

Chapter 10

Learning Lessons Our Schools Can't Teach

How can our children learn to be Good Neighbors when we teach them in a school system built on aggression?

The Bitter Fruits of Aggression

In the past 100 years, technological progress has been amazing. At the turn of the twentieth century, horses were still the mainstay of the transportation industry. Today, automobiles and planes take us all over the world. Letters used to take weeks to cross a continent; today, e-mail is delivered within minutes to any place on earth. Just a few generations ago, people died from simple infections. Today, with modern nutrition, antibiotics, and sanitation, infection is rarely fatal. In most arenas, radical progress has been made over the past century. Unfortunately, our educational system is one of the few exceptions.

In the early 1900s, our great-grandparents trudged off to the neighborhood school. For the better part of the day, the teacher stood in front of the class, chalk in hand, to expound on lessons contained in the schoolbooks. Today, our children take cars or buses to school, but once there, students listen as the teacher stands in front of the class to expound on the lessons contained in the schoolbooks. The facilities are newer, the chalk has become a whiteboard marker, and the curriculum includes some additional subjects, but otherwise our schools are still stuck in the horse-and-buggy days.

The cost of doing things the same old way, however, has skyrocketed. The United States, for example, spent 14 times as much per pupil in 1996 as in 1920, even after adjusting for inflation,¹ yet educational surveys find the United States to be “A Nation at Risk.”² Almost 25% of our high school students do not graduate, and another 25% know too little to get a job or go to college.³ By 1997, 20% of companies had to teach their new employees reading, writing, and arithmetic even though most of the new people hired had high school diplomas!⁴

Literacy in the United States is on a steep decline. Before the end of World War II in 1945, 18 million men were tested to see if they could

In no other industry in U.S. history has there been so little technological change as in the field of public school education.

—National Center for
Policy Analysis

THE FAILURE OF OUR
PUBLIC SCHOOLS: THE
CAUSES AND A SOLUTION

... it isn't just cheap labor that's attracting companies to India, Ireland, or the Philippines—it's their "educated, trainable workers."

—SCHOOL REFORM NEWS
April 1998

Only 20 percent of job applicants at Motorola can pass a simple seventh-grade test of English comprehension or a fifth-grade mathematics test.

—NATION'S BUSINESS
October 1988

More than a third of Michigan students leave high school without possessing basic skills in reading, writing, and arithmetic.

—Dr. Jay P. Greene
Manhattan Institute for
Public Policy

It's no surprise that our school system doesn't improve: It more resembles the communist economy than our own market economy.

—Albert Shanker
president, American
Federation of Teachers

read well enough to be soldiers. Only 4% failed. By 1952, during the Korean War, 19% of the men tested were turned away as illiterate. The U.S. Army hired psychologists to find out how high school graduates were faking illiteracy, only to discover that they really couldn't read!⁵ By the end of the Vietnam War in 1973, 27% of potential inductees read too poorly to be accepted.⁶

Reading isn't the only arena in which our students are doing poorly. During international competition, U.S. eighth graders were asked, "Here are the ages of five children: 13, 8, 6, 4, 4. What is the average age of these children?" The correct answer, 7, was one of the multiple choice answers, yet an embarrassing 60% of the U.S. students missed it.⁷

Perhaps students have difficulty with tests because their teachers do too. Some states now require instructors to pass literacy tests themselves. In 1998, 59% of would-be teachers in Massachusetts failed the test, even though they were college graduates and the test's difficulty was at the junior high level.⁸

Fourth-Layer Aggression: Monopoly Education

We shouldn't be too surprised that both our students and teachers are floundering academically. After all, our schools are examples of fourth-layer aggression, exclusive, subsidized monopolies that we are forced to use. All schools, even the more flexible private and home schools, must meet requirements of the state's licensing boards, which usually dictate the core curriculum, the hours and years of attendance, the list of acceptable textbooks, and the educational standards for teachers.⁹ The result is predictable. The aggressive education monopoly gives us high prices, low quality, and little innovation.

Government education is heavily subsidized by taxes. Subsidies encourage waste. As a result, public schools consume twice as many dollars in operating costs as do private ones,¹⁰ even though private school students consistently do better academically. Increasing the public school budgets does not improve learning and may even have a negative effect.¹¹

Decreasing literacy means that our children have fewer skills with which to create wealth. If

learning hadn't declined after World War II, the United States would have been 39% richer by 1989.¹²

School-age children are forced—at gunpoint, if necessary—to attend a licensed school. Because we want all children to get a good education, we view tuition-free public schools and mandatory attendance as a way to ensure that neglectful parents don't deny their children this valuable asset.

