# **Chapter Nine**

# Change the Priorities of Education

I've worked as a teacher for most of my career at the high-school and college levels, and I've seen many ideas come and go for fixing the system, but few, if any of them, make any difference. My favorite challenge to professional educators is the following:

I'm from the computer generation where the power of computers doubles every two years. What measurable outcome of the educational system has improved by a factor of two in the last one hundred years? Do students learn twice as much? Do they graduate in half the time? Does it cost half as much? Are graduates able to reason and solve problems twice as well or as fast? (Preston, 2017)

The system hasn't been able to achieve even this modest goal because it is the wrong goal. I suggest we recognize that our schools are not factories that produce product for the next level of school or for the workforce, but rather it is a place where children spend a lot of time while they mature. The appropriate goals for our schools are to help them transition from immature children to mature adults who are equipped to handle the responsibilities of interpersonal relationships, parenting, work, and participating in community activities.

# Expand the Measurements of Success and Change Focus

We've all heard a student ask why they need to take a particular class only to be told that they have to have it to get into college, and when they ask why they should go to college, the answer is to get a good job and earn more money. When fourteen-year-old children seek guidance on what educational path to choose, they are told to pick something they are passionate about when they don't know enough about the choices to have an opinion, let alone a passion.

Is it a surprise that our children feel stressed and anxious? The National Institute of Mental Health tells us that one in four children ages thirteen to eighteen have some type of anxiety disorder (Any Anxiety Disorder among Children n.d.). This statistic is representative of my small circle of adult male friends when we talk about their children.

The first step to making our schools better is to measure and evaluate them on how well they are helping our children to mature and deal with stress. For example, we can periodically ask the following questions:

- Do you feel physically safe while you are in school?
- Do you feel that you can ask questions without being ridiculed for not knowing?
- Do you feel that your peers discourage you from excelling in your schoolwork?
- Are you being bullied either in person or online?
- Are you getting good advice from your teachers on how to develop friendships?
- Do you have one or more close friends?
- Are you getting better at listening?
- Are you comfortable with your sexual identity?

- Do you think that you are getting better at learning new ideas?
- Do you think you are getting better at distinguishing truth from lies?
- Are you excited about learning in at least one of your classes?
- Do you feel that your school is a community of which you are a part?
- Are you identifying jobs that are worth doing that you might like to try?
- Are you optimistic about your future?

# Change the Role of Schools and Parents

If we change the emphasis of education from the factory model to one of helping students to mature, other forms of teaching and learning become more attractive.

Internet technologies have made it possible for everyone to watch well-designed, entertaining presentations by master teachers online. To achieve the goal of helping our students to mature into successful adults, it is time to make some basic changes to the culture of K–12 education. I propose the following changes:

#### Meals, Group Activity, Practice, and Introspection

When we bring students together in school buildings, we have the opportunity to involve them in group activities where they can develop social skills to help them mature. The school day should feature activities that are considered extracurricular now such as sports, music, and theater. It should also take advantage of specialized spaces and expensive equipment, so school is where students do science labs, make things in art and woodworking, and learn how to repair things in mechanics classes. Students tend to enjoy these activities and are willing to spend time doing them. Students could learn family-building skills like cooking, childcare, and elder care.

#### Extend the School Day to Match Parent's Workday

One of the most valuable functions of school for parents is to provide day care while they work. Because teachers and students cannot take too many hours of traditional classes, the school day and school year are limited to a shorter period than most people work, which results in the need for expensive before- and after-school care, "summer school," or unsupervised children.

I propose that the school day include breakfast and lunch and consist of a mixture of group activities, lab work, "homework," and introspection and last from about 7:30 a.m. until 5:30 p.m. Periods of introspection would give the students an opportunity for quiet time and rest while learning techniques such as yoga, meditation, or prayerfulness, which could help with reducing anxiety and depression. Students would be grouped into "families" of twelve students, including students of all ages that would prepare, eat, and clean up after breakfast and lunch. No student eats alone (Mckenzie 2017). The number of school days would be increased from 180 to 217 to match their parent's work schedule (see <u>#Job Sharing and Increased Vacation Time</u>).

