

The Crash of Public Education: Who's at the Wheel?

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The future and current state of K12 education, both public and private, is a daily news story. The story includes scarcity, fear of the unknown, a relapse of segregation, human rights, failing assessments, top-down enforcements and partisan opinion. Everyone knows best, although, the solitary student holds the key to their own and our collective success. The problem facing students, parents and influencers, teachers and administration today is that the public school system is a shattered iceberg with the unstoppable force of nature separating its composition.

#### **Problem Statement**

Public schools are crumbling. The cause and effect of this natural evolution are both mysterious and multifaceted. The problem exposes a severe difference in opinion and mission between liberals and conservatives, equity advocates and those who strongly believe "making America great again" includes freedom of choice - even if that choice includes re-segregation and the abandonment of urban schools and neighborhoods. Everyone feels that they are right and the inevitable is happening anyway. School choice is alive, well and expanding. Advocates for public school need to rethink, retool and prepare for what happens between today and the new norm of market-based education. If not, the students they serve will fall through the cracks, as they have feared.

#### **The Future of Education**

The future of education in the United States is a story of deconstruction, achievement gaps and rebirth. The unstoppable force of public policy focused on less government and more school choice (Hutchinson, 2016) will eventually collide with the immovable object of

stagnation in the public school classroom due to standardized testing (Busteed, 2013). Although the public perception of choice and public schools are as divided as the presidential election of 2016, one or the other will become the majority. The achievement gap between students in the United States and other countries (Wagner, 2014) is astonishing, but will pale in comparison to the achievement gap between the affluent and minority student in the war between less government funding and need. On the upside, the increase of choice schools will have positive effects to include freedom from teaching to the test and market competition promising to engage and educate for the new global economy (Neal, 2002).

The future classroom will be more engaging, entertaining and effective. Educators will have the opportunity to connect core curriculum to creative content delivery. At the height of interactive media and virtual travel to anytime and anywhere, educators will facilitate students on the journey that will best fit their strengths and interests. From Google glass to virtual anatomy tables, all the organs and all the world are within the students' reach ("Virtual cadavers: Biology class goes 3-D," 2017) Students will connect to a relevant and individualized curriculum, Why? Because schools will be competing for students and will want to exceed parent and student expectations, performance assessments and market-share perception to encourage enrollments, persistence and graduation.

As public policies all but encourage licensed teachers to leave benefit-leaking and IEP paperwork-packed careers, and more government money is given to students to leave their home school boundaries, public schools will re-invent in a serious way. New legislature will continue to grow allowing unlicensed teachers and paraprofessionals to more easily enter the helm of the classroom. New Elementary Education college graduates will gravitate toward Teach Grants in order to have their student loans forgiven ("TEACH Grants | Federal Student Aid,"

n.d.) while veteran teachers will opt for early retirement as to not lose even more of their pensions. The vacuum caused by the aforementioned will give rise to more emergency licenses in areas such as English Language Learning and Special Education as those programs are shifted from one side of town to another. ("Emergency License and Emergency Permit | Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction," n.d.) The students identified as needing Special Education will be forced to choose a school that can support them; they will usually remain in their home school because it's the only choice, and they will lose protections under IDEA. Things are shifting without delay and parents can be overheard complaining about the consequence to their sports teams.

Ask a teacher today who has worked in the public school district for the last ten years what has changed in their homeroom involvement with IEPs. Since the critical Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) was enacted in 1975, students attending schools requiring accommodations and special education services rose from 3694 to 6464 in 2014-14. ("IDEA - Building The Legacy of IDEA 2004," n.d.) The paperwork involved for teachers has also increased with the implementation of the Individualized Education Plan. Even the most passionate teachers would be hard-pressed to keep up with the volume of paperwork, coupled with standardized test prep, the inability to get paid for after-hour parent meetings and decreasing budgets. It is possible, with the deconstruction of the public school system as we know it, for teachers in the remaining neighborhood public schools to have more time to work with students with disabilities. An unintended consequence of segregation could lead to better services for students and an attainable school environment for teachers.