As always, aggression gives us results we'd rather not have. Specifically, fourth-layer aggression, which forces our children to use the subsidized, exclusive monopoly service, gives others control of what the children are taught. Literacy is no longer a priority.

The Most Literate Nation in the World

In the 1800s, Americans were considered to be among the most literate people in the world. A visiting French aristocrat, Alexis de Tocqueville, claimed that the new nation had the best educated people in history.¹³ The complex novel *Last of the Mohicans*, published in 1818, sold five million copies¹⁴ at a time when the U.S. population was less than 20 million.¹⁵ By 1840, literacy in the North and South, exclusive of the slave population, was over 90% and 80%, respectively.¹⁶ In other words, literacy was more prevalent than it is today!

Schooling was neither compulsory nor free, although private “charity” schools provided education to those too poor to afford formal instruction.¹⁷ Many of those schools taught hundreds of children at a time, using a monitoring method pioneered by the British Quaker schoolmaster Joseph Lancaster. The teacher would instruct several older children, and they, in turn, would instruct others under the teacher's supervision. Lancaster perfected his method so that he was able to teach a thousand pupils at one time—for free!¹⁸

Schools could try new and better methods of teaching because the licensing requirements for instructors and schools were few. Students left if they didn't learn, so the marketplace ecosystem regulated schools without aggression, which allowed for innovative improvements.

In no country in the world is the taste for reading so diffuse as among the common people of America.

—Per Siljestromm
Swedish visitor, 1853

When I perceive that many boys in our school have been taught to read and write in two months who did not before know the alphabet ... and when I perceive on great assembly of a thousand children under the eye of a single teacher ... I confess that I recognize in Lancaster the benefactor of the human race.

—DeWitt Clinton
founder of the New York
Free School Society and
governor of New York

In 1812, Pierre Du Pont de Nemours published “Education in the United States.” ... Du Pont said that fewer than four of every thousand people in the new nation could not read or do numbers well.

—John T. Gatto
1991 New York State
Teacher of the Year

Before 1850, when Massachusetts became the first state in the United States to force children to go to school, literacy was at 98 percent.

—Sheldon Richman
SEPARATING SCHOOL AND
STATE

Our purpose is to teach our students to be responsible adults who will be of benefit to society.

—posted in every
classroom, Mililani
High School, Mililani,
Hawaii

In the early 1800s, Boston had schools that were partially tax-supported, but twice as many children attended the private ones. Admission to public schools required that students *already* know how to read and write. They were usually taught these basic skills either by their family, a tutor, or a private school.¹⁹

An 1817 survey revealed that over 90% of Boston’s children attended some type of local school.²⁰ Education in America was so readily available that school attendance didn’t change in New York City when it began offering tax-subsidized, tuition-free public education.²¹

Parents had a variety of schools to choose from, especially among institutions not subject to the conditions attached to state support. Some schools prepared students for the university, and some taught trades. Some schools provided a broad-based education, while others focused on a particular area of expertise. Private tutoring was available for those unable to attend ordinary day school, and some children were taught by their parents or older siblings. The marketplace ecosystem, free from aggression, provided education to fit every budget and schedule. Parents voted with their dollars to support the educators who served them best. In this way, parents determined both the content and process by which their children would be educated.

Aggression Disrupts the Marketplace Ecosystem

Clearly, private education and the literacy it produced were virtually universal by the mid-1800s in the United States. How then did tax-supported compulsory education evolve?

Supporters of a uniform system of “American” education hoped to mold immigrant children into their idea of proper citizens. If public schools were tax-supported and didn’t need to charge much tuition, immigrants might send their children to the “free” schools instead of the private ones that they generally favored.

Of course, tax support meant that parents would be forced to turn over their hard-earned dollars over to the public schools. Only the wealthy could then afford to send their children to private institutions. Like the serpent in the

Garden of Eden, the so-called reformers tempted the American citizenry to use aggression against the new immigrants, presumably to create harmony throughout the land.

Many immigrants had come to the United States to escape this holier-than-thou attitude. In spite of the additional financial burden, struggling immigrants made great sacrifices to educate their children as they saw fit rather than send them to inexpensive or even free public schools. Catholics saw the public schools as vehicles for Protestant propaganda and established parochial schools; German immigrants sent their children to private institutions when the public ones refused to teach them in German as well as in English. Immigrants who wanted their children to learn their native tongue and their Old World history opted for private or parochial schools that catered to their preferences.²²

Schools Built on Aggression Teach It

The willingness of poor parents to send their children to private instead of public school tells us how highly they valued education, specifically education that reflected their beliefs and culture. Many people had come to the United States for a chance to pull themselves away from the poverty trap spun by Europe's guild-style licensing laws and other forms of aggression. Perhaps they didn't want their children in schools that were created by the aggression from which they had recently fled. Perhaps they feared that schools built on aggression would teach aggression. If that seems farfetched, consider your own education. As you've read through the past few chapters, have you been saying to yourself, "That's not the way my teachers told me the world worked"?

