sup>

Earlier this year, the New York Department of Children, Youth, and Families accused a home-schooling mother of "educational neglect" (which is a criminal offense) and, with the sanction of a judge, abducted her son and put him in a foster home. What was the mother's crime? Her crime was that the educational bureaucracy had been slow in processing her *duly*-filed paperwork to homeschool her son. Finally, after a protracted court battle, the woman got her son back—but only after assuring the government she had complied with its home-schooling regulations.<sup>9</sup>

Although subject to state control, homeschooling in America is at least legal. Not so in Germany. As the *Observer* reviews:

Home-schooling has been illegal in Germany since it was outlawed in 1938. Hitler wanted the Nazi state to have complete control of young minds. Today there are rare exemptions, such as for children suffering serious illnesses or psychological problems. Legal attempts through the courts—including the European Court of Human Rights—have so far failed to overturn the ban.<sup>10</sup>

Today, seventy-five years later, German education policy is set by Article 7 of the German Constitution, which reads: “The entire school system shall be under the supervision of the state.” (German law permits private schools, but only when approved and regulated by the state and “when segregation of pupils according to the means of their parents will not be encouraged.”)<sup>11</sup> There is no difference in theory between the National Socialist law of 1938 and that which governs education in Germany today, and, for many individuals who live under the current law, there is no meaningful difference in practice.

For many German homeschooling families, the situation is dire. In “Home-School Germans Flee to UK,” the *Observer* recounts a few disturbing stories, such as this one:

Klaus Landahl . . . who moved in January from the Black Forest in Germany to the Isle of Wight with his wife, Kathrin . . . said they had no option but to leave their home, friends and belongings in order to educate their five children, aged between three and 12, legally and without fear. “It feels like persecution,” he said. “We had to get to safety to protect our family. We can never go back. If we do, our children will be removed, as the German government says they are the property of the state now.”<sup>12</sup>

Other German homeschoolers, *Time* reports, have fled to the United States, including Ewe Romeike and his family:

Romeike decided to uproot his family in 2008 after he and his wife had accrued about \$10,000 in fines for homeschooling their three oldest children and police had turned up at their doorstep and escorted them to school. “My kids were crying, but nobody seemed to care,” Romeike says of the incident.<sup>13</sup>

It gets worse. In 2007, as Paul Belien reports for the *Washington Times*, “15 German police officers forced their way into the home of” a German family and “hauled off 16-year-old Melissa . . . to a psychiatric ward. . . . [A] court affirmed that Melissa has to remain in the Child Psychiatry Unit because she is suffering from ‘school phobia.’”<sup>14</sup>

Another European nation that has recently banned homeschooling is Sweden,<sup>15</sup> where political leaders are even calling for the legal abduction of children from home-schooling parents. Michael Donnelly of the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) warns, “Sweden’s educational policy is becoming increasingly totalitarian. A country that does not permit home education is not really a free country.” HSLDA recounts one of the more egregious cases of abuse: In 2009, a seven-year-old Swedish boy named Domenic Johansson was abducted by armed police officers acting on behalf of the state social services department. Domenic was kidnapped from an airliner as it sat on the runway waiting to take off to India, where his family planned to resettle and homeschool him.<sup>16</sup> When Domenic’s distraught father attempted to have his son released from state custody, government authorities publicly branded him a “human rights fanatic.”<sup>17</sup>

How do these foreign horror stories relate to education in America?

Attempts have been made throughout American history to pass laws similar to those established in Germany for the purpose of using government force against parents and their children in the realm of education. And these efforts were not limited to assaults on homeschooling; in seeking to require all children to attend government schools, they assaulted private schools as well.

Massachusetts led the way with compulsory attendance laws. As Murray Rothbard writes, Massachusetts first imposed compulsory education in 1789; then, in 1852, “established the first comprehensive statewide, modern system of compulsory schooling in the United States.” In 1862, the state “made jailing of habitual truant children mandatory, and extended school age to between ages seven and sixteen. In 1866, school attendance was made compulsory for six months during the year.” Most other states imposed compulsory attendance laws in the 1870s and 1880s.<sup>18</sup> “By 1900 court cases had affirmed state enforcement of compulsory attendance laws based on the benefit to the child and the welfare and safety of the state and community.”<sup>19</sup> By 1918, “compulsory-education legislation was passed in all the states.”<sup>20</sup>

By 1922, the full meaning of the compulsory nature of government education came to fruition in Oregon, where the state legislature passed a law effectively prohibiting the existence of private and parochial schools and compelling all children to attend government schools. Fortunately, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down the law in 1925 in a well-known case, *Pierce v. Society of Sisters*; however, the court upheld the ability of states to compel attendance at government-approved schools, whether “public” or private.<sup>21</sup>

Since that ruling, private schools have been legal in all states in America. But a movement to regulate or even ban all forms of private education—including independent, religious, and homeschools—has gained ground in recent years, with advocates in the media, America’s law and “ed” schools, and teachers’ unions. Homeschooling is on the front line of these attacks. For Robin L. West, a professor at the Georgetown University Law Center, the “recriminalization” of homeschooling is not a politically “viable option” today, but only because homeschooling is “such an entrenched practice.” So, in lieu of recriminalizing homeschooling, she supports government regulation of what is taught in the privacy of the home. Curricular regulation, West writes, would give the state the authority to ensure that students are “exposed to diverse and more liberal ways of life.”<sup>22</sup> And Kristin Rawls, a popular journalist writing for *Salon*, does not “believe the answer is to end home schooling altogether,” nor does she think it necessary to “imprison” home-schooling parents, but she does advocate heavily regulating home education, including the creation of a government “home-school watch list.”<sup>23</sup>

Catherine J. Ross, a professor at George Washington University Law School, argues that a liberal society “should not tolerate the inculcation of absolutist views that undermine toleration of difference,” and so the state “can and should limit the ability of intolerant home schoolers to inculcate hostility to difference in their children—at least during the portion of the day they claim to devote to satisfying the compulsory schooling requirement.” Ross’s explicit goal is for the state to regulate those home-schooling parents “who believe in an absolute truth.” Such views, she writes, “have no place” in America.<sup>24</sup> Apparently, Ross is oblivious to the fact that her condemnation of other people’s absolutist views is itself absolutist, not to mention the fact that she is willing to use the coercion of the state to support her absolutism.

Likewise, Professor Kimberly A. Yuracko of Northwestern University law school has argued that constitutional and political limits must be placed on home-schooling parents who “teach their children idiosyncratic and illiberal beliefs and values.”<sup>25</sup> Professor Martha Albertson Fineman of Emory University Law School has openly proposed that public education in America “should be mandatory and universal”; that parents should be permitted only to “*supplement* but never *supplant* the public institutions where the basic and fundamental lesson would be taught and experienced by all American children: we must struggle together to define ourselves both as a collective and as individuals.”<sup>26</sup>

None of the aforementioned critics of homeschooling has specified—at least not yet—what punishments they would advocate for people who resist their decrees.

## Government Schools Are Tools of Indoctrination

For almost 250 years, education in Britain's North American colonies and then in the United States of America was almost entirely private. Parents had the freedom to choose the education, ideas, and values that they wanted for their children.

By contrast, America's experiment with universal compulsory education, which began in earnest in the 1850s and picked up in the postbellum period, was explicitly based on the authoritarian Prussian model. In 1836, for instance, Calvin E. Stowe of Ohio, one of America's leading education "reformers," hailed the Prussian system of compulsory education. In his book *The Prussian System of Public Instruction and Its Applicability to the United States*, he urged America to adopt the Prussian model.<sup>27</sup> America began to follow his advice in just a few years.