Referring to the Trump administration and the Tax Credit Scholarship Program, enacted in Florida in 2001, corporations will continue to receive dollar for dollar tax credits for donating

money to school-choice scholarships.(Figlio & Hart MD, n.d.) The program served 92,000 Florida students in the 2015-16 school year and continues to shadow the numbers of school vouchers. Mentioned in President Trump's 2017 address to Congress, and praised by American Federation of Children's past chairman and current Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, this tax advantage will only expand with the recent publicity. President Trump cites the program as being most beneficial to "...disadvantaged youth, including millions of African-American and Latino children. ..." in his televised speech to Congress and viewers worldwide. (Kamenetz, 2017)

Another dollar-for-dollar tax credit program born in Georgia in 2008, The Georgia GOAL scholarship program has received \$102,645,187 in contributions in lieu of tax obligations to the state. ("Georgia GOAL Scholarship Program, Inc. [TAX CREDIT DETAILS]," n.d.) This program has contributed to the wildly popular, endorsed by Oprah, Ron Clark Academy in Atlanta, Georgia. The school's mission, vision and global reach are as deep as they are wide. The student demographic consists of about (95%) African American students from metro Atlanta with an average family income less than \$34,000 annually. To add richness to its curriculum and reciprocating impact, the school welcomes educators and administrators from around the world to both observe best practices and participate in hands-on learning. The school boasts rigor, collective and individual achievement. Students work together in time and pull each other forward. Founded in 2007, by Ron Clark and Kim Bearden, the Ron Clark Academy isn't slowing down and is a non-profit model of the future of instruction on every administrator's radar. ("Home | The Ron Clark Academy," n.d.)

Although this is an example of a positive consequence of tax dollars begin diverted toward school choice, the unintended negative consequences of incentive programs focused on

gifting students with school choice are being researched and are still unknown. Questions are being asked about the impact on neighborhood property values, student success in the abandoned neighborhood schools, the success of the individual student being transplanted into a foreign environment, the fate of students with disabilities, the combination of church and state, re-segregation and more. (Kane, Staiger, & Riegg, 2005)

In public and private schools, the terms early college, career pathways and transcribed credits will continue to rise. One new program being piloted in Green Bay, Wisconsin, called Turbocharge, is a cooperative effort between Green Bay Area Public Schools, Northeast Wisconsin Technical College (NWTC) and the University of Wisconsin Green Bay (UWGB). The program is being rolled out late in the 2016-17 school year and will be ready for implementation in the 2017-18 school year. Through many years of development, the three entities made a promise to infuse a college mindset in students during their K-12 years. Students will have the opportunity, with work on their part, to graduate from high school with twelve college credits. This program is determined to have every student graduate with high school credit by the year 2020. The partners hope to change the urban/rural (and immigrant) mindset of Green Bay families from a high school graduation success story to a college graduation success story.

Before the implementation of the Turbocharge program, students can earn a transcribed credit by taking a college-level course in their high school taught by either a Green Bay Area Public School teacher or a Northeast Wisconsin Technical College instructor. Students in 10th grade may also participate in the Youth Options program where they can take one class per semester at either UWGB or NWTC tuition free. This program is only offered to students in “good academic standing” and to those not deemed a “child at risk.” Currently, the parent has to

participate in the application process and purchase the classroom materials. Although this program is available to all students, it has its challenges with students lacking a strong home support system. These challenges won't pose a problem with the new TurboCharge program.

Career planning will also become the norm in the K-12 pathway. No longer will we see elementary school, high school, college and career as separate chunks of time. The learning pathway starts early and is a continuum from the earliest signs of student strength and passion to add-on certificates later in the adult's career. Early career planning assessments are given in middle school where students can begin to choose how they will apply their talents in the workforce ("Academic and Career Planning - Green Bay Area Public School...", n.d.). From there, both community colleges and universities offer summer-camp programming that can help a student try on that career. Examples at Northeast Wisconsin Technical College include Girls at Work, Summer Tech Camps.

At the community and technical college level, career areas are broken up into easy to understand clusters ("Career Clusters and Programs of Study | Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction," n.d.). Clusters align with passion and ability and also align with career assessments given in middle school. With an easy to understand color coding system, a student can position themselves for a strong college experience and a promising career in clusters such as agriculture, architecture or digital arts.