# Flip the Role of Classroom and Home

The present system has teachers making presentations to groups and then requiring them to write about it or practice at home. An alternative to this system is the "flipped" classroom where students watch videos or read texts at home and then use class time with teachers to practice. The prevalence of Internet connections and access to YouTube videos make it possible for students to watch presentations at home that are well designed and presented in an entertaining manner. Parents can

insist that their children spend time watching or reading their assignments and can even watch the videos with their children. Parents would not be put in the position of trying to help their children with difficult concepts or topics with which they, the parents, are unfamiliar. It would also get parents out of the responsibility of doing their child's homework or projects for them. Students who have college-educated parents have a big advantage in the current system. It is much easier for parents with limited education to insist that a child spends a certain time watching required content, and it gives the parents a chance to learn along with their child.

When students do their writing or "homework" assignments is when they need the most expert help. Instead of spending their time sitting passively in a classroom watching the teacher, students would spend time in class practicing assignments or writing. When they need help, it would be available from the teacher who is a trained professional in that subject or a senior volunteer (see <u>#Senior Service Corps</u>). It would also assure that the student is doing the work and not their parents or their friends.

#### Make Schools Smaller

Larger schools have certain economies of scale and can offer more specialized subjects (and have more successful football teams), but there is a large cost in the development of children (Kokemuller, Neil 2016). Children can feel lost in big schools where most teachers or other students don't know their names. If we change our goal to helping students mature and to be happy in the process and if we adopt new teaching methods like the flipped classroom and longer school days, smaller schools become more practical.

I propose that we limit the size of schools to three hundred students. There are benefits and challenges to consider.

# Transportation

Parents are fearful about letting their young children walk to school unsupervised even if they are less than a twenty-minute walk away. This deprives the student of exercise and an opportunity to converse with peers or siblings. US Service Corps people could be stationed at street corners before and after school in sufficient numbers to provide visual coverage of the entire route for many neighborhoods and older siblings could accompany young children (see #Koop on Prevention) (see #US Service Corps).

Parents need to be involved in schools, especially in early education. If an elementary school is located too far from home, it is more difficult for parents to serve during the day, and they often spend time driving children to school instead of letting them walk to school. If a school is too large, students and teachers lose a sense of community and teachers have difficulty controlling children they do not know.

I propose limiting school size to about three hundred students, including preschool through twelfth grade using Service Corps people to patrol streets while young children are walking to and from local schools or to man drop-off areas near schools where parents could drop children off safely but do it without too much waiting on the way to work.

Because the school day would be much longer than it is now, there would be time to transport students during the school day to aggregate groups in larger geographic areas for specialized classes or large group activity and to expose them to diverse experiences with students from other ethnicities and economic strata.

#### Home Economics and International Poor People's Food

Teenagers can learn to cook and maintain a home so that they can contribute to a household and become prepared to live on their own. In this system, students would eat breakfast and lunch at school. This would be a good time to teach them how to read the ingredients list and how to construct a menu of foods that meet basic nutritional requirements. It would also be a good opportunity to teach them how to eat on a limited budget by introducing them to the kind of food that many people eat every day on other parts of the world that are low-cost, such as the following:

- Pasta and tomato sauce
- Tacos
- Beans and rice
- Stir-fry rice
- Asian noodles
- Soups and stews
- German spätzle and cheese
- Curry

#### New Teacher Qualifications

People who choose teaching as a profession do so with a clear idea of what it will be like based on what they observed when they were students. They want to work in education because they liked the experience and know how to succeed in that system to get a degree. The weakness of this arrangement is that teachers who go from the college classroom to their own K–12 classroom have not learned how to succeed outside of the education system, and they don't know what it is like in noncollege prep classes or how much teachers work at home. They are also attracted to the role of being the center of attention and having control of other people. Changing the education system will not succeed by imposing it from above on the existing faculty. The proposed system of longer school days will require teachers to be at school more hours, but that time can be used for preparation and homework grading, so they are done for the day when they head home.

I propose creating experimental schools that are designed from the ground up with the new goals mentioned above in mind. This begins with choosing teachers who have the appropriate qualifications, experience, and personality. Teachers in the new schools would have

- five years of work experience outside of education;
- two years of public service such as the US Service Corps (see <u>#US Service Corps</u>);
- certification of subject matter expertise; and
- willingness to serve as a learning coach rather than be the center of attention.