Originally, the purpose of America's new Prussianized education system was twofold: first, to elevate and promote the interests of the state as the nation's primary vehicle for establishing moral virtue and political order; second, to indoctrinate each new generation of children into being obedient and subservient subjects of the state. This view of government schooling was best summed up by the philosopher Johann Fichte, who wrote that the German schools "must fashion [the student], and fashion him in such a way that he simply cannot will otherwise than you wish him to will."<sup>28</sup>

Under this Americanized Prussian model, America's government bureaucrats and teachers were to create a system that would foster collective obedience to those in power. Over the course of the past 150 years, the specific goals of the state have changed marginally with changing administrations, but the general goal of the government schools has remained the same: to indoctrinate children and mold them to the goals of the state. The purpose of government education, wrote Edward Ross, a prominent American sociologist and education theorist, is "to collect little plastic lumps of human dough from private households and shape them on the social kneadingboard."<sup>29</sup>

The goal of government schools is not to serve children by teaching them to think and acquire important knowledge, but to serve the state by forcing children to conform to its will. The U.S. Bureau of Education made the point clear in 1914: "The public schools exist primarily for the benefit of the state rather than for the benefit of the individual."<sup>30</sup> More recently, William H. Seawell, a professor of education at the University of Virginia, defended government schooling by stating: "Each child *belongs* to the State."<sup>31</sup>

What are the implications and realities of a school system that regards children as belonging to the state and holds the purpose of the schools as instilling

obedience? Consider a recent example from New Jersey, where a school required its children to recite the pledge of allegiance—allegiance not to the flag of the United States but to the school itself and to its teachers. Students were told to pledge their allegiance to “the Marlboro Township School District and to the teachers who help us learn all that we need to know for the future.” *FoxNews.com* reports that, after receiving criticism for this, the school “opted to rewrite the pledge as a school song instead”—as though it makes any difference whether the propaganda is spoken or sung.<sup>32</sup>

One consequence of a system in which government schools push state-sanctioned ideas and values on children is that the system invites ideological groups to pursue political power in order to force their particular ideology on the community, the state, or the nation as a whole. Government schooling enables those who control the state to force their political views on those who do not. As a result, liberals in Kansas rightly fear that conservatives in power will use the government education system to support a religious agenda, and conservatives in Massachusetts rightly fear that liberals in power will use the schools to promote a leftist agenda. Parents who want their kids to get a good education in math, science, history, and literature rightly fear both—they no more want their six-year-olds being *forced* to memorize the Ten Commandments in school than they want them being forced to read *Heather Has Two Mommies*.<sup>33</sup> Parents, of course, are properly free to introduce their children to such subjects, but the government has no business pushing religious or sexual preferences on students.

It is clearly a violation of rights for the government to force secular parents to send their children to schools that teach them the world was made in seven days, that snakes can talk, that a virgin gave birth, that a man walked on water, or the like. And it is likewise a violation of rights for the government to force religious parents to send their children to schools that teach them to worship mother earth; to put condoms on cucumbers; to reject the Bible but enjoy the Koran; and to regard American society as inherently racist, sexist, classist, and homophobic.

The problem here is not that schools are teaching values. No education—whether it is government, private, parochial, or home schooling—can escape the teaching of values. The problem is that the values being taught in government schools are chosen not by parents but by the state.

The role parents play in the system of government education is minimal to nonexistent. Parents today have virtually no control over the ideas or values taught at the school to which their children have been assigned by the government. Over the past 150 years, the government has acquired the authority to teach children

values that were once the exclusive domain of mothers and fathers; it has done so on the supposition that it knows better than parents how to bring up their children and which values they should embrace.

Although in some school districts parents are given a token voice in school affairs, even this small role is granted by *permission* rather than by right. The view of government authorities and educators on this matter is that parents are an unenlightened, harmful influence on children during the formative years of their development. As Judge Archibald Douglas Murphey, founder of the government school system in North Carolina, wrote in 1816, the government must educate children in the virtues of “subordination and obedience” because “parents know not how to instruct them. . . . The state, in the warmth of her affection and solicitude for their welfare, must take charge of those children, and place them in school where their minds can be enlightened and their hearts can be trained to virtue.”<sup>34</sup>

Since Murphey’s time, leaders of the government school establishment have always viewed parents not as clients whose needs and values were to be respected and catered to, but as recalcitrant reactionaries standing in the way of genuine reform. In 1864, the state superintendent of public instruction for California stated unequivocally the role that the state should play in the education of children: “The child should be taught to consider his instructor, in many respects, superior to the parent in point of authority. . . . [T]he vulgar impression that parents have a legal right to dictate to teachers is entirely erroneous.” To enforce the point, California Progressives even denied parents the right to criticize government schoolteachers. The California Penal Code declared: “Every parent, guardian, or other person, who upbraids, insults, or abuses any teacher of the public schools, in the presence or hearing of a pupil thereof, is guilty of a misdemeanor.”<sup>35</sup>

The goal of government schooling is and always has been social reconstruction for the purpose of advancing the ideological agenda of those in power. This means that the teacher, the school, and ultimately the state must assume control of the child in order to reeducate him and to break him from the influence of recalcitrant and ignorant parents who almost always teach the wrong ideas and values.

Horace Mann, the 19th-century godfather of American government schooling, summed up the anti-parent premise of state-run education in these terms: “We who are engaged in the sacred cause of education are entitled to look upon all parents as having given hostages to our cause.”<sup>36</sup> Backed by the state’s monopoly on coercive force, the government schools, in effect, seize children from their parents, then indoctrinate them with a government-mandated curriculum. What parents



want for *their* children is beside the point. As the Wisconsin Teachers' Association declared in 1865, your "children are the property of the state."<sup>37</sup>

On the basis of these and related premises, government schooling takes away from parents the enormous responsibility of providing their children with an education and transfers that responsibility to the state. The government decides which schools children will attend, what and how they will be taught, and who they will associate with for several hours a day. The parents' only responsibility is to ensure that the child is delivered to the school on time every day. If they should fail in that responsibility, the child is declared truant, and in most states the parent is subject to fine and/or imprisonment. The schools have become surrogate parents concerned with child rearing—not through default, as they typically argue, but by design.

In California, for example, a federal appellate judge ruled in 2005 that the government school system has the absolute authority and right to educate children about whatever it wants, including matters dealing with sex. In the case of *Fields v. Palmdale School District*, the court invoked the doctrine of *parens patriae* (i.e., the country as parent), which says that the government has the authority to do anything reasonably related to its educational mission. According to Judge Stephen Reinhardt, "[T]here is *no fundamental right* of parents to be the *exclusive* provider of information regarding sexual matters to their children." Ultimately, the court wrote, parents' right to control the upbringing of their children "does not extend beyond the threshold of the school door." The court continued, stipulating that once a parent puts a child in a government school (something many parents must do given compulsory schooling laws, the taxes they are forced to pay for public schools, and their inability to pay for education twice), the parents' "fundamental right to control the education of their children is, at the least, substantially diminished."<sup>38</sup>

The same year Judge Reinhardt issued his California ruling, David Parker, a Massachusetts father of a five-year-old boy, was arrested, handcuffed, thrown in jail for a night, and fined after he went to his son's school objecting to his child being forced to read and discuss the book *Who's in a Family* (a book promoting same-sex marriage). (Parker was arrested for trespassing after refusing to leave the school until it honored his requests.) Parker sought merely to arrange an opt-out for his son, but his efforts were in vain. The following year, Parker filed a federal civil rights lawsuit in order to defend his right to have some control over his son's education. Parker's lawsuit claimed the school had "intruded upon," "impaired," and "invaded" his substantive due process rights under the Fourth, Fifth, and Fourteenth Amendments in three ways: first, by violating his rights as a parent and guardian "to direct the moral upbringing" of his children; second, by violating his

“familial privacy rights”; and third, by violating his right to the free exercise of his religion. Federal court judges in the Parker case eventually ruled that parents have no right to interfere with the authority of the government schools to educate children on whatever topics they please.<sup>39</sup>

Given that parents are forbidden from determining what subjects their children will study in school or how they will be taught, given that these matters are *fully* in the hands of government educators, what ideas and values are these educators teaching American children?

Over the past several decades, a well-organized movement has revolutionized the curricula and culture of the nation’s government schools. Its aim is to eradicate the “prejudices” and attitudes children learn from their families with regard to issues of race, class, the environment, gender, sexual orientation, and so on. These are the obsessions of the government schools.