Can you imagine a school system funded by taxation hiring a teacher who equated taxation with theft? Hardly! Consequently, our children are instructed by teachers who believe that first-strike force, fraud, or theft is acceptable as long as it's for a good cause. An obvious underlying assumption of this philosophy is that the ends are not influenced by the means used to obtain them. To parents with an enlightened view of

A general State education is a mere contrivance for molding people to be exactly alike one another; and as the mold in which it casts them is that which pleases the predominant power in government, whether this be a monarch, a priesthood, an aristocracy, or a majority of the existing generation; in proportion as it is efficient and successful, it establishes a despotism over the mind, leading by a natural tendency to one over the body.

—John Stuart Mill
English philosopher

By this mode of education, we prepare our youth for the subordination of laws and thereby qualify them for becoming good citizens of the republic. ... Let our pupil be taught that he does not belong to himself, but that he is public property.

—Benjamin Rush, 1786
signer, Declaration of Independence and public school advocate

... public schooling often ends up to be little more than majoritarian domination of minority viewpoints.

—Robert B. Everhart
professor of Education,
University of California,
Santa Barbara

... during the high point of the whole language era of popularity, I and my department neglected to promote phonics. The results, as shown by the NAEP reading results in California in 1992 and 1994 were catastrophic ... the theory is dead wrong.

—William Honig
California Schools
superintendent

how the world works, this idea is analogous to teaching their child that $2 + 2 = 5$!

We interpret facts according to our world view. If our interpretation is correct, we can predict which actions will take us to our goal. We will be able to create peace and plenty in our hearts, our families, our communities, and our world. If our interpretation is faulty, we will create problems instead of solving them. No wonder parents who wanted the best for their children were willing to make great sacrifices to send them to a school that would complement their home instruction.

One-Size-Fits-All Education

If the law demanded that all children must receive an education, it also needed to define exactly what constituted one. School boards, not parents, decided what children would learn. Because school boards were drawn from the upper class and professional groups, the curriculum was often geared toward a liberal arts education in preparation for college.²³ For students who didn't want to attend college, the curriculum seemed irrelevant. Boredom and frustration led them to loud, boisterous behavior that hurt other children's chances of learning.

One desperate public school teacher, Steve Mariotti, asked his inner-city students why they were so disruptive. "You're boring!" they replied. In frustration, Steve asked the class if anything he had taught interested them. One young man told Steve that his stories about his former import-export business had been wonderful. Indeed, the young man was able to recall that class in great detail.

For youngsters enmeshed in the poverty trap, making money in business is a ticket to a better future.²⁴ However, public schools rarely have the autonomy to introduce classes in entrepreneurial skills.

When the monopoly school boards make a mistake, a great number of children are adversely affected. Sometimes the error lies in failure to promote courses that interest students and help them succeed in the real world. Sometimes the error is a substitution of experimental methods

for the tried and true, as when phonics instruction was replaced by “whole word.” Regrettably, school boards seem unaware that comprehensive studies have determined which methods are most effective in teaching basic skills. Direct Instruction (“Distar”) not only ranked first in reading, spelling, arithmetic, and language, but it also gave children the highest sense of self-esteem. In spite of these exciting results, Distar was discontinued in public schools.²⁵

Schools Built on Aggression Beget Violence

When schools don't provide relevant and interesting classes, and yet force attendance, some youngsters do more than create distractions for other children. As attendance has risen, so have theft, drugs, and violence perpetrated by students unmotivated by the curriculum.²⁶

By 1992, 24% of teenage students reported fearing for their physical safety while at school.²⁷ In Detroit, 63% of parents cited violence as their child's biggest problem at school.²⁸ One Arizona mother had only one wish for her boy's schooling: that he be alive at the end of his high school years.²⁹

Children who have difficulty focusing in such an environment, run the risk of being “diagnosed” with ADD (attention deficit disorder) by a school administrator and put on powerful drugs like Ritalin or Prozac. Approximately 5 million children are on psychotropic drugs. Parents who refuse to medicate their children on demand are threatened with medical neglect and child abuse suits.

However, these powerful drugs have side effects in children that are truly frightening. One 12-year-old boy, Michael Mozer, pleaded with his mother to stop the drugs because “there's a person inside my head telling me to do bad things.”