### **Current Issues in Education**

The following five aspects have an interconnected impact on education, now and into the future. The cause and effect has educators, policy makers, scholars, parents, real estate agents, sociologists and the media scratching their heads and searching for solutions.

### **Teachers and Standards**

Teachers and standards set the pace for learning and set goals for outcomes. For example, state standards for teaching set goals not only for the instructor but for what the students must learn to advance in grade level. Standards are the faint path in the forest of education and attempt to level the playing field for student achievement. Standards, and teachers as their advocates, ensure learning alignment across the United States and on a global level. Standards also play into the future of education by providing equality for high school students entering college. To be a high school graduate assumes the student will be college, community and career ready. ("College, Career & Community Readiness - Green Bay Area Publ.," n.d.). Standards set the pace for this goal and teachers are instrumental and accountable to the attainment.

From the enactment of No Child Left Behind connection to standardized assessments, and the later rollout of the Common Core State Standards, the pros and cons are in the forefront of parent conversations, teacher and administration preparation and the media. Common Core Standards, implemented in 2014-15, are essentially a set of learning goals and benchmarks to conclude each student's academic year. ("Home | Common Core State Standards Initiative," n.d.)

One perspective, on teachers and standards, is that enforced standards are a hindrance to education; standards make it difficult for students to learn, parents to support and teachers to teach. One example would be the switch to Common Core Standards. During the switch to Common Core many public forums were held to educate parents on the impact on their students. Even today, parents can be heard complaining that the Common Core can be blamed for their children's difficult and foreign lattice math method. This is one overarching interpretation of what common standards mean that has led to the belief that it is a change for the worse - enforcement, not decided by them, where they have to adapt to keep their child in the game.



With an achievement gap already well established, a leap for students to higher-level math and English language arts has been especially challenging. Again, making the public schools the enemy to parents not understanding the intentions of leveling learning goals for all students in the United States and across the globe.

From the peer-reviewed article, *The Gettysburg Address in English Class: An 'Exemplar' of Common Core's Attack On Diverse Learners*, in the *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*, Professor Zachary Casey from Rhodes college digs into the effects of the Gettysburg Address lesson in the high school classroom. He urges educators to adapt, rather than blindly adopt the suggested curriculum to meet the character of their schools and classrooms. Casey also calls for political activists on the left to offer solutions to personalize curriculum so that diverse learners won't continue to lose footing. He also cites evidence that right-wing conservatives' goal and pursuit of higher standards are further positioning for the privatization of schools and a greater achievement gap. (Casey, 2016)

Another perspective on standards, specifically Common Core Standards would be the equalization of student learning outcomes and expectations in the United States. The goal is to ensure every high school graduate is career and/or college ready. When this is achieved, in this theory, the student can compete in the job market and/or will be ready to attend the college of his/her choice. All students are included in this goal and in the equation. A student graduating from a high school in Oklahoma will have met the same benchmarks as the student in Wisconsin. Their college resume will only differ by the variation in grade point average, extra-curricular activities and college-level coursework taken in high school. According to the Common Core State Standards Initiative website, these standards were created in the name of equity and preparedness of all students for life after high school. They also create the toolbox for educators

to ensure they are leveling the playing field for all students. ("Frequently Asked Questions | Common Core State Standards Initiative," n.d.)

### **High stakes Assessments**

To begin, it is important to start at the beginning in introducing high stakes assessments. In a best effort to close an achievement gap between white and historically disadvantaged groups, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was enacted. These groups included minorities, low-income students, students with disabilities and English language learners. Assessments to hold schools accountable to the learning outcomes for all students was born. To ensure equality and consistency, students are tested every year. High stakes assessments and the NCLB act has changed the every aspect of education from policy to curriculum, and may be one of the drivers for the crash of public education. (Harris, 2006)

One perspective on high-stakes assessments is that they have taken over the curriculum and sucked the life and love out of learning. According to an annual Gallup student poll taken in 2012, students grow less engaged in their studies as they rise in grade level. Referred to as the school cliff, only four out of ten students were deemed engaged by the time they reached high school, and back in elementary school - eight out of ten. The survey used metrics to measure hope, engagement and wellbeing as researchers attribute these factors most importantly to the prediction of student success. The findings are attributed to boring and unending high-stakes test preparation and the lack of engaging, individualized curriculum that speaks to the student and connects to their passions. (Busteed, 2013)

The referring article, The School Cliff: Student Engagement Drops With Each School Year, written by Brandon Busteed, also offers a solution to the curriculum of test prep: focus on the entrepreneurial student pathway. Forty five percent of students polled said they were

interested in starting their own business. This calls for more job shadowing and less #2 pencil sharpening.