Officially, the schools claim to teach no moral values per se. But that claim is patently contradicted by the fact that they constantly push “diversity,” “tolerance,” and moral relativism. Such “values” are intended to strip the children of any standards or principles they may have previously embraced so that the teachers can replace them with the values of the cultural left: egalitarianism, multiculturalism, feminism, community service, environmentalism, and “social justice.” The primary function of teachers is no longer to be the transmitters of knowledge but to serve as agents of social change.

America’s leading teacher-training institutions, teacher unions, and textbook publishers push a radical, New Left, Marxist-feminist-egalitarian ideology.<sup>40</sup> One could write a book on this topic alone, so let us consider just a few examples that have been in the news in recent years.

At the cutting edge of this trend is the attempt by government schools to eliminate many gender and other social distinctions. As of 2007, California’s education code states that gender pertains not to anything biological but to “a person’s gender-related appearance and behavior.”<sup>41</sup> In a training seminar funded by the California Teachers Association, “Gender Spectrum” trainer Joel Baum told Oakland students in a mandatory class, “People can feel like girls. They can feel like boys. They can feel like both, and they can feel like neither.”<sup>42</sup> In Sweden, where the same ideology dominates the education system, teachers at some schools are forbidden from addressing little boys and girls with third-person singular pronouns such as “him” or “her.” Instead, they are required to address all students as “friends.”<sup>43</sup> In Britain, teachers at some schools have banned students from having “best friends.” The students are discouraged from playing in small groups and encouraged to play in

large groups.<sup>44</sup> To have a “best friend” or to prefer certain classmates over others is to commit what Ayn Rand called the “Transgression of Preference.”

At the heart of the government’s education propaganda machine are the “values” of collectivism, multiculturalism, and “social justice.” In order to promote these, the Seattle school district has redefined racism as “whiteness”—that is, one is a racist by virtue of *being* white. Racist values, according to the Seattle educators, include “emphasizing individualism” as opposed to collectivism and having “a future time orientation.”<sup>45</sup> In other words, you are a racist if you like to plan ahead.

America’s government schools also openly and explicitly teach and promote a new religion—the religion of environmentalism. For instance, in 2011, Maryland began requiring all students to take a course in “environmental literacy” in order to graduate from high school. Curricular guidelines encourage students to “take informed action” against forces that “threaten human health.” Students are encouraged to combat “consumption of natural resources” and “the impacts of climate change.”<sup>46</sup> In Vermont elementary schools, students watched Al Gore’s documentary *An Inconvenient Truth* in their math and English courses, while other “students testified before legislative committees about global warming and what Vermont can do about it.”<sup>47</sup> Upon winning the prestigious Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching, one Louisiana teacher praised the students in her class because, as a result of taking her course, they had become “spokespeople for wetlands and the environment” and “activists” for trees.<sup>48</sup> Science classes around the United States have students inundate local newspapers with letters opposing new home construction, sell T-shirts to help preserve the Brazilian “rain forests,” and boycott McDonald’s for its negative impact on “the environment.”<sup>49</sup>

What impact does such a barrage of environmentalist propaganda have on children? When asked about “the most serious threat facing humanity today,” one California sixth grader answered, “Human existence.” Agreeing there are “too many humans on the planet,” the girl said, “Sometimes I wish we didn’t exist.”<sup>50</sup>

## Further Atrocities in Government Schools

In addition to indoctrinating students in multiculturalism, “social justice,” and environmentalism, government schools are probing into the private lives of children and their parents.

For instance, in a New Jersey elementary school students were asked on one of their standardized tests to “reveal a secret about their lives [and] explain why it was hard to keep.”<sup>51</sup> Regardless of whether this was an act of innocent

stupidity or malicious calculation on the part of New Jersey school officials, the fact remains that this kind of psychological intrusion into the lives of children has the effect of turning them into stooges for the state. When government school officials gather private information from students, what is to stop them from using such information against the children or their parents? Suppose teachers learn that a given student's parents refuse to recycle, or that they cook with trans fats, or deny global warming, or own guns, or attend Tea Party events, or buy Big Gulps on the black market. Would anyone in his right mind be comfortable with the government gathering such information?

In addition to placing children in the service of the state, government schools can and in some ways do turn teachers into spies for the state. In the Canadian province of Ontario, a father was arrested and strip-searched recently, his home ransacked by police, and his wife and children taken into police custody and interviewed by family and children's services, all because the man's four-year-old daughter drew a picture in her kindergarten class of her father holding a gun. When teachers asked the girl what the picture was meant to represent, she replied: "He uses it to shoot bad guys and monsters." The girl's teachers reported the picture to the local police. After he was arrested, the father explained to police that he neither owns a gun nor kills monsters—facts confirmed by the police when they searched his house.<sup>52</sup>

Back in America, the focus is less on parents and guns and more on children and sex. In Massachusetts, seventh-grade students in a government school were asked to complete a graphic survey about their sex lives that included asking the twelve- and thirteen-year-olds if they'd ever had oral sex.<sup>53</sup> At a government school in Wisconsin, students were required to take a "Heterosexual Questionnaire" that asked them questions such as: "If you have never slept with someone of your same gender, then how do you know you wouldn't prefer it?"<sup>54</sup>

Not only do many government schoolteachers mine their students for personal information about themselves and their families, many government schools are outfitted with barbed wire, metal detectors and locked doors, timed bells that go off at regular intervals, closed-circuit television monitors linked directly to local police stations, armed guards and bomb-sniffing dogs, protocols for strip searches, and a bevy of state-sponsored psychologists. At one school district in Texas, students have been expelled for not wearing their government issued, microchip-embedded ID cards, the purpose of which is to monitor their whereabouts at all times while at school.<sup>55</sup>

And then there are the drugs. Starting in the 1980s and 1990s, psychologists, counselors, and teachers working in government schools began diagnosing young boys with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in alarming numbers and then pressuring parents and doctors to have the boys medicated with Ritalin, a drug similar to cocaine.<sup>56</sup> *The Christian Science Monitor* reports, “According to testimony given before Congress in 2000, ADHD diagnosis in children grew from 150,000 in 1970 to 6 million in 2000, representing 12 to 13 percent of US schoolchildren.”<sup>57</sup>

These tragic statistics, however, do not reveal the depths of the scandal. Teachers and school counselors—not medical doctors—in the government school system are driving this dramatic increase in the number of American children being medicated with psychotropic drugs. Some physicians report that they have been told by government schoolteachers that if they did not prescribe Ritalin for their students, the teachers would “find a doctor who will!”<sup>58</sup>

Teachers and government officials have even threatened to send boys to special-education facilities if their parents refused to medicate them with Ritalin, and they have accused parents of “child abuse” and then threatened to report them to child protection services if the parents balked at giving their kids the drug.<sup>59</sup> As a result, some parents are medicating their children simply out of fear of having them abducted by government officials.<sup>60</sup>

Why has the government school system become America’s biggest drug pusher? The answer is threefold. First, the government schools have an incentive to diagnose as many children as possible with ADHD because they receive federal funds for each student labeled “disabled”; second, the schools are full of incompetent and badly trained teachers who do not know how to handle America’s Tom Sawyers and Huck Finns; and third, the so-called “whole language” reading technique (and like methods) has caused many children of several generations to be functionally illiterate and mistakenly diagnosed with ADHD.<sup>61</sup>

By 2004, the coerced drugging of American children by the government became so bad that President George W. Bush signed into law the “Prohibition on Mandatory Medication Amendment,” which bans government schools from forcing parents to drug their children for classroom or behavioral problems.<sup>62</sup> When politicians start banning government bureaucrats from immoral behavior, you know the situation must be very bad, indeed.

Not only are America’s government schools corrupt and immoral for all the foregoing reasons, they are also (and consequently) failing academically. Educational standards and performance in the United States have been in a well-

documented state of decline for the past fifty years, and today they are in total free fall. On state, national, and international tests, American academic preparedness is at an all-time low. In every major academic subject—from reading to arithmetic, from history to physics—American students know less and less. They know less relative to American students from one hundred years ago, and they know less relative to students from other countries today.