#### Retrain or Replace Underperforming Teachers

When my oldest son was attending a large, highly rated high school in a university town, I was surprised to find out that geography was not a required part of his college preparatory program of study. I encouraged him to take a geography class, and he did as a sophomore. He was a bright and engaged student but started to complain about the quality of the class. He said the teacher was the track coach and hated football players like him. He also said that after six weeks, the class was still on the first chapter in the book. I went to parent-teacher night and met with the teacher. We were in a portable classroom building that is like a large mobile home. The first thing I noticed was that there were no maps on the walls in a geography class. When I asked him about this, he said that he had been reassigned from the main school building to one of these units, and the administration did not allocate any money to pay a custodian to hang the maps. As a protest, he refused to hang them himself or to teach the topics in the book. After I got over the impulse to strangle him, I realized that I was helpless as a parent to do anything about this other than get my son transferred.

I worked as a teacher at the high-school level for ten years and at the college level for thirty years and was a union member at both levels. I've walked more than one picket line, and the union won wage increases that made it practical for me to support my family as the primary bread winner, so I am not anti-union. However, in any large group, some of its members will have emotional or motivational problems that would get them fired in most business environments. In the forty years I was a teacher, I did not know of one instance of a teacher being fired for poor job performance. The "punishment" available to administration for poor performance as a teacher was to assign them to noncollege prep classes where the parents were less likely to complain but where teaching expertise is even more important.

My eldest son is now a CEO, and he has had to fire several people. I asked him how he made that decision. He told me that if he could replace an employee with someone who could do the job better, it was his responsibility to make the change. It was that person's responsibility to find a job for which he or she was better suited or to make changes in their job skills. I'm not advocating that approach for teachers, but there needs to be a way to replace teachers who are not performing well with someone who is better and who is seeking work.

I propose giving parents a voice when a teacher is not doing a good job but which also protects academic freedom. For example, if the parents of 20 percent of the students file a petition calling for a review of a teacher's performance, the teacher would be placed on probation for a year. During that time, an experienced teacher would be assigned to mentor that teacher to help them improve or the teacher could take a semester leave at half pay to seek other employment. If the parents of 30 percent of the students sign a similar petition the following year, the teacher's tenure would be revoked and the administration could let the teacher go. Specific provision would be made in the rule to protect academic freedom so that objections to teaching topics like evolution or black history would not be considered grounds for dismissal.

### US Service Corps in Schools

An immature child who is anxious or stressed does not make rational decisions. An anxious child under stress might act out and break the rules. The stress might come from an abusive home

situation, bullying by peers, or many other sources that are unrelated to the rule that is broken, and punishment does not have a deterrent effect. If we recognize the school's role as helping the child to mature, we see that suspension is not the appropriate response to many acts of rule breaking.

I propose using volunteers from the US Service Corps who are only a few years older than the students to assist in providing a restorative-justice program in schools (see <u>#US Service Corps</u>):

Restorative justice (RJ) is a powerful approach to discipline that focuses on repairing harm through inclusive processes that engage all stakeholders. Implemented well, RJ shifts the focus of discipline from punishment to learning and from the individual to the community. (Ferlazzo 2016)

US Service Corps members would receive basic training in RJ methods and assist school counselors and principals in helping students to make amends and restore a sense of community.

I also propose using US Service Corps people to improve school safety by monitoring school entrances, playgrounds, and hallways while wearing video cameras. Their role would be to report, record, provide witness, and call for help if necessary but not to intervene.

# Emphasize Discernment and Thinking Skills

A few years ago, my wife asked me what I wanted for my birthday. I surprised her with an unusual request. I said that I wanted her to take my old slide rule from my college days and have it mounted so I could display it on my office wall. I graduated from the University of Michigan in 1968 with a major in physics (after transferring from engineering) and minors in mathematics and education. My class was the last to graduate before electronic calculators became available, so I did all my calculations with a slide rule. A slide rule can multiply, divide, and find square and cube roots and the value of trigonometric functions to three or four digits. However, it cannot tell you where the decimal point goes in the resulting number. This limitation forced me to develop methods of quickly estimating the size of the right answer to within a power of ten, so I knew where to put the decimal place in the answer. I've found this skill to be very valuable because it lets me catch large errors that people who grew up using calculators and computers often do not catch.