Another perspective on the topic of high-stakes assessments, although not an opposite of the previous perspective, is the concern for the lack of accountability measures in private schools. In other words, where are the high-stakes assessments in private schools? Because private schools are not relying on federal funding, they do not have to participate. Advocates for school choice offer the argument that private schools rely on free-market accountability. Rather than test scores, the school is assessed by how well it meets the needs of the individual child. The greatest risk to the school is that the parents will vote with their feet - no customers mean closed doors. According to a 2014 report by the National Conference of State Legislatures, entitled *Accountability in Private School Choice Programs*, many states debate that in order to align curriculum with high-stakes tests, private schools would lose the ability to create, innovate and beat the competition. Policy makers insist schools are better at determining the best accountability measures for their student and school success. (Busteed, 2013)

### **Curriculum/Instruction**

To introduce the aspect of curriculum and instruction, author and educator Dave Burgess invites spectators to his classroom in the book *Teach Like a Pirate, Increasing Student Engagement, Boost Your Creativity and Transform Your Life as an Educator*. In the height of the standardized testing era and disappearing funding, Dave Burgess refuses to teach to the test. In the spirit of integrated lesson plans, he offers countless thought-starters to help invigorate any lesson plan. From adding music and movement to theatre and dance, he asks the right questions to get even the uncreative thinking of new ways to take students on a learning adventure. Mr. Burgess is an educator who stands his ground in curriculum and instruction. The result? Engaged

students and personal development for other educators in his workshops. (Burgess, 2012)

The future of education relies heavily on curriculum enhancement geared toward students on a pathway to college, career and their communities.

One perspective on curriculum and connecting to the individualizing instruction focuses on teacher training in inclusivity. In a 2016 peer-reviewed article from the Journal of Organizational Culture, Communications & Conflict, data suggests that it is imperative that teachers are trained to work with and engage the diverse classroom of today. Teachers have more responsibility than ever before and their pupils each have a place in the classroom. The research found that only one third of the teacher education graduates were naturally equipped with the attitude and skillset to manage an inclusive classroom. Some teachers have fear or even negative feelings toward particular student categories. The conclusion is that teacher training and measuring of these aspects is imperative as our classrooms continue to diversify. (Kirillova & Ibragimov, 2016)

Contrary to the previous perspective, America First, President Donald Trump's budget plan would cut \$2.4 million dollars for teacher training grants. Although these programs are said to be best funded locally, they are deemed misaligned with the administration's priorities. This is yet another example of the priority to shift financial responsibility to the state level, if not the individual private schools. Because the budget also contains unprecedented increases to support school choice for all students and increases in funding for school preparation to meet the needs of students with disabilities, those left teaching in public schools may have to attend professional development workshops on their own dime. ("America first: a budget blueprint to make America great again," 2017)

### **Public Policy**

Public policy, concerning education, is a set of rules and principles that lead to governing educational systems. Policy shapes all aspects of education - from curriculum to inclusivity. The level of government interference or guidance in education is revered in opposing ways. One side wants more and one side wants less; everyone in between tries to keep up with the fine print and wonder if them and theirs will be impacted.

One perspective on policy as it pertains to education is that decisions should be made by educators, subject-matter experts and above all those who are educated. Because our elected officials are tasked to represent their constituents, it is expected that the voice of all constituent will be heard and action aligns. Some would argue that high-impact decisions, regarding education, are not being made at the right level.