In history, for instance, only 20 percent of U.S. fourth graders, 17 percent of eighth graders, and 12 percent of twelfth graders who took the 2010 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) exams were deemed “proficient” or “advanced” in their knowledge of the subject. More than 50 percent of high school seniors posted scores at the lowest level (“below basic”), and “only 35% of fourth-graders knew the purpose of the Declaration of Independence.”<sup>63</sup> According to a recent survey, 42 percent of Americans think Karl Marx’s communist slogan “From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs” is to be found in one of America’s founding documents.<sup>64</sup>

In a 2002 survey on geographic literacy conducted in nine nations, American students scored next to last; 11 percent of American students could not locate the United States on a map of the world; 29 percent could not locate the Pacific Ocean; 69 percent could not find the United Kingdom.<sup>65</sup>

American students’ science test scores are equally abysmal. Two-thirds of U.S. fourth graders, 70 percent of eighth graders, and 79 percent of twelfth graders failed to show science “proficiency” on the 2009 NAEP test.<sup>66</sup>

Likewise in math: In 2007, 61 percent of U.S. fourth graders and 66 percent of eighth graders scored below the proficient level on the NAEP test.<sup>67</sup> On international mathematics exams, American students typically finish close to the bottom of world rankings of industrialized nations. In 2009, for example, American fifteen-year-olds ranked twenty-fifth among their peers from thirty-four industrialized nations on an international math test.<sup>68</sup>

From a historical perspective, today’s schools could not hold a candle to those of the 19th century. In 1885, the following math question was on the admissions test for eighth-grade students applying to Jersey City High School: “Find the sum and difference of  $3x - 4ay + 7cd - 4xy + 16$ , and  $10ay - 3x - 8xy + 7cd - 13$ .”<sup>69</sup> By contrast, here is a sample question from the 1998 Ohio ninth-grade mathematics proficiency test: “About how long is a new, standard-sized pencil? (A) 7 inches, (B) 7 pounds, (C) 7 yards, or (D) 7 ounces.”<sup>70</sup>

And then there are the reading scores. In 2007, 33 percent of American fourth graders scored “below basic” (the minimum standard defining literacy) on the

NAEP reading test.<sup>71</sup> In 2009, 74 percent of American twelfth graders tested at or above the “basic” level on the NAEP reading test, meaning that more than a quarter of students scored below that level.<sup>72</sup> In 2011, only 7 percent of Detroit eighth-graders scored “proficient” or better on the NAEP reading test—and 57 percent scored “below basic.”<sup>73</sup> In 2003, the National Assessment of Adult Literacy conducted by the U.S. Department of Education found that 14 percent of American adults (about 30 million people) scored below the “basic” level of prose literacy, which means they demonstrated “no more than the most simple and concrete literacy skills.” In other words, they are barely literate—even though 45 percent of this group graduated from high school.<sup>74</sup>

The result of the decline and fall of American education is summed up in a 2007 newspaper headline: “American kids, dumber than dirt.” The article’s subtitle put an even finer point on the issue: “Warning: The next generation just might be the biggest pile of idiots in U.S. history.”<sup>75</sup> American kids are, of course, not less intelligent than they have ever been, but they do *know* less than ever before.

And the students are not alone in their ignorance. Many of their teachers, unsurprisingly, are ignorant, too. In Illinois, 78 percent of prospective teachers failed an eleventh-grade level competency test administered in 2010.<sup>76</sup> Reporters in Atlanta recently found that “more than 700 Georgia teachers repeatedly failed at least one portion of the certification test they are required to pass before receiving a teaching certificate. Nearly 60 teachers failed the test more than 10 times.” What’s more, “There were 297 teachers on the payrolls of metro Atlanta school systems in the past three years after having failed the state certification test five times or more.”<sup>77</sup>

When so many teachers in America are this academically incompetent, should we be surprised that American children aren’t learning very much?

As if the flunking academic performance of American students and teachers were not bad enough, our government schools are also in a state of moral anarchy. From drug and alcohol abuse to sexual nihilism to bullying to mass murder, if it is bad for life and happiness, it can be found in the government schools. A recent survey by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse found that 17 percent of American high school students (roughly 2.8 million teenagers) use drugs at school. The survey, reports *U.S. News & World Report*, “also found that schools can be a hub of drug-dealing activity, with 44 percent of high schoolers saying they know a fellow student who sells drugs at their school” and “61 percent of students at public schools saying their schools are ‘drug infected [*sic*].’”<sup>78</sup>

More disturbing still is the sexual abuse of students by teachers and administrators and the sexual nihilism of the students themselves. A 2004 report

sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education says that more than 4.5 million students—that is, one in ten—endure some form of sexual misconduct by teachers and school employees.<sup>79</sup> The study found that roughly 290,000 students had experienced some sort of physical sexual abuse by a government school employee between 1991 and 2000, making teacher sexual abuse a significantly worse problem than the Catholic priest sex abuse scandal of recent years. (The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops released a study in 2004 that found 10,667 people made sexual abuse allegations against priests or deacons in the fifty-two years between 1950 and 2002.) In the words of Charol Shakeshaft, the author of the 2004 report, these figures suggest that “the physical sexual abuse of students in schools is likely more than 100 times the abuse by priests.”<sup>80</sup>

Statistics alone, however, do not tell the whole story, and they certainly do not reveal the human tragedy and suffering that go on in America’s schools. Here is just a brief indication of how bad things have become in recent years, beginning with the sexual abuse of students by teachers.

ABC News reports that a 61-year-old third-grade teacher in California was arrested in January 2012 for taking hundreds of bondage photos of himself sexually abusing at least forty-eight students. Police reported that the man blindfolded students, taped their mouths, put live cockroaches on their faces, and spoon-fed his own semen to nine-year-old girls.<sup>81</sup> In Florida, a 360-pound teacher was arrested for raping a thirteen-year-old boy nearly one hundred times in his classroom after school. He was convicted of multiple felonies.<sup>82</sup> In Texas, a married female teacher and mother of three children, was arrested for engaging in a five-person orgy with eighteen-year-old students. The orgy was captured on cell phone video.<sup>83</sup>

The tragic sexual nihilism of students themselves is equally disturbing. In Indiana, school officials attempted to hush up a news story about two sixth-grade students who, in 2007, reportedly had sexual intercourse in shop class while ten students and their teacher were present.<sup>84</sup> Associated Press reports that in 2005 in Ohio, “A 16-year-old disabled girl was punched and forced to engage in videotaped sexual acts with several boys in a high school auditorium as dozens of students watched, according to witnesses.”<sup>85</sup> *City Journal* reports that in 1996, in a school district in Georgia, two hundred students were diagnosed and treated for syphilis after engaging in after-school orgies they had arranged while at school.<sup>86</sup> The *Austin American-Statesman* reports that in Marble Falls, Texas, five fourth-grade boys were suspended from school in 2002 for performing oral sex on each other at least twice—in a classroom, during reading period, and in the presence of their teacher (from whom the boys were “hiding” under coats).<sup>87</sup>



Perhaps we should not be surprised that students act in such ways given how some of their teachers act. In Georgia, seven middle school teachers and staffers were reprimanded for turning their school's public-safety office into a sex room.<sup>88</sup> And in Massachusetts, school administrators and teachers bused high school students to a state-sanctioned conference, where students learned about such sexual techniques as "fisting."<sup>89</sup> At a similar conference a year later, Planned Parenthood distributed sex kits to students containing latex gloves and lubricant. When the conservative *Massachusetts News* claimed that the gloves were intended to be used for "fisting," the leftist Media Matters indignantly retorted that, no, they were intended for use in oral sex.<sup>90</sup>

As a final and most disturbing indication of the moral anarchy reigning in today's government schools, consider that, in the past few decades, hundreds of students have been murdered in government schools (323 in the fifteen years between 1992 and 2007 alone).<sup>91</sup>