In today's information environment, it is often left up to the individual to identify when someone's argument is highly unlikely to be true—even if the numbers they quote are off by a factor of ten. Developing the skill that allows the individual to block exaggerations and lies before they become part of one's knowledge base takes training in logic as well as numerical estimating.

I propose that we teach basic logic and how to spot fallacies in everyday discourse. Here are a few examples (Williamson 2017):

The A Priori Argument (Also, Rationalization; Proof Texting.): A corrupt argument from logos, starting with a given, pre-set belief, dogma, doctrine, scripture verse, "fact" or conclusion and then searching for any reasonable or reasonable-sounding argument to rationalize, defend or justify it.

The Ad Hominem Argument (also, "Personal attack," "Poisoning the well."): The fallacy of attempting to refute an argument by attacking the opposition's intelligence, morals, professional qualifications, personal character or reputation.

Alternative Truth: A newly-famous contemporary fallacy of logos, denying the resilience of facts or truth as such. Writer Hannah Arendt, in her <u>The Origins of Totalitarianism</u> (1951) warned that "The ideal subject of totalitarian rule is not the convinced Nazi or the dedicated communist, but people for whom the distinction between fact and fiction, true and false, no longer exists."

The Big "But" Fallacy (also, Special Pleading): The fallacy of enunciating a generally-accepted principle and then immediately negating it with a "but." Often this takes the form of the "Special Case," which is supposedly exempt from the usual rules of law, logic, morality, ethics or even credibility e.g., "As Americans we believe on principle that everyone has the inalienable right to a fair trial before a jury of his or her peers, but your crime was so unspeakable and a trial would be so problematic for national security that it justifies life in Guantanamo without trial or conviction."

The Big Lie Technique (also the Bold-Faced Lie; "Staying on Message."): The contemporary fallacy of repeating a lie, fallacy, slogan, talking-point, nonsense-statement or deceptive half-truth over and over in different forms (particularly in the media) until it becomes part of daily discourse and people believe it without further proof or evidence.

### **Teaching Science**

In addition to logic, another major tool in the development of Western civilization is the scientific method of inquiry. Instead of arguing from authority, we learned to gather data, look for patterns, and then make and test hypothesis. The most important step in this process is the ability to conclude that a hypothesis is wrong and to try another hypothesis. Healthy skepticism—not cynicism—plays an important role in this process.

I observe some disturbing flaws in how many people teach science:

- Most text books focus on successes and not how the scientists dealt with failures.
- Laboratory experiments are intended to confirm known results.
- The role of healthy skepticism in developing hypotheses into theories is not taught.
- Images of famous scientists like Einstein do not portray them at the age when they made their discoveries.

The problem with teaching a series of scientific truths is that students don't learn how to recognize incorrect hypotheses and students learn to argue from authority instead of evaluating something for themselves. For example, you might hear the question: "Do you believe in evolution?" The word *believe* in this question indicates the person asking the question is accustomed to arguing from authority. The answer I would like to hear from a student would be, "One doesn't 'believe' in a scientific theory. I think the theory of evolution is the best explanation of the data we have. Here are some examples..."

The role of science education should be to give students the tools to think for themselves. If we simply argue that "scientists agree..." then it is an argument based on authority, and if someone accepts a religious source as their authority, they will not be persuaded. I think this

explains why so many people in this country do not accept evolution or climate change in spite of the strongest possible support by science teachers.

I taught physics at the high-school level for ten years. When it came to lab experiments, I used to say, "You get a bachelor's degree in science to learn what the lab results should be. You get a master's degree to understand why the labs often don't give you those results." By this, I meant that there are complicating factors that hide the underlying principle you are trying to demonstrate and lab results in high school are often inconclusive. If the only way to get an A on a lab report is to get the expected data and confirm the principle behind the experiment, then our best and brightest students will produce those results—even if they have to scrub anomalous data from the lab report or even fake results.