One example of this phenomenon is Scott Walker, Act 10 and Wisconsin's 17-day protest and demonstration in 2011. Those in opposition of Scott Walker's plans to break down unions, cut funding to schools and benefits to teachers united in a wave of resistance in the state capital, Madison. Wisconsin hasn't been the same since Act 10 and Scott Walker remains governor even after a failed recall election. (Rickman & Colburn, 2012)

Another example is the appointment of Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos under the new Trump administration. In a 2017 article in the Humanist publication, Segregation Now and Forever: Betsy DeVos and the Looting of Public Education, Sikivu Hutchinson sees Betsy DeVos as the wrong solution for public education. Because of her past alignment with vouchers and school choice, the author feels that this will spell disaster for students in poverty and from non-white descent in urban schools. (Hutchinson, 2016)

From an interview, by the Oxford University Press, of a Tea Party supporter, 'We think the federal government is overstepping their authority. Take health care, take the education. All

those things . . . . The EPA, they've shut down I forget how many timber plants in Arizona because of the spotted owl.' According to the article, Tea Party enthusiasts fear the direction of the United States, loathe Barack Obama and everything he stands for and want less government and reciprocating support for those in need using taxpayer dollars. Rally and protest or don't, these strong supporters of the privatization of everything" education, healthcare, social security, etc. helped to lay the foundation for the Trump victory in 2017. (Skocpol & Williamson, 2012)

### **Diversity and Inclusion**

“The future of a truly inclusive education relies on a cultural shift that supports and nurtures differences, and views success through a lens not focused on standardization but on diversity.” Maria-Luise Braunsteiner, University College of Teacher Education Lower Austria

Diversity and Inclusion are not new concepts or aspects in education, although they are making a comeback when it comes to instructor training, corporate professional development, and equitable practices in the classroom and in the workplace. From segregation to desegregation to the dreaded re-segregation, the topic of diversity and inclusion is always a factor. Some people would say that they fear re-segregation as it negates progress made to date in civil rights. Others feel that freedom to choose, at any cost, is a right they should have for their children and communities. The future is unknown, but when it comes to school choice, the debate is highlighted by segregation and the further widening of the achievement gap between the rich and the poor, the black and the white and the able bodied and disabled student.

One perspective, pertaining to students with disabilities is that vouchers and choicing out of public schools is not in their best interest. According to an article in Harvard Graduate School of Education, parents considering new funding designated for students with disabilities to utilize vouchers should be carefully considered. The article cites IDEA, the Individuals with Disabilities Act, and its lost protections should a family make the switch from a “free and appropriate public

education" to a private school. Possible lost protections include parent participation in IEPs and appropriate interventions to behavioral problems explained by the disability in lieu of expulsion. Although Secretary of Education DeVos praises IDEA, her policies put the control of education into the marketplace. (Schifter, 2017)

Why would policy makers support the move of students with disabilities into private schools? According to a 2010 article by Georgia State University College of Law, children with disabilities are the poster children for the universal school choice movement. Campaigning around initiatives toward this end pull on heart strings and shed light on a public school system that is not equipped to handle the mountain of IEPs in the regular education classroom. The article refers to this first wave of students as the acorn to wider expansion of their special interests. (Fritzen Hensel, 2010)

Another perspective says that students coming from poverty have improved outcomes in a charter school environment; these students took advantage of school choice. In fact, students from poverty make up a sizable portion of the student body in charter schools across the United States. According to a report from Stanford University and the Center for Research on Education Outcomes in 2013, 53% of students attending charter schools were considered coming from poverty as they qualified for free or reduced school lunch. ("Charter Schools In Perspective - Diversity and Inclusion," n.d.)

In a longitudinal study on diversity, AT, it was found that students coming from poverty did significantly better when attending a magnet, or choice school. The effects of the increase in performance are said to be influenced by new peers, and the student's choosing in helped to diversify the student body. ("What happens when schools become magnet schools: A longitudinal study of diversity and achievement," 2016)

### **Connections Between Aspects**

Aspects regarding education never exist in a vacuum. One affects the other and then circles back and evokes emotion or reaction about the other. The following are examples of aspects of education, how they play off of one another and why it is significant.