And how much do Americans pay for all this academic failure and moral anarchy? U.S. taxpayers are forced to pay considerably more in taxes per pupil for education today than they did one hundred years ago, and more relative to the education taxes paid by citizens of any other industrialized nation. Over the course of the past one hundred years, annual per pupil spending in the United States has risen by more than 2500 percent. In 1890, Americans spent \$275 per pupil (adjusted for inflation and presented in 2000 dollars); in 2000 they spent \$7,086 per pupil, which is a 25-fold increase.<sup>92</sup>

The United States also spends more on education than any other nation in the world, but with shockingly poor results. In 2003, the United States spent an average of \$10,240 per pupil, while twenty-five other industrialized nations spent on average \$6,361,<sup>93</sup> and students from these other nations typically score better on international tests than do American students. Today, the United States spends \$11,467 per pupil; New York, \$18,618; and New Jersey spent \$16,841 per pupil in 2010.<sup>94</sup>

Not surprisingly, many private and parochial schools do a much better job of educating children and spend much less money doing it. In socially and economically comparable neighborhoods in Los Angeles, for instance, the government schools spent more than \$13,000 per pupil, while the Catholic schools spent an average of \$3,750 per student; yet the Catholic schools outperformed their government school rivals in both reading and mathematics tests at every grade level.<sup>95</sup>

It is a strange world, indeed, where children can spend thirteen years in an American government school and then graduate with a diploma they can't even read. And for all this, we pay more than \$11,000 per child, per year.

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The case for abolition is clear. America's government school system is immoral, impractical, and unfixable. It is *immoral* because it is coercive—because it forces parents to submit their children to government-sanctioned educators, government-sanctioned curricula, and the whims of government bureaucrats—and because it forces Americans to fund its immoral operations at the point of a gun. The government school system is *impractical* in that it fails to educate children—and it fails to do so by design. Its goal is not and never has been to educate children; its goal is to create obedient citizens who will serve the state. And because the government school system is by its very nature immoral and impractical, it cannot be reformed. It must be *abolished*.

The task before us is daunting. But that is no excuse. Who would have thought in 1830—with the notable exception of one man, William Lloyd Garrison—that slavery could be abolished in America? Garrison and his followers ultimately succeeded because they were right in principle, they knew it, and they proceeded accordingly. We who recognize that the government schools are fundamentally immoral and impractical must take the same principled course with respect to our cause. We must be the New Abolitionists. We must identify ourselves as such. We must unabashedly speak the truth. And we must uncompromisingly call for ending government schools.

Part and parcel of our principled approach must be the wholesale rejection of conservative demands for “prudence,” demands that the government schools not be abolished but rather be “reformed.” Nonsense. You cannot reform that which is fundamentally corrupt.

Conservatives (not to mention leftists) will attempt to smear us as “extremists,” as “firebrands,” as “incendiaries.” Good. We will answer that we *are* extremists—extremists for what is morally right and educationally practical. We will explain that because our position is right in theory, it will also work in practice. We will explain that the only approach deserving of the term “prudent” is the approach based on sound moral principles and the actual facts on the ground.

William Lloyd Garrison and the other original Abolitionists were extremists, firebrands, and incendiaries—and they were called far worse than “imprudent” for taking their principled stand. Yet they courageously and proudly stood and said, “I am an Abolitionist.”

Do we lack their courage and pride? Or will we stand with them and say: “I, too, am an Abolitionist.”

That is the question with which we are faced.  
I've made my choice: I am an Abolitionist.

# Education in a Free Society

In “The New Abolitionism: Why Education Emancipation is the Moral Imperative of Our Time” (*TOS*, Winter 2012–13), I argued that America’s government school system is immoral and antithetical to a free society, and that it must be abolished—not reformed. The present essay calls for the complete separation of school and state, indicates what a fully free market in education would look like, and explains why such a market would provide high-quality education for *all* children.

## The Need for Separation of School and State

What is the proper relationship of school and state? In a free society, who is responsible for educating children? Toward answering these questions, consider James Madison’s reasoning regarding the proper relationship of government and religion—reasoning that readily applies to the issue of education. In 1784, in response to Patrick Henry’s call for a compulsory tax to support Christian (particularly Episcopalian) ministers, Madison penned his famous “Memorial and Remonstrance,” a stirring defense of religious freedom and the separation of church and state. The heart of his argument can be reduced to three principles: first, individuals have an inalienable right to practice their religion as they see fit; second, religion must not be directed by the state; and third, religion is corrupted by government interference or control. Few Americans today would disagree with Madison’s reasoning.

One virtue of Madison’s response to Henry’s bill is that its principles and logic extend beyond church-and-state relations. In fact, the principles and logic of his argument apply seamlessly to the relationship of education and state. If we substitute the word “education” for “religion” throughout Madison’s text, we find a perfect parallel: first, parents have an inalienable right to educate their children according to their values; second, education must not be directed by the state; and third, education is corrupted by government interference or control. The parallel is stark, and the logic applies equally in both cases.

Just as Americans have a right to engage in whatever non-rights-violating religious practices they choose, so Americans have a right to engage in whatever educational practices they choose. And just as Americans would not grant government the authority to run their Sunday schools, so they should not grant government the authority to run their schools Monday through Friday.

Parents (and guardians) have a right to direct the education of their children.<sup>1</sup> Parents' children are *their* children—not their neighbors' children or the community's children or the state's children. Consequently, parents have a right to educate their children in accordance with the parents' judgment and values. (Of course, if parents neglect or abuse their children, they can and should be prosecuted, and legitimate laws are on the books to this effect.) Further, parents, guardians, and citizens in general have a moral right to use their wealth as they judge best. Accordingly, they have a moral right and *should* have a legal right to patronize or not patronize a given school, to fund or not fund a given educational institution—and no one has a moral right or properly a legal right to *force* them to patronize or fund one of which they disapprove. These are relatively straightforward applications of the rights to life, liberty, property, and the pursuit of happiness—the rights on which America was founded.

But the educational system in America today systematically ignores and violates these rights. At its core, America's system of state-controlled education is *compulsory*. It involves force from top to bottom: The state forces children to attend its schools (or state-approved alternatives). It forces taxpayers—whether or not they use the schools—to pay for them. It dictates what is taught in the classroom through its mandatory curriculum. And it dictates how teachers are to teach the content, through its requirement and control of teacher certification.

Because a government school system violates rights in such a fundamentally crucial area of life—education—it constitutes, as Madison said of a religious establishment, “a dangerous abuse of power.” Government should never be in the business of forcing or controlling the mind—and nowhere is this principle more important than with respect to the education of young minds. Unfortunately, many Americans today willingly accept this dangerous abuse of power.

Although most parents embrace the responsibility of feeding their children and wouldn't dream of letting the government dictate what will be put in their children's bodies, they relinquish the responsibility of educating their children and permit the government to dictate what will be put in their children's minds. Few Americans see that this is what they are doing, but this *is* what they are doing. Consider how this all begins.

One day, when a child turns five or six, his parents drive him to the local government school and say, “Good-bye.” What the parents typically do not realize is that when they say good-bye to that child, they are literally and forever saying good-bye to *that* child—to that unique, irreplaceable child they have raised, nurtured, and loved since birth. When the child comes home in the days, weeks, and months ahead, he or she will have become a *different* person; his mind will have changed, his views of the world will have formed, his values will have developed. In time, he will have spent his formative years—seven hours per day, five days per week for thirteen years—at a government institution whose purpose is to indoctrinate him with state-approved ideas and values, regardless of whether his parents approve of those ideas and values. When it comes to state-run schools, as government school advocate Lester Frank Ward stated candidly in 1897, “the result desired by the state is a wholly different one from that desired by parents, guardians, and pupils.”<sup>2</sup> The goal of a compulsory, state-run educational system is to ensure that children conform to the desires of the state. Education *by* the state is education *for* the state.

Given such facts about government education (see my article “The New Abolitionism” for many more), one conclusion is clear: America’s system of government-run schools must be abolished. This is the only policy consistent with the rights of parents and guardians and with the proper purpose of government, which is to protect and not to violate rights.