One of my heroes of science is Johannes Kepler. He was a mathematician and astronomer in the age before the invention of the telescope. He had access to the meticulous observation of the motions of the planets in the night sky made by Tycho Brahe. Kepler assumed that heavenly objects would move through the heavens along circular paths whose spacing would be determined by nesting the circles within regular solids so the circles touched the corners or sides of regular solids. (A regular solid has faces that are the same shape and size like a cube.) Kepler devised a model of the solar system that combined spheres and regular solids such as cubes and three-sided pyramids that fit Brahe's data better than any other model (Hart 1998). The reason that he is one of my heroes is that he recognized that in spite of his best efforts, he couldn't get the model to fit the data to within the error limits of Tycho's observations, so he reexamined his assumptions and started over using ellipses (ovals) instead of circles, which turned out to be correct.

Another of the great stories of science is the Michelson-Morley experiment where they set out to prove the existence of an invisible fluid between the planets called the ether. Instead, they proved that it didn't exist! The scientific community awarded Michelson the Nobel Prize in Physics for the accuracy of his measurements on an experiment that didn't work.

When we confuse science with belief, we also confuse skepticism with heresy. In recent times, we've seen reports of "cold fusion" and particles that move faster than the speed of light (Cho 2012). Skeptical scientists examined the assumptions, procedures, and calculations of these reports and found enough irregularities to disqualify them as accepted fact. An important part of the scientific process is a requirement that someone who discovers something must persuade the skeptics with careful and rigorous work. The best way to convince a skeptic is to show that the results are repeatable and to use the hypothesis to predict something that is more than just an extrapolation of known trends. Fortunately, this type of success is easy for the nonspecialist to evaluate. We can teach students to ask two simple questions: "Can you do it again?" and "What unexpected or unknown data can it predict or discover?"

If we want to inspire teenagers to become scientists who discover new phenomena, cures, or theories, it is helpful if they can visualize it for themselves. When I taught physics, the only well-known physicist was Albert Einstein. Unfortunately, the image of him with which my students were familiar was a wild-haired, eccentric-looking old man (Albert Einstein's Quote n.d.).

Instead, I put up a poster that showed what he looked like at their age and less of an authority figure (The Foundations of the New Physics 1900).

I propose changing the goal of science education from that of a factory designed to produce college students to a place where students learn to apply the scientific method of thinking, including healthy skepticism, so they can decide for themselves what to think and to use the scientific method to discover new relationships. The purpose is to reduce the practice of faking data to get an A, to shift from authoritarian arguments and *belief* in science to reasoning, and to judge the validity of new hypothesis for themselves.

#### Read and Write Future Fiction

New technologies can be used for good or ill, and it is important to consider the effects before they happen. Television had only been available for a few years in 1949 when George Orwell wrote 1984 in which he portrayed a world where the government leader known as Big Brother controlled everyone's lives. In his book, he envisioned televisions that had cameras in them to monitor everyone's behavior and the government could turn them on remotely and force everyone to start the day with exercise and pledges of obedience. Even the parks and woods were monitored with microphones, so there was nowhere anyone could be that was not under surveillance by the government. His view of a future only thirty-five years in the future was chilling. This book was required reading at many schools in the 50s and 60s, and when a government program sounded like it came from this future, the cry of 1984! went up and people reconsidered. I recall a proposal by the city government of Ann Arbor, Michigan, to allow the government to turn on our televisions to warn us of weather threats like tornadoes. Many people said that it reminded them of Orwell's book, and they said they would rather take their chances with a tornado than give the local government the power to turn on our sets and make announcements of their choosing. Consider the relevance today of some of Orwell's statements from 1984:

For, after all, how do we know that two and two make four? Or that the force of gravity works? Or that the past is unchangeable? If both the past and the external world exist only in the mind, and if the mind itself is controllable—what then?

Orthodoxy means not thinking—not needing to think. Orthodoxy is unconsciousness.

The Party seeks power entirely for its own sake. We are not interested in the good of others; we are interested solely in power, pure power.

To know and not to know, to be conscious of complete truthfulness while telling carefully constructed lies, to hold simultaneously two opinions which cancelled out, knowing them to be contradictory and believing in both of them, to use logic against logic, to repudiate morality while laying claim to it.

War is peace. Freedom is slavery. Ignorance is strength.

Big Brother is Watching You.

As you can see, this book's warnings about the future can be applied to today's world (Blakinger 2016), but this book is no longer required reading.

