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Proposal to Change Florida Public Schools



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*The Best Opportunity to Reduce Cost
and Increase Payback in the State's
Educational System*



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Purpose, Scope, Background

This is a proposal to change Florida's educational system. There is no point changing an educational system that does its job and is cost-effective. Florida's educational system does neither of these adequately. Its form does not follow its function. That is why I am writing this paper.

The purpose of this document is to state educational goals plainly, outline the fundamental problems that stand in the way of achieving those goals, and propose simple but sweeping changes that will short-circuit the problems and allow the goals to be achieved.

I realize that professional educators think they already know the goals of a modern educational system, but I seriously doubt that most of them have my life-experience perspective. For that reason I encourage patience and a spirit of good will when reading this proposal.

The primary reason for my writing this is an accumulation of annoyances over our nation's schools for 3 decades. I have watched them decline as legislators and school board members cat fight and back bite to have their ways. Obviously, with barely illiterate high school graduates, our nation is in trouble.

I ran a business in Clearwater for 10 years and hired dozens of employees. My biggest problem was not that people were unskilled, but that they had a miserable work ethic. Many were habitually late, dressed inappropriately, didn't seem to want to work, and always wanted more money than their work deserved. I had no trouble training them. They just did not seem to be prepared by the educational system for life in the real world.

The main stimulus for my writing this is a recent event associated with observations in my personal life. My name is Robert Hurt and I am 59 years old, and semi-retired. Recently my niece purchased a house and during the time between leaving her apartment and occupying the house, her son of 15, a brighter-than-average "B" student, came to live with us. I took on part of the responsibility of driving him to and from his bus stop and marching band practice.

It was a wonderful experience. I got to talk with him about school, politics, religion, current events, his thoughts and activities, and so on. He did not know much about anything, it seemed. What really shocked me was the discovery that his school day ended at 1:50 in the afternoon. How, I wondered, could kids learn much in only half a day of school? When I asked him what he had learned that day, I normally got an answer that was nonresponsive, and it was not a petulant teenage answer. He honestly could not remember.

I concluded that the people who devised the current plan of teaching Florida's children need to be given an extended vacation while a few truly competent educators take over and fix the

mess that has evolved over the past hundred years. After stewing over it for a couple of months, I decided to write this proposal for change.

Primary Goals

Educational Goals

All students should be both taught and trained in the development of demonstrable skills in the following subjects first and foremost:

- English language communication skills
- Philosophy and human responsibility toward other humans
- State, national, world history, and world religions
- Citizenship skills for family, community, state, and nation
- Math and science skills
- Physical health, hygiene, fitness, and grooming
- Mental health, hygiene, fitness, and grooming
- Arts, particularly music, oratory, handwriting, drawing/painting
- Parenting and marital responsibilities
- Games, play, and relaxation/meditation

In my opinion, actual religious instruction should be the exclusive province of the home.

Accommodation Goals

In addition to imparting knowledge and wisdom to those being taught, the educational process needs to be conditioned as follows

- **Learning and Application.** It must be guaranteed “effective”. That is, traditional and well-known techniques must be employed to ensure students actually *learn* (retain) and *can apply* the subject matter. Specifically, the laws of association and repetition of learning must be applied *at school* as a matter of both practice and policy – students must study at school and under supervision.
- **Student Teaching.** All students must be taught to *teach other students*, and must demonstrate skill at teaching them, for it is axiomatic that learning to teach, and then actually teaching a subject one knows is the