### Major Obstacles to Abolishing the Government Schools

Abolishing the government school system will not be easy. The forces defending the status quo are powerful and entrenched. At present, three major groups support the current system, and many of their members will oppose all efforts toward establishing a free market in education.

The first of these, the education establishment—the teachers’ unions, the so-called ed schools or teacher training institutions, and the government education bureaucracy—will, like southern slaveholders, fight tooth and nail against the emancipation of America’s children and their parents. Many people in the education establishment believe their jobs depend on maintaining the status quo—and in many ways they *do*. Many in the education establishment are incompetent and would not fare well if required to compete with the competent rather than rest on their laurels. And many in the establishment are simply not concerned with educating children and will do anything to keep their jobs, regardless of how bad the schools are or become.<sup>3</sup>

But the education establishment is not the main obstacle to abolishing the government school system and adopting a free market in education. The greatest impediment to educational freedom is the American people themselves.

Most Americans have been convinced—in large part by the education establishment—that the “public” school system, despite its obvious failings, is the bedrock of our “democracy” and the source of our national prosperity. As regards the government schools, Americans have a kind of “Stockholm syndrome.” They support the very schools in which they suffered profound abuse and on behalf of which their rights are routinely violated. Because I frequently cite the significance of this phenomenon, my former colleague, the historian Eric Daniels, has termed it the “Thompson Paradox”: Most Americans recognize that the nation’s education system is failing but nevertheless insist that *their* local government school is doing a great job of educating their children.<sup>4</sup> Ironically, American parents express the highest degree of satisfaction with their local schools of any parents in the developed world, despite the fact that their children are among the worst performers on international tests.<sup>5</sup> This dissonance is fueled by the education establishment, which spends millions of taxpayer dollars every year on propaganda to the effect that government schools are necessary, doing pretty well, and could be doing much better if only they had more money.

The third obstacle to establishing a free market in education is the so-called school choice movement. Despite all of its rhetoric about freedom and choice, this movement does not promote freedom or choice in education; rather, it promotes the perpetuation of government schools and the expansion of government involvement in education.

The main way the school choice movement does this is by advocating vouchers, which are, in effect, food stamps for education. Voucher programs assume that children have a “right” to a tax-funded education and thus that taxpayers must be forced to support government schools and/or pay for vouchers. But if *real* rights are to be protected and if education is to be freed from government force, the premise that children have a “right” to a tax-funded education must be rejected, not embraced.

Further, vouchers undermine and corrupt private education by gradually turning private schools into government-controlled schools. When government provides students with vouchers, government obviously has a say in where and how that money is to be used.

Finally, the purpose of voucher programs is to *reform* the existing system of government-controlled education by injecting some degree of choice and

competition into it. The goal is to make a corrupt system more efficient and effective in order to save and perpetuate it. To the extent that vouchers marginally or temporarily improve education, they undermine efforts to do what morally must be done. They undermine efforts to *end* government involvement in education—and they extend the coercive reach of government into private schools. (For details on the problems with vouchers, see Michael A. LaFerrara’s “Toward a Free Market in Education: School Vouchers or Tax Credits?” *TOS*, Spring 2011.)

If we care about protecting individual rights and enabling all American children—rich, poor, and in between—to receive a quality education, we must abolish government schools and establish a genuinely free market in education.

### **Essential Steps toward Abolishing Government Schools and Establishing a Free Market in Education**

How do we begin? We should begin as did the American Anti-Slavery Society, whose motto was “Immediate emancipation, immediately begun.” In the case of education, we should begin now, and with the education of *adults*.

Although government schools obviously cannot be abolished overnight, we can immediately begin the process of abolishing them. The first and most important step in this process is what the antislavery abolitionists called *moral suasion*. We must educate and persuade a sufficient number of Americans as to the moral necessity of dismantling the government school system and establishing a free market in education. All efforts toward political action will be useless unless we convince a substantial number of Americans that government schooling is morally wrong, inconsistent with a free society, incapable of properly educating children, and therefore in need of abolition, not reform. Evidence in support of our case abounds, but few Americans see the relevant facts as evidence for our cause. We must help them to see it. This is our single most important task.

Toward this end, we must understand the facts and arguments in support of our case sufficiently to discuss them intelligently with others; we must share with them the articles and books in support of our cause, as these will answer questions we might not address definitively in conversation; and we must urge them to join us in this moral revolution.

We should also, if possible, move our children from government schools to private schools, or homeschool them—and we should encourage others to do so as well. This is good for our children, who will undoubtedly receive a better education, and good for the abolitionist movement, as it reduces Americans’ reliance on government schools and thus lessens resistance to their abolition.



In addition to educating people regarding the problems with government schools, we must understand and be able to articulate the essential steps that ultimately must be taken in order to end them and establish a fully free market. And we must understand and be able to articulate in essence how a fully free market could and would enable all children—including the poor—to receive an excellent education. Let us take these in turn.

First, and foremost in our efforts to educate people, we must be clear about the ultimate goal and why it is a moral imperative. Our ultimate goal is and must be to abolish government schools and replace them with a fully free market in education. We are calling for the complete separation of school and state—just as the founders called for the complete separation of church and state, and for the same reason. We must think, speak, and act on principles commensurate with this goal, and we must resist all temptation to compromise our principles (i.e., individual rights and the evil of government involvement in education) for the mirage of short-term gains that actually move us away from that goal (such as vouchers). To be principled is to be principled all the time. The moral authority of the abolitionist movement depends on its moral consistency.

Being principled does not mean never compromising; rather, it means never compromising the principles. It can be perfectly permissible to say, in effect, “Sure, we’ll agree to abolish compulsory attendance laws now and hold off on abolishing the Department of Education until later.” This moves us toward our ultimate goal and not at all away from it. This is a compromise on tactics, not on principle. An example of a compromise on principle would be to say, in effect, “Sure, we agree that government should be paying for children’s education; we just want families to be able to spend those tax dollars at the school of their choice.” This is a compromise of principle: It concedes that children have a “right” to that which they do not have a right. That is a huge difference, and it is a difference that abolitionists must never lose sight of.

With our ultimate goal and our principled approach in mind, we can proceed to discuss the various steps that must be taken. These steps can be broken into federal, state, and local objectives.

What I propose here is by no means exhaustive, nor must the steps be taken in any particular order. Different states with different laws may require different tactics by which to achieve progress toward abolition. That said, here are some of the major steps that must be taken in order to end government involvement in schooling and establish a fully free market in education.

*Eliminate all federal government involvement in education, which means:*

- Abolish the Department of Education.
- Repeal all federal education regulations and standards such as the “No Child Left Behind” Act and “Common Core.”
- Abolish all federal taxation for education.
- Abolish all national standards for teacher education and certification.

*Eliminate all state government involvement in education, which means:*

- Abolish state departments of education.
- Repeal all government-mandated curricular standards and testing.
- Decertify the so-called education schools.
- Repeal all compulsory attendance laws.
- Repeal all laws regulating the establishment and operation of home and private schools.

*Eliminate all local government involvement in education, which means:*

- Eliminate local property taxes for education.
- Implement universal tax credits for tuition and scholarships.<sup>6</sup>
- Auction off the government schools to the private sector—that is, to entrepreneurs, voluntary associations of parents, private school operators, and the like.

Again, these objectives have no necessary order. Any progress toward any of them at any time is good. The result of accomplishing all of these objectives will be the abolition of the government school system. And, to prevent this great Moloch from arising again, we should demand that our representatives in government draft and pass an amendment to the U.S. Constitution (and pursue similar measures for state constitutions) that would permanently disestablish all government schooling. Such an amendment might read as follows: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of education, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of parents to choose how or by whom their children will be educated.”<sup>7</sup>

## **What a Free Market in Education Would Look Like and How it Would Work**

As the government school system is dismantled, more and more opportunities will arise for entrepreneurs and educators to pursue free-market alternatives. And once the government school system is completely abolished, a fully free market will enable educational alternatives and opportunities we can only imagine.