In addition to warning us about potential threats, we also must have time to decide how to apply our ethics and morals to new situations. We live in a world where technology is providing us with choices that we've never had before. One of the problems with this is that we have no experience to guide us, and our ethics and moral principles have not been applied to these issues before. It takes time to consider how to behave in these new circumstances, and we do not have enough time if we wait until they occur to think about it. For example, we might be on the verge of finding a cure for aging. What would be the effect on society? What would happen if the drug company charged \$10 million for it?

I propose that we encourage students to read and write fiction about the future to sensitize them to risks and help them decide what would be the moral and ethical thing to do before they are faced with the choice.

### Use Retirees to Teach Part Time

Grading homework can be converted into advising students on how to do better, but it takes more time to provide individualized feedback, especially in writing. This can be done by matching students up with retirees who are experienced teachers. About half of the teachers are expected to retire between 2009 and 2019, so it is likely that there would be many qualified people who would welcome the opportunity to become involved with a few individual students to read, respond, and evaluate their writing or other homework (Nation's Schools Facing Largest Teacher Retirement Wave in History 2011).

I propose that teachers work with the Senior Service Corps to coordinate retiree skills with teaching needs. Evaluations by these volunteers would be passed along to the managing teacher, the student, and the student's parents (see #Senior Service Corps).

#### Teacher Workload and Salaries

When I considered becoming a teacher in 1969 as the primary breadwinner, I had to consider the pay scale. My initial salary was low enough that I didn't have to move out of my federally subsidized housing, but the high end of the pay scale was as much as an engineer. An additional incentive was that I could get a draft deferment for teaching science. I switched majors from engineering to physics and picked up an additional minor in education to qualify for a teaching certificate. The pay scale went up each year based on years in service and additional education. I found the masters courses in physics to be particularly useful in teaching my classes. By the time I had two children, I could afford one car and a nice house with additional income from my wife who provided day care in our home, but still most of our children's clothes came from rummage sales. Along the way, we had two illegal strikes for higher pay in which I participated.

Today, the average teacher salary is about \$57,000 plus about \$19,000 (34 percent) for benefits or about \$76,380 per teacher (Best Jobs: High School Teacher 2015; Luebke 2016). Teachers are required to work fewer days per year than most full-time employees—180 versus 245—and fewer hours per day—6.5 versus 8.5.

This sounds like a very nice job, but the attrition rate is high. About one in five washes out after one year and a third of new teachers don't last five years—about half in urban areas. Of the 269,800 teachers who left the profession in 2009, only 38 percent had made it to twenty years for full retirement (Nation's Schools Facing Largest Teacher Retirement Wave in History 2011).

I was one of those teachers who left high-school teaching after less than twenty years. I felt that I had the best job in the school district, but the acrimony between the union and the administration made the environment toxic. I reached the top of the pay scale and the limit of creative curriculum innovation—I increased enrollment in the physics courses by 460 percent. I wanted to try my wings in business, so I quit a tenured teaching job, cashed in my retirement equity, and started a computer-software business that specialized in energy audits. After three years, the business failed when the federal government required the utilities to give away the service we were selling. I combined my teaching and curriculum-development experience with additional education and my business experience to land a job as an assistant professor at a midlevel state university where I created degrees in energy and facility management and taught there for thirty years until my retirement in 2014. Teaching at the college level was much easier than teaching at the high-school level because I could focus on content rather than socialization and discipline.

When I was a professor, I had a discussion with another professor who taught polymer coating technology after working for twenty years in the industry. He had no experience teaching at the K–12 level, but he was critical of the quality of chemistry education taking place there. I explained to him that teaching the subject matter was the easy part of the job. I challenged him to work one day as a substitute teacher in the ninth grade in general education classes (not college prep). I bet him that he wouldn't make it to lunchtime. He didn't take the bet. The point of my bet is that teaching is often a very stressful job and that expertise in the subject matter is important, but it is not the key element in a teacher's success.

In my view, the average amount spent on teacher salaries and benefits is adequate, but distribution of that money needs to be changed, and the entire model of teaching must change to reduce stress and increase job satisfaction (see <u>#Change the Role of Schools and Parents</u>).

We promote equal pay for equal work when we advocate fair treatment of women versus men, but we do not support that value when we pay young teachers who are raising families less than older teachers for the same work.