Teachers and standards and high-stakes assessments shape and structure the armature of education at the federal, state and local level. Teachers are, of course, held to standards to ensure that students learn what they need to learn and demonstrate that learning by the end of each grade. This learning outcome is determined by high-stakes assessments on an annual basis. High stakes assessments also indicate whether or not a school is going to be deemed passing or failing and whether or not the school will be in an intervention and/or receive funding. Teachers are held accountable for assessment scores and are often teaching to the test in order to fulfill their obligation to get students to their benchmarks. This is highly significant to the deconstruction of public schools because public school teachers are not able to teach to strengths or teach to motivate and inspire anymore; they must focus entirely on the standards and assessments day after day.

Public policy and high-stakes assessments are also interconnected. High stakes assessments came about because of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2002 ("No Child Left Behind Act of 2001," n.d.) Policy makers wanted to close the achievement gap to ensure schools were held accountable to student success in Math and Language Arts. Unfortunate to public instruction, the act only served as the new structure for classroom curriculum - teaching to the test. Students, encouraged to memorize and regurgitate, are contributing to the global achievement gap even more. Extra-curricular activities, science and others are dropped and recess is a faded memory. Students are not ready for the marketplace and do not have what employers desire in its



workforce - thinkers, problem solvers and team players. The public school system as it has fully adopted this policy and assessment practice will lose to private schools that can invigorate curriculum and recruit families from all parts of the cities. (Wagner, 2014)

Curriculum/instruction and diversity and inclusion are in the spotlight. White privileged? Assimilation? Honoring culture and vantage point? Notes to parents in multiple languages. Diversity is no longer an add-on consideration. Today we are a minority majority and curriculum/instruction as to meet the needs and motivations of diverse learners. From collaboration to independent studies, culture matters. From English Language learners and the approach to lesson plans and the growing number of IEPs in the classroom learning has become individualized. To become a teacher is to become a translator, a social worker, a special education professional and a parent, in some cases. This growing pressure is important to the deconstruction of public schools. Some parents are pulling kids out of the diverse classroom and diverse learners will find it difficult to find a choice school to meet their needs, but something has to give. (Tileston & Darling, 2008)

Diversity and inclusion is often supported by public policy. From No Child Left Behind to Every Child Succeeds to Promise grants to Michelle Obama's prized program, Let Girls Learn, policy makers can't keep their hands off of promising programs aimed at supporting student success in education. Sporadic grant opportunities override steady funding as politicians gain and lose positioning. Although funding is critical to the success of programs geared toward empowerment of the impoverished, the sustainability of the gift comes in waves. In the example of Let Girls Learn, for example, as the Obamas left office and the Trumps moved in, this was a program that ended. ("Let Girls Learn," n.d.) This is important to the future of public schools as

funding is cut and schools have to resort to referendums and grants to sustain school operation and extra support for diverse populations.

High stakes assessments have a great impact and little regard to diversity and inclusion. Students from diverse backgrounds and English Language Learners are at an immediate disadvantage. Even if they thrive in their home language they could be placed in remedial classes because of their inability to grasp academic language in assessments. More and more multiple measures are being implemented in college entrance criteria. Schools are also testing for grit, resilience and self-control. (Ozelli, 2016) The school of the future will measure the whole child and not just how well they are able to memorize, test and fill in the bubble with a #2 pencil.

### **Solution**

One step in the right direction to achieve public buy in with public policy enforcements would be to make decisions at the right level – to have the right people at the table. “We’ve designed an accountability system that holds those with the most power the least accountable.” New York University Education Professor, Pedro Noguera (“High Stakes Testing Holds The Most Powerful the Least Accountable | gadflyonthewallblog,” n.d.) Decision making at summit events, for example, with education experts from around the world leads to peer collaboration, continuous improvement, and right-sized policy creation. Continued silo’d decision and policy making will always evoke critique from one side about the other; It needs to change.