Of course, we cannot specify in detail what a fully free market in education will look like, just as we cannot know what our computers or phones will be like in five years, never mind twenty or thirty years. What we can know is that, given the law of supply and demand and given the enormous value that parents place on education, education entrepreneurs—when left free—will innovate and compete such that educational alternatives and opportunities will expand, and costs of education will (generally) decrease.<sup>8</sup>

To the extent that businessmen and educators are free to act on their judgment and to pursue profits, they can and will work to provide good education at affordable prices. That is the only way to make money in a free market. Likewise, to the extent that parents are free to act on their judgment, they will pursue the best educational opportunities they can find given the needs of their children and the money they can afford to pay; thus, parents will reward businessmen and entrepreneurs who provide good educational opportunities at affordable prices. The result is a win-win-win-win system in which businessmen, educators, parents, and students all profit and prosper.<sup>9</sup>

When school leaders and teachers know they must compete for every child who might attend their school, and when they know that parents are always on the lookout for a better and less-expensive product, they are more likely to deliver the kinds of education that their customers want at affordable prices. Quality goes up and prices go down. This is how a free market works, and we can see it in every sector to the extent that it is free.

Consider the cell phone industry or the clothing industry or the Lasik surgery industry, or any other relatively free sector of the economy. What you will see is that when people are free to produce and trade in accordance with their judgment, opportunities and alternatives multiply, and prices make economic sense. That's the way it works for *all* goods and services in a market economy. And education is no exception.

In a free market for education, new schools would be created to meet the demand, resulting in a cornucopia of educational diversity. New for-profit and nonprofit schools would open. Existing private schools would expand. Church-

run schools would open or expand. University- and college-run schools would open or expand. Schools run by major corporations such as Apple and Boeing would open or expand. Big chain schools owned and run by tutoring companies such as Sylvan Learning Centers, small neighborhood schools run by voluntary associations of parents, and online private schools owned and administered by education entrepreneurs would open or expand. And, of course, homeschooling would thrive.

Imagine a world in which Apple computers, Google, and other large technology companies start math and science schools for the children of their employees because they think they can teach those subjects better than competitors can. Might hugely successful companies run by brilliant entrepreneurs and engineers on the order of Steve Jobs and Sergey Brin be able to figure out how to teach math and science well and at reasonable prices? Apple already provides summertime computer camps for the public at their stores across the country at prices that can't be beat—namely, free. Not to be outdone by a competitor, IBM also runs free summer innovation camps for high school students.

For a further indication of what a free market in education would look like, consider what's happening in South Korea, which boasts a booming \$17-billion business in private, after-school tutoring. Known in South Korea as “hagwons,” these private tutoring academies serve as a kind of shadow education system to supplement the government schools, which, unsurprisingly, are systemically mediocre. The hagwons offer classes in every subject, providing much better teachers and hence achieving much better results than do the government schools. Since the rise of these private tutoring companies, South Korean students have rocketed to the top of world education rankings. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, most South Koreans were illiterate sixty years ago, but today their fifteen-year-olds rank second in worldwide reading tests. Because of these private, competitive tutoring services, 47 percent of South Korean students are ranked “advanced”; by contrast, only 7 percent of U.S. students are ranked that high.<sup>10</sup>

In the United States, we are seeing a burgeoning private education market that is branching out in multiple directions. Education and tutoring companies, large and small, are revolutionizing the content and delivery of education.<sup>11</sup> Some of the relatively well-known companies in this category are Hooked on Phonics, Singapore Math, Rosetta Stone, Kumon Learning Centers, and Khan Academy. Many others less well known are also providing excellent educational opportunities for students of all levels and means. Here are just a few: Advance Confidentiality is a personal academic coaching business specializing in one-on-

one and small-group tutoring services for traditional and homeschooled students and their parents. Academic Earth provides free video courses from the world's top universities on virtually every subject imaginable as well as SAT and LSAT prep courses. Nurturing Wisdom is an in-home tutoring service in Chicago and San Francisco with more than one hundred tutors. Grammar Revolution is a Web-based education company that provides grammar materials to schoolteachers and homeschoolers. History at Our House is an online school with live and archived full-year classes on a wide variety of American, European, Asian, and ancient history topics.<sup>12</sup> (My own children have taken several History at Our House courses.) The list goes on and on.

All this is happening in a system in which the government (federal, state, and local) is coercively *retarding* the market for private education by forcibly taking \$935 billion from American taxpayers every year for government education programs.<sup>13</sup>

A fully free market would be unimaginably diverse. Some schools would focus on specialized academic topics such as math and science or the arts and humanities; some would focus on a great-books classical curriculum; some would specialize in music; others would specialize in vocational training, offering courses in commercial fishing, farming, baking, plumbing, information technology, building construction, and countless other fields. Some schools would specialize in working with gifted children; some would specialize in working with those who have learning disabilities; and others would specialize in working with those who have severe mental or physical disabilities. And, of course, some schools would specialize in sports, as does Montverde Academy in Florida, which offers a program for gifted soccer players from around the world. Wherever substantial demands exist for education, entrepreneurs and educators would work to provide it—if they were free to do so.

In a free market for education, there would also be a surge in religious schools. Already many religious schools operate across America, and as demand for private schools increased with the abolition of government schools, existing religious schools would expand and additional religious schools would arise.

Likewise, explicitly secular schools would multiply and expand. Today, Objectivists own and operate several schools, which focus exclusively on secular academic subjects such as reading, writing, history, math, and science. In a fully free market, such schools would proliferate.

And not only would the kinds of schools and types of curricula expand; technologies for delivering education would also constantly expand and improve.

The Internet, of course, has been a huge boon to the education industry; in a fully free market, it and related technologies would continually provide new and better ways to deliver content far and wide. Teleconferencing and Skype have revolutionized homeschooling in recent years, and the success of these technologies has invited competition that has required all involved to innovate and improve or become obsolete. The Khan Academy now offers courses in virtually every subject and at every grade level—all of it accessible from any computer on the planet—and all for *free*.<sup>14</sup>

Major colleges and universities are joining this educational bonanza as well. For instance, Harvard and MIT recently signed an agreement to create a virtual school using their best professors.<sup>15</sup> A teenager living in rural Alaska can now take an advanced course in astrophysics with one of the world's top scholars through the Harvard-MIT online program.

Education innovations and technologies are already booming and disrupting the government-run, monopolistic system of education—and a fully free market in education would dramatically expand their development.

In a free market for education, the ways in which schools are administered would be more diverse, as well. Principals, for instance, would be able to hire and fire teachers without burdensome regulations or union restrictions. Likewise, owners of schools or boards of directors would be able to fire incompetent principals or administrators who do not uphold the values of the school's owners and customers. And schools would be able to hire noncertified teachers who might have advanced degrees in mathematics or physics, for example, or brilliant polymaths with no degrees at all. (Today, in the surreal world of America's "public" schools, a highly decorated Ivy League Ph.D. with multiple teaching awards but with no government certification is not permitted to teach at his neighborhood government school, yet a semiliterate "education" major who took courses in bulletin-board design—yes, such courses exist in America's "ed" schools—is "qualified.")

In the hagwon system in South Korea, the directors of the private tutoring companies spend much of their day scouring the Internet looking to recruit potential star teachers in order to compete with their rivals. In this competitive, free-market microcosm, parents and students *choose* their tutors, which means the best tutors usually get the most students and the most remuneration. Pay is based on performance and demand. The *Wall Street Journal* reports that a top "rock star" tutor in South Korea, Kim Ki-hoon, earns \$4 million per year for teaching English. Kim works a sixty-hour week, teaches 120 students in person, and tutors 150,000 students online. "The harder I work," said Mr. Kim, "the more I make."<sup>16</sup>

Likewise, if South Korean tutors receive low performance evaluations from their students, or if they don't generate enough new students to take their courses, they are fired.

If America moves to a fully free market in education, we will likely see tens of thousands of American retirees with advanced degrees in specialized subjects coming out of retirement to work (for pay or as volunteers) in America's new private schools, just as we will see countless twenty-something computer experts teaching online computer science classes. In a free market, we can be certain that many more of America's best and brightest will choose to teach.