Indeed, both 18-year-old Eric Harris and his 17-year-old friend Dylan Klebold were on Luvox when they massacred their classmates and teacher at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado on April 20, 1999. Just a month later, T.J. Solomon, a 15-year-old who had been on Ritalin, shot six of his fellow students at Heritage High in Conyers, Georgia. In Oregon, Kip

... when it [the State] controls the education, it turns it into a routine, a mechanical system in which individual initiative, individual growth and true development as opposed to a routine instruction becomes impossible.

—Sri Aurobindo
SOCIAL AND POLITICAL
THOUGHT

One reason Johnny can't read may be that he is simply too busy surviving.

—William Plummer and
Luchina Fisher
PEOPLE MAGAZINE

... a Metropolitan Life study released in late 1993 reported that over 10 percent of teachers and about 25 percent of their students had been victims of violence in or near their public schools ... This seems to be a problem exclusive to public schools.

—Sheldon Richman
SEPARATING SCHOOL AND
STATE

What is most disturbing, however, is the growing awareness that the increased violence among school children may have more to do with the drugs than with the guns they use to carry out their violence.

—Samuel Blumenfeld
WORLDNETDAILY

I have no doubt that Prozac can contribute to violence and suicide. I've seen many cases. In a recent clinical trial, 6% of the children became psychotic on Prozac. And manic psychosis can lead to violence.

—Peter R. Breggin
author of TALKING BACK
TO PROZAC and TALKING
BACK TO RITALIN

It is difficult to find a group of people that has been dealt a worse hand by modern government schooling than African Americans.

—Andrew Coulson
MARKET EDUCATION

I will find a way to have my children attend private school even if it means less food on the table. A quality education for my children is that important.

—Pilar Gonzalez
Milwaukee parent

Kinkel, 15, killed his parents and two classmates, as well as wounded 22 others in his school cafeteria. Kip was on both Ritalin and Prozac.³⁰

We tell our children not to use drugs, yet we give them powerful psychoactive medication when they are more boisterous than we want them to be. Rather than doping our children, perhaps we should find out why they are restless. Perhaps they are having a natural reaction to an education based on aggression.

The Poor Get Poorer: Discrimination Against the Disadvantaged

Learning problems are most pronounced in the inner-city schools populated by minorities. Only 12% of black high school seniors were proficient in reading in 1995, compared with 40% of whites. In 1997, 76% of white fourth graders had acquired basic math skills, whereas only 41% of Hispanic and 32% of black children had done so.³¹

Inner-city parents usually pay hefty school taxes through their rent, which reflects the high cost of this poor education. Even though private school tuition is an immense hardship for them, many enroll their children in the local parish or independent neighborhood schools—even if they have to pay tuition with their welfare checks!³² As a result, the proportion of poor and minority children in private schools has been increasing.³³ By the late 1970s, more private school students came from families in which the parents earned between \$5,000 and \$10,000 a year than from families with incomes of \$25,000 or higher.³⁴ Vandalism, crime, drug abuse, student apathy, and disrespect for teachers are much lower in private schools, even after adjusting for socioeconomic and demographic differences.³⁵

The Marketplace Ecosystem Offers Hope

Most parents cite superior academic quality as the reason for sending their children to private schools. The Catholic school system is the largest single private educational network.

Even after adjusting for race, family background, and social class, the average Catholic high school student gained over three years of learning above that of the average public school

student.³⁶ Whereas minorities in public high schools lose ground each year compared with their white counterparts, that gap narrows each year for minority students in Catholic and private high schools.³⁷ The “Catholic school advantage” was evident to me when, as a high school student, I watched Catholic students take a disproportionate share of awards at the Detroit Metropolitan Science Fair.

Not only do private schools promote academic excellence, they do so in a setting that is more integrated, both racially and economically, than in public schools.³⁸ Twice as many private school students (36.6%) are in well-integrated classrooms compared with public school students (18.3%).³⁹ Even voluntary lunchroom seating patterns are more integrated in private schools.⁴⁰

Public schools draw their students from the surrounding neighborhood more often than the regional private institutions do. Zoning restrictions, another form of aggression-through-government, increase the price of housing in the suburbs, effectively eliminating lower-income, minority buyers.⁴¹ The segregation promoted by zoning laws becomes reflected in our neighborhood public schools as well.

Private school students are more socially conscious in other ways. They, more than public school attendees, are likely to report that they’ve volunteered recently and that such community action is important to them.⁴²

For the most part, private schools do not obtain their superior results in academic and social arenas by admitting only the very best students. More than a quarter of inner-city parochial schools have no admission criteria at all; the typical Catholic school takes 88% of all who apply. In urban schools, like those in Cleveland, three-quarters of the students are not even Catholic.⁴³ Twenty percent of Catholic schools report accepting students expelled from the public system!⁴⁴

Indeed, public schools send almost 100,000 problem students to private schools specializing in helping such youngsters.⁴⁵ Students include delinquents, troublemakers, and the emotionally disturbed.