Instead of standardized testing, results could be measured in multiple ways, for example, portfolio assessments, less frequent assessments, multiple measures, social and emotional skills assessments, game-based and stealth assessments to avoid total classroom immersion in standardized test prep and testing blocks of time. (Kamenetz, 2015) A group of colleges joined forces in the Thematic Working Group 5 (TWG5) in Bangkok, Thailand and took a deep dive

into the effectiveness of formative, rather than summative assessments. Their findings were that technological tools should be developed in order to measure student progress along the way. The benefit of this approach is that rather than testing memorization and testing, schools could measure critical thinking and problem solving skills. The group also recommended more teachers training in formative assessments and the data that can be gleaned from them. (Spector et al., 2016, p. 58-71)

With a change to standardized testing, teachers can once again find freedom in their instructional time with students. Like in the book "Teach Like a Pirate," students can find the fun in learning through theatre, movement and exploration. The community can help, too! Like grassroots projects, similar to the Green Heart Project founded in Charleston, SC, where students in urban areas learn about science and life through gardening initiatives with community sponsorship and partnership. ("Green Heart Project," n.d.) This project brings the classroom outdoors and the students' hands in the dirt.

On State Standards, there is little wrong with building a set of expectations and outcomes with the goal of equal opportunities at given stages in the educational path. Keep Common Core as it sets out to level the playing field. Instead of changing to the flavor of the day, invest more in teacher preparation to help diverse learners instead of taking federal funding away for continuing education. (Kamenetz, 2017) Common core and standardized tests are not one in the same and educational campaigns should address this to key influencers of the student.

And on Diversity and Inclusion, let's get to today with equalizing the playing field for all students. In a minority majority place in time, we need to meet students where they are in their cultures and ways of communication. Assimilation is from the dark days of the past, and it is time to embrace the differences and similarities we have as a community. To excel in a global

culture, we must learn to be resilient and adaptive. It is a balance between dual respect (the relationship) and growth (learning) between the teacher and the student. (Tileston & Darling, 2008)

People also need to find a legitimate source of truth, evidence through research and data must drive all action, and emotion should be stripped from the conversation. When this occurs, no one can rebut the necessary and inevitable changes occurring to today's public educational system.

### **Potential Criticisms**

Critics in support of public education, as it is today, will not see the benefits of restructuring a dated system. That or they are not in a position of power to make decisions to affect the whole. With the red tape and committee-level or top-down decision making (add a 70-hour work week) teachers and administrators are hard pressed to make big change at a local level. With mountain IEP meetings, a second job and extra-curricular supervision, who has time to make change?

Educators and administrators comfortable in their positions and routines will also not voice support for shaking up a dated public school system. Although evidence stated earlier indicates both pros and cons to school choice, loss of funds to public schools and changes in mandated standards, naysayers to change will always rally and stand their ground. Arguments can be overheard stating that system change will only benefit the white privileged and those without learning challenges. Naysayers will also argue that dramatic change can only attribute to corruption, partisan greed and apathy. In the spectrum of perception between good and evil intentions, the catalysts for change undoubtedly exists on the spectrum - but likely not as extreme one way or the other as the individual in scarcity mode would assume.

Further, depending on where you stand on the political spectrum you will trust one media station over the other for your facts. This can only lead to conflict as the media on all sides fights for viewership and pays no mind to the drama it creates.

### **Conclusion**

Public schools are stuck in the storm. Both mysterious and multifaceted, the lightning and thunder act together and apart. The people are divided. Administrators are divided. Policies are misconstrued and lend to more pressure and deeper divide. And, every side is claiming to battle for student success. Who gets left out in the rain? Who are the innocent bystanders?

At a pivotal moment of scarcity and survival, the elements of public policy, high-stakes assessments, diversity and inclusion, teaching core curriculum standards, and instructional delivery are on the top of everyone's mind and all over the media. The data feeds the news and the news feeds the people and bits and pieces of truth are lost along the way and recycled back.

Once evidence-based action can be proven, a new normal for educating children from K12 and into early college can be established. As policy makers step out of the way, initiatives from the inside can take root. Perhaps the entry of free market education will allow for more freedom of instruction and we can begin to close the achievement gap we hear so much about.

“Without continual growth and progress, such words as improvement, achievement, and success have no meaning.” Benjamin Franklin. It is time to get out of the way of the trajectory of public education and let it be what it wants to be for a while. There will always be passionate parent groups, there will always be research into the shaping of the mind, and there will always be talk about preparing the future workforce. Some things will change and some things will remain the same. The most difficult part of change is the turmoil we hear about in this tumultuous time in education.

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