Further, in a fully free market for education, we would see much greater diversity in teaching *methods*. Some schools would use old, musty books and classical curricula, and their teachers would use the old-fashioned chalk-and-talk method of teaching. Some would use the observation-based, hierarchical method of teaching associated with Ayn Rand's philosophy of Objectivism (as they do at the LePort Schools and at VanDamme Academy in southern California). Some would use the Montessori method, others would use the Waldorf method, and still others would use the Marva Collins way. Some might even continue using the so-called progressive method (which has done untold damage to the minds of American children)—but probably not for long.

In a fully free market for education, bad ideas and bad methodologies would soon be driven out and replaced by ideas and methodologies that are derived from the factual requirements of human cognition and thus actually work. Competition would inspire school administrators and teachers to innovate when necessary but also to adhere to tried-and-true methods that have worked successfully for centuries—such as phonics for reading instruction. As a result, bad methodologies—such as the disastrous “whole language” method of teaching reading that has been foisted on our children by government schools, the method that eschews phonics in favor of rote memorization based on the shape of words—most likely would come to a halt. In a for-profit environment, a widespread and sustained disaster on the order of the “whole language” movement would be virtually impossible.

Finally, a free market for education would provide much greater variety in both the prices for and the means of financing education. Some schools would be for profit and some nonprofit; some would be free (for the students) and some might cost tens of thousands of dollars. Because American parents would no longer have to pay thousands of dollars in local property taxes every year (whether directly or through inflated rent) for failing government schools, they would be able to use that money for private schools or tutors—or to fund and support scholarships

for children of lesser means. Because more corporations, more churches, more Internet entrepreneurs and the like would open and expand schools and other educational opportunities, competition would increase and costs for education would generally drop. And, as with Khan Academy and Google and IBM camps, even more education would be free.

Although no one can predict in detail how the education market would develop if left fully free, we can be sure that, unencumbered by government controls and taxes, entrepreneurs and educators would create effective, diverse, and constantly improving methods of education, and parents would have more money and more choices.

### **What about Poor Children?**

Give the preceding discussion, the question “How would children from poor families be educated without public schools?” has essentially been answered. Even so, let’s examine further how and why a fully free market in education would benefit the poor.

To begin, observe that (contrary to unjust presumptions on the part of some people) lower-income Americans generally love their children and want a good education for them so they can succeed and prosper. One need only watch the documentaries *The Lottery* and *Waiting for Superman* to realize that lower-income Americans will go to great lengths to make sure their children receive a good education. If it seems as though some American parents do not care much about the education of their children, one reason is that the government has shorn them of their parental rights and responsibilities and made them reliant on government schools as a surrogate babysitting service.

Observe further that the costs to educate children in a free market will not be the same as they are today. The high price of many private schools today is largely a consequence of their artificially limited supply, which is due to the existence of government schools and the high regulatory and tax burdens the government imposes on private schools. America’s movement to a free market for education would lead to an explosion in the creation of new schools (traditional and nontraditional), all competing for customers, which would drive down prices.

Further, in a free market, charitable giving to scholarship funds for poor children to attend private schools would greatly increase. We already see the development of such programs despite the government’s interference in education. For example, in 1998 Ted Forstmann and John Walton created the Children’s Scholarship Fund to provide academic scholarships for poor children. Unsurprisingly, in the



first year alone, 1.25 million families applied for scholarships that would allow their children to escape the government schools. In New York City alone, the Children's Scholarship Fund received 162,000 applications in its first year of operation. And this massive demand has been met by substantial supply. Over the past thirteen years, the CSF has awarded \$525 million in scholarships for children of lower-income families to attend private schools.<sup>17</sup> With the abolition of government schools, Americans would have much more disposable income for such philanthropic giving.

As just one indicator of the responsibility that American parents and children are willing to assume for the sake of education, consider a story that appeared a few years ago in the *New York Times*. Titled "Those Bake Sales Add Up, to \$9 Billion or So," the article illustrates how entrepreneurial and charitable Americans can be when it comes to raising private money for education.<sup>18</sup> The article tells, among other things, of Nadaburg Elementary School in Wittmann, Arizona, where about 70 percent of the children are from low-income homes. This school's students, teachers, and administrators take frequent bus trips to wealthy retirement communities such as Sun City Grand in order to meet and sign up benefactors. The teachers and children meet with potential supporters face-to-face and ask for supplemental funding in order to improve their substandard, government education. The program is successful; the retirees do provide funding, and the schools are able to improve thereby. In a free market—in which people would no longer be burdened by heavy taxes to fund failed government schools—we can expect charitable giving to expand dramatically.

If these facts are not enough, consider the amazing and revolutionary research James Tooley and Pauline Dixon have conducted in the third world.<sup>19</sup> For the past twenty-five years, Tooley and Dixon have been studying education in Africa and Asia, and what they have found is remarkable.

In the shantytown slums in Lagos, Nigeria, and Hyderabad, India, surprisingly large numbers of poor parents are sending their children to unregistered, unregulated private schools despite the existence of "free" government schools. In the slums of Hyderabad, 80 percent of all children attend private schools; in the shantytowns of Lagos, more than 70 percent do. These slum areas house scores of private schools, which sometimes charge little more than \$2 per month in tuition—around 10 percent of average income in the area.

How is this possible? Why do people start and operate these schools? People start and operate them to meet a specific need. The government schools fail to provide good education, so education entrepreneurs have moved in to fill the

void and deliver quality education. The schools range from partnerships in small schoolhouses with fifty students to single-proprietorships in huts with a shingle on the door and five students.

Why are desperately poor parents paying for private education when state schools are available “free”? The answer may surprise defenders of government schooling. The parents of these students—like parents everywhere (with very rare exceptions)—love their children and will go to great lengths to ensure that they get a good education.

Not surprisingly, the children in these private schools score considerably higher on achievement tests in math and English than do the children attending the “free” government schools, despite the fact that the teachers in the government schools are paid at least four times more than those in the private schools. The private schools are far more effective at a fraction of the cost, precisely because they are accountable to customers who can, at any time, withdraw their children and put them in competing schools. And because teachers in these schools are accountable to principals who can fire them at any time. And because principals in these schools are accountable to owners of the schools, who can fire *them* at any time. In essence, these schools are free from government—which means, free to educate children.

One parent summed up the difference between these shantytown private schools and the government schools with a succinct analogy: “If you go to a market and are offered free fruit and vegetables, they will be rotten. If you want fresh fruit and vegetables, you have to pay for them.”<sup>20</sup>

Given that private schools can meet the needs of these children despite their extreme poverty and despite the continued existence of government schools, imagine how much better fully private education could meet the needs of American children—including the poorest children—given the much greater resources available here.

## Conclusion

Only a free market in education is consistent with a rights-respecting society. The principle of individual rights requires the separation of school and state, the full freedom of educators to produce and parents to purchase education services in a competitive market where providers and customers strive continually for better ideas, better methods, and better results—at lower costs.

Just as our forefathers successfully fought to end slavery, and their forefathers successfully fought to separate church and state, let us carry on the fight to expand freedom in America by ending the tyranny that is the government school system.

Toward this vital and noble end, we principled abolitionists of the 21st century must proceed with the unwavering tenacity and urgency that enabled earlier abolitionists to succeed. We must say, as William Lloyd Garrison did:

On this subject, I do not wish to think, or to speak, or write, with moderation. No! no! Tell a man whose house is on fire to give a moderate alarm; tell him to moderately rescue his wife from the hands of the ravisher; tell the mother to gradually extricate her babe from the fire into which it has fallen—but urge me not to use moderation in a cause like the present. I am in earnest—I will not equivocate—I will not excuse—I will not retreat a single inch—AND I WILL BE HEARD.<sup>21</sup>

We must proceed not with moderation but with the full force of the moral case for the abolition of government schools, the complete separation of school and state, and the establishment of a fully free market in education. And we must be heard.

# Endnotes

## **The New Abolitionism: Why Education Emancipation is the Moral Imperative of our Time**

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### **Education in a Free Society**

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