... Chicago’s Catholic schools are able to offer a good education at a cost of \$1,500 per elementary student and \$3,200 for secondary students; the Chicago public schools spend \$5,500 per pupil ... [and] 46% of entering freshmen fail to graduate, while in the parochial schools only 22% drop out.

—William Tucker

FORBES

November 25, 1991

... a 1995 challenge to New York City officials from Cardinal John J. O’Conner: send us the lowest-performing 5 percent of public school students and we guarantee they will succeed.

—Clint Bolick

TRANSFORMATION: THE
PROMISE AND POLITICS OF
EMPOWERMENT

The expected graduation rate for minorities in Catholic schools is 94 percent; the rate in public school is 64 percent.

—George A. Clowes

SCHOOL REFORM NEWS

The existence of thousands of private schools that focus on nothing but difficult-to-educate children lays bare the myth that private schools just skim the cream and leave the toughest kids to the public schools.

—Joseph Lehman
Mackinac Center for
Public Policy

One such private school, specializing in drop-outs, boasts an 85% graduation rate. By utilizing self-paced computer learning and high teacher-to-pupil ratios, Jim Boyle's Ombudsman Educational Services helps students advance one grade level in basic skills for each 20 hours in his program. Ombudsman achieves these remarkable results while spending half as much money per pupil as the public schools do!⁴⁶

A quarter of the students at Marva Collins Preparatory School in Chicago have learning disabilities, yet almost all of the students read at least one level above their grade.⁴⁷ The school's tuition is less than a third of what the neighboring public schools receive per pupil.⁴⁸ Sylvan Learning Centers, a tutoring service for students who want more progress, *guarantees* a one-grade-level leap with 36 hours of instruction!⁴⁹

While private schools offer to guarantee results, courts in Colorado have ruled that public schools have no "contractual duty" to provide a good education. Parents are obligated to pay for public schools in their tax bill, yet schools have no reciprocal obligation to teach children even basic skills!⁵⁰

Even Public Employees Go Private!

If you're becoming eager to send your children to a private school, you're not alone. On a nationwide basis, approximately 14% of students are enrolled in private schools.⁵¹ Almost half of the Milwaukee public school teachers send their children to private institutions. When Wisconsin state legislator Polly Williams wanted to force employees of Milwaukee's public school system to enroll their children in it, she was harassed with death threats!⁵² Presumably, at least some school employees would rather kill than have their children attend Milwaukee public schools!

Members of Congress send their children to private schools more frequently than the average parent. At least 34% of U.S. representatives and 50% of the senators chose private education for at least one of their children. During their terms of office, former president Bill Clinton and vice president Al Gore sent their children to private schools as well.⁵³

*Private schools raise achievement, promote voluntary community service, lower violence, and heal race relations—at half of the per pupil cost of the public schools.*⁵⁴ Lower administrative costs are a significant factor in the savings. For example, Chicago public schools have 37 times as many administrators per pupil as the Catholic ones; in New York City, the ratio jumps to 60!⁵⁵

Teachers' salaries average 50% more in the public sector,⁵⁶ which may account for their unions' violent antagonism toward the private sector. In 1995, Pepsi announced that it would give scholarships to low-income children living in Jersey City so that they could attend private schools. The public school teachers' union began discussing a statewide boycott of Pepsi products. The company's vending machines were vandalized. Faced with such hostility, Pepsi withdrew its offer.⁵⁷ Sadly, teachers who deny poor children a chance for a better education and destroy property in the process will ultimately teach students to be aggressors too.

Public school teachers needn't fear that a fully privatized school system would mean a cut in pay. Indeed, as explained in "The Better Way," teachers would probably earn more when money wasn't wasted on excess administration and other inefficiencies of public education. By harming students to maintain the status quo, teachers only hurt the very people they are trying to help.

Aggression vs. Choice

Our schools have failed low-income children, but the marketplace ecosystem stands ready to serve them—at half the cost. Simply by sending our children to private schools, we could slash the price of education and increase its quality, especially for the disadvantaged.

With this vision in mind, minority parents are supporting reforms that enable them to take their tax dollars to the school of their choice. Vermont⁵⁸ and Maine⁵⁹ have had such programs since the 1870s. Milwaukee gives each child about half of the \$9,500 per pupil cost of public school education.⁶⁰ Because private schools cost so much less than public ones, "vouchers" allow

Giving every school-aged child ... vouchers for the full average tuition charged by private schools would save over one hundred billion dollars a year nationwide.

—Andrew Coulson
MARKET EDUCATION

... the absence of political control over the schools is a determining factor of private school effectiveness.

—Eugena F. Toma
University of Kentucky

... education, like religion, is too important to be left in the hands of the state.

—Jacob Hornberger
Future of Freedom
Foundation

students to pay tuition and have money left over. As a result, a total of \$1.2 million of taxpayer funds was returned to the state in 2000.⁶¹

If private schools don't live up to parents' expectations, they lose their students and their money. This natural regulation by the marketplace ecosystem keeps educational quality high. As a result, most voucher programs boast academic gains and increased parental satisfaction.⁶²

School choice programs end the aggression of forcing children to attend a particular neighborhood school, but maintain the aggression of tax funding. Tax-supported private schools in Belgium, France, New Zealand, Ontario, and the United States still outperform the public ones, because overall aggression is less. However, when public school regulations are imposed on choice programs, the private schools lose their effectiveness.⁶³ Ultimately, only complete separation of school and state will protect our children's education.

Investigators recently constructed an Education Freedom Index, measuring the level of aggression-through-government that each state experienced in the educational realm. As might be expected, students from states with less aggressive school regulations scored higher in an eighth grade standardized math test.⁶⁴

Perhaps the best evidence that public schools have failed our children is the incredible increase in after school education. Sylvan Learning Centers, with affiliates in Canada, Germany, France, England, and Spain, guarantee students a one-grade-level leap with 36 hours of after-school instruction.⁶⁵ In other words, Sylvan guarantees to do in 2 months of daily instruction what the public schools often fail to do in 10 months.

In Japan, 70–90% of students regularly attend *juku*, an “after-school school” by the ninth grade. Top *juku* instructors can make as much money as professional Japanese baseball players. As with Sylvan, the *juku* curriculum is adapted to each child's learning style and goals.⁶⁶

More and more parents are choosing to keep their children out of schools and teach them at home. In some states, home schooling is permitted only with a state-licensed teacher, even

though such training does not improve student learning.⁶⁷ Parents without this qualification have been fined or jailed for home schooling, even when the education has been progressing well.⁶⁸

Home schooling has now been legalized in every state, but only 1–3% of the U.S. school-age population learns at home.⁶⁹ *In spite of home schoolers' small numbers, the top three finalists at the 2000 National Spelling Bee were home schoolers, as were 4 of the 10 National Geography Bee finalists.*⁷⁰ Home schoolers score higher on standardized tests than 75–85% of conventionally schooled children. Parents typically pay between \$200 and \$2,000 dollars for materials, with a median cost of \$400.⁷¹ Home schooling is more economical than even private schools, but usually one parent stays out of the work force to provide the learning environment.

Do home-schooled children lag behind their peers in social development? Just the opposite! Trained counselors saw no difference between the two groups with regard to self-concept or assertiveness. However, children schooled by their parents were better behaved and exhibited higher self-esteem.⁷² An entire network of support groups now provides sports and social activities to home schoolers, giving them the best of academic excellence and social interaction.⁷³

A Better Way

As we've learned from the above examples, less aggression results in better education, especially for the disadvantaged. If we were to honor our neighbor's choice, to what educational heights could we aspire? Let's try to imagine what a successful school might look like if education were totally deregulated (i.e., completely free from aggression). Although this school, which we'll call Quest, doesn't actually exist, many of its components do. These factors are referenced to allow comparisons with what we have today.

Quest would probably start out small, expanding each year as its reputation for excellence grew. New students would take tests to discover their aptitudes and their optimal learning modes, much as Sylvan Learning Centers

Young home school students test one grade level ahead of their counterparts in public and private schools. As they progress, the study shows that home schoolers pull further away from the pack, typically testing four grade levels above the national average by eighth grade.

—Lawrence Rudner
University of Maryland

do today. Some children are visual learners who remember best what they see; auditory-oriented youngsters learn fastest when they hear their lessons; kinesthetic children understand best what they are able to feel and manipulate.⁷⁴

Subjects taught at Quest would come in each of these three learning modes. A kinesthetic child, for example, could be introduced to math by adding and subtracting with blocks before working with numbers on paper.⁷⁵ The curriculum would make effective use of computers and audiovisual equipment, which have long been known to double a student's learning.⁷⁶

Tuition for the standard Quest program would probably be comparable to the private school tuition of today, roughly half of what public schools currently cost. A student's classes might begin with an "edutainment" video or Internet program. Since the producers of these lessons would receive royalties based on usage, exceptional broadcast teachers could make as much money as professional athletes, just as *juku* instructors do today.⁷⁷ Because student achievement increases along with teacher expertise,⁷⁸ broadcast educators might include Nobel Prize winners, who would likely donate their time and expertise to promote quality education. Unlike the public school system, which turned away such offers,⁷⁹ a results-oriented school like Quest would gladly accept such generosity.

After the edutainment, students might go into one of several "query" classrooms where the resident teacher could answer their questions. Students would naturally gravitate to teachers who relate best to their learning style. Not all Quest teachers would have advanced degrees, but those who didn't attract students to their query sessions wouldn't be at Quest long. Employment at Quest would be performance-based, rather than dependent on seniority, as it is in public schools today.

Teacher excellence would be rewarded with bonuses.⁸⁰ Most teachers would be partially paid in Quest stock, which would give them incentive to share successful teaching techniques with other Quest faculty. Teachers would thus reap what they sow.

The instructors would enjoy working at Quest because they could do what they were hired to do—teach. Extensive high-tech learning programs would take the repetition out of their job, so that they could devote most of their time to answering students' questions, guiding their choice of curriculum, or teaching writing and other skills that require personal instruction. Some teachers would supplement their income by creating edutainment in their field of specialty. The combination of royalties, Quest stock, and regular paychecks would give most teachers better compensation than public school teachers make today.

Quest's teachers would be highly regarded in their community because of their dedication to helping students meet their goals. Teachers could track student progress through the interactive computer programs that students use for learning and testing. For example, students who did poorly on the computerized test following each lesson would review their material again. After successful retesting, students might attempt more sophisticated problems or simply move on to the next lesson.

Because student computer time is monitored by the staff, slow learners would quickly be identified and given special attention so that they can meet their predefined goals. Motivation would be kept high by reward systems. For example, Sylvan has found that giving out milestone tokens gives students a sense of completion and accomplishment that motivates them to complete the next learning segment.⁸¹ For major achievements, such as graduation from their pre-defined programs, both students and their teachers might receive a monetary bonus.⁸²

The curriculum at Quest would be designed taking into account a student's strengths and weaknesses. For example, one student might excel in history and the social sciences but do poorly in math and the physical sciences. When the student keys in her password on the teaching computer, she might be able to access her math problems formulated in terms of historical events.

Depending upon their goals, students might stay at school all or part of the day. Quest teachers would likely work in shifts, so that families would have maximum flexibility to design the best schedule to mix school, work, and play.

Quest would probably help students relate their academic lessons to real-life situations, unlike most schools of today. For example, Quest could cultivate relationships with community professionals so that students could be exposed to various career opportunities and work environments (e.g., hospitals, laboratories, computer firms, manufacturing plants, auto repair shops). Students could visit these organizations, or even work part-time for pay or class credit. Such exposure to different careers would help students discover what their aptitudes are and inspire them to study subjects appropriate to possible careers. For some Quest students, such contact might eventually evolve into an apprenticeship or even full-time employment.

Early exposure to a wide range of career possibilities is essential for wise curriculum choices. As a research scientist, I supervised several pre-med students who found out, in their last year of college, that they couldn't stand the sight of blood during surgical procedures. Had they recognized this earlier, they might have chosen another program. By the time they discovered that they really didn't want to go into medicine, it was too late to change their major.

With exposure to a variety of experiences, students would discover their strengths and weaknesses. For example, a student who has an exceptional grasp of math or science and a weaker understanding of literature and the arts might choose to spend more time on liberal arts courses to match his proficiency in other areas. Alternatively, he could focus only on the basics in his weak areas and accelerate his strong ones, perhaps even earning college credit in his specialties. Some students might want to explore specialized curriculum, such as the courses in offered by Steve Mariotti's National Foundation for Teaching Entrepreneurship. Quest counselors would keep abreast of new offerings to help students and parents choose wisely.

Most colleges rely heavily on standardized test scores when evaluating prospective students. Quest would almost certainly post student scores to show new applicants the effectiveness of the school's program. Schools that are hesitant to display such records would likely be viewed with suspicion by parents considering enrollment for their children. Because high school diplomas don't always mean that graduates can read and write, test scores are evolving into the standard by which employers and colleges select among applicants.

At Quest, studies would continue until test scores indicate that the proficiency target has been met. A state-of-the-art school like Quest would probably guarantee that students have 12th grade proficiency by the time they are 12 years old.⁸³ Indeed, such progress by properly taught youngsters is probably conservative, given the progress that Sylvan and other learning programs are already able to achieve. For example, Hope Academy in Lansing, Michigan, gives parents a money-back guarantee that their kindergartners, by year end, will read as well as second-graders.⁸⁴ What a refreshing change from the public school system, which has no obligation to ensure that students learn anything!

Social skills development would be well integrated into the Quest curriculum. Children would learn how to tutor and mentor younger classmates, how to engage in constructive teamwork with peers, and how to assume leadership roles in various types of projects.

Although Quest would be less expensive than the old-style public school system, the yearly tuition might still be beyond the means of many who would like to attend. Fortunately, Quest would most likely have a number of programs enabling parents to pay all or part of their children's tuition by contributing their labor. Some parents might help maintain the buildings or grounds; others might staff the office; still others might work in the cafeteria. Much of the nonteaching function of Quest would likely be provided this way.⁸⁵

As they progress, students could help pay their tuition by supervising younger children,

Children born into poverty have special gifts that prepare them for business formation and wealth creation. They are mentally strong, resilient. ... They are long-suffering in the face of adversity. They are comfortable with risk and uncertainty. They know how to deal with stress and conflict. ... In short, poor kids are "street smart" or what we call "business smart."

—Steve Mariotti
National Foundation for
Teaching
Entrepreneurship

working with the cafeteria staff, and tutoring less-advanced students. Not only would such students get a first-rate Quest education, but they would leave with a work reference as well!

Problems with drugs or violence would probably be minimal, since students could be expelled for disruptive behavior. However, rather than abandoning such children, Quest might provide a specialized home-study program for such youngsters.

A Quest home-study program might also be popular with those who prefer to keep their children at home. If the family had a home computer, it could tap into the Quest system via the Internet so that student progress could be monitored by Quest instructors as if they were on-site. Quest instructors might also be available by video phone, so that students won't get stuck if their caregiver isn't able to answer their questions. By providing space for several children of working parents, stay-at-home parents could earn enough to pay for an at-home Quest education for their children.

For families without Internet access, Quest might have a comparable video program and home workbook. Instructors could be contacted by telephone for questions and consultations. Every couple of weeks, students could visit Quest for evaluation and program alterations. For example, a child who has trouble with math might receive a special series of videos and workbooks to resolve his or her problems. Quest is likely to guarantee results in its home-study program, just as it would in its classrooms.

Of course, Quest's excellence might also make it more expensive and structured than many parents would prefer. Such parents might choose instead to subscribe to educational cable television. For a monthly fee similar to that of the entertainment channels, a family would probably be able to order a "school" station that specializes in K-12 education. Such channels are not yet available, since today's children are mostly in a classroom. However, such an alternative would almost certainly develop if parents had full choice in educational options.

Indeed, alternatives are already beginning to appear. A number of correspondence courses are now available in subjects for which a professional's evaluation is desirable (e.g., essay writing).⁸⁶ Indeed, Internet schools, like Class.com⁸⁷ and VirtualHighSchool.com,⁸⁸ provide standard and elective courses in a more interactive environment.

In addition to "school" cable stations, educational television would continue to be supported by advertising, just as other sponsored shows are. *Sesame Street*, which taught preschoolers their letters and numbers, would have many K–12 imitators. Virtually every child in the country would have access to this "free" classroom!

Churches and other support groups would most likely provide inexpensive day care and schooling through such advertiser-sponsored educational television. A volunteer staff would probably run the center, providing low-income parents with affordable schooling and day care while they work. Like *Sesame Street*, educational television is likely to be highly participatory. Children would probably sing their alphabet to catchy jingles and march around the room chanting historical dates, names, and happenings. Madison Avenue techniques could be used to produce stimulating programs to entice advertisers to pay top dollar to sponsor them, as they do for high school programs today.⁸⁹

With so many options available at costs ranging from substantial to trivial, few parents would be unable to provide their children with a good education. Those parents who need assistance, however, would probably have access to a number of scholarship programs. Children First CEO America, which began in 1991, has already provided over \$500 million to low-income students for private school tuition. Funds come primarily from the business community,⁹⁰ although other charitable organizations also contribute. Most likely, such efforts would continue in an educational system free of aggression.

Would parents take advantage of these widespread educational opportunities? All of the available evidence suggests that they would. Over

90% of Boston's children enrolled in some sort of learning program in the early 1800s. Today, although high school is optional in Japan, over 90% of Japanese 17-year-old youths *voluntarily* attend. In contrast, the United States was only able to *force* 72% of its teens to enroll.⁹¹

The few children who would be without a formal educational program most likely have parents who don't value learning or their children's future. Because family background is a significant factor in a child's scholastic achievement, few of those children would benefit from being forced into a learning program. Instead, they would only disrupt the learning of others with drugs and violence, while learning little themselves. Such children cannot be helped by forcing their parents to send them to school.

However, such children can be helped. By taking aggression out of education, learning aids would become widely integrated into our culture (e.g., advertiser-supported educational TV programs). Children might find it difficult *not* to learn the basics. After all, when education becomes as easy as pressing buttons on the TV remote, even a child can do it!

**Nonaggression is
the education of choice!**