I propose that we make the following changes to teacher workload and compensation:

- Remove the increase in pay for years of service.
- Keep the increase in pay for obtaining a master's degree in the teacher's major.
- Tie teacher pay to the number of student-hours for which they are responsible.
- Allow teachers to increase their income by managing teams of senior volunteers and US Service Corps volunteers to increase their productivity of student contact hours under their supervision (see #Senior Service Corps) (see #US Service Corps).

- Provide teachers with time during the extended school day to plan classes, report progress, and evaluate student progress (see <a href="#">#Change the Role of Schools and Parents</a>). Teachers should be done at the end of the day and not expected to work nights and weekends.
- Increase the number and length of school days from 180 to 217 to match the reduced full-time adult workload (see <u>#Extend the School Day to Match Parent's Workday</u>) (see <u>#Job Sharing and Increased Vacation Time</u>).
- Create a compensation board that compares teacher salary to those of other college graduates with similar degrees in the region and sets pay equal to the median of those salaries. Strikes would be illegal.

# Teaching Reading, and Writing

Communicating by reading and writing is a critical skill, but teaching reading and writing can be the most time-intensive task a teacher can have. Experts still disagree about the best method to teach children to read. Most reading programs start with phonics where students relate the letters with sounds, but there are more than a billion Chinese who learn to read by memorizing the meaning of characters that provide no clue to their pronunciation (Phonics Basics 2017); (Upbin 2013). Clearly, our current methods do not work for everyone because thirty-two million (14 percent) of US adults cannot read, and the negative effect of illiteracy is indicated by the fact that 70 percent of prison inmates cannot read (Illiteracy Statistics 2016). For those students who are struggling with methods that work for the majority, one-on-one tutoring works if the tutor is a trained teacher (Effective Programs for Stuggling Readers: A Best Evidence Synthesis 2009).

The study cited above indicates that computer-assisted instruction programs were not effective for reading assistance, but all of us who have used a computer to write know how helpful the spell-check feature can be. Writing is a skill that is developed by doing it frequently and getting feedback on content and identifying and correcting spelling and grammar errors. Fortunately, modern word-processing software like Microsoft Word (MS Word) can identify most spelling errors with the notable exception of incorrect use of correctly spelled words such as *there*, *their*, and *they're*. A less well-known feature of MS Word is its grammar-checking feature (Look under File/Options/Proofing). This is an option that can be set to find and explain a long list of common grammatical errors, including the following (Select Grammar and Writing Style Options in Office 2016 2016):

- Adjective used instead of adverb
- Agreement with noun phrases
- Capitalization
- Comma splice
- Commonly confused words
- Comparative use
- Hyphenation
- Incorrect pronoun case
- Indefinite article
- Punctuation
- Spacing

- Subject-verb agreement
- Verb use
- Passive voice
- Double negation

Students could be required to use automatic spelling and grammar checking when they write and seek help as needed to understand the grammar rules. Emphasis should be shifted to writing skills that are harder to grade and correct automatically such as sentence structure. Volunteers could read and discuss the student's writing to provide feedback on structure, clarity of expression, and other more advanced writing skills.

I propose that we use retired teachers and other educated retirees to assist with reading and writing in our schools to provide the personal attention needed by those for whom the normal methods are not working and to increase the amount of writing all students are doing without increasing the workload of the teachers (see #Retirement) (see #Read and Write Future Fiction).

#### Remove Tuition Barriers to Attending College in Other States

State-supported colleges typically charge lower tuition for residents of the state and much higher rates for out-of-state students. The difference is typically about \$10,000 a year but might be much more (In-State vs. Out-of-State Tuition 2013). This creates a barrier for students who want to experience life in another part of the country. There are regional associations that allow students to attend public colleges in another nearby state for a discount, which lowers the barrier, but students are still restricted to schools that are in the same geographic region (Farah 2014).

I propose that we create an exchange process where students can attend any college in the country at the in-state tuition rate charged in their own state plus an adjustment factor to compensate states that provide more assistance to their public colleges. The exchange process would limit the number of students using the system to prevent a "brain drain" from a particular state. For example, if a student in Michigan wanted to attend a college in Alabama, he or she could do so for the in-state rate in Alabama if there is another student in Alabama who wants to go to school in Michigan and pay its in-state tuition.

The intent of this proposal is to reduce the regional misunderstandings within the country by exposing our future leaders to a broader range of cultural experiences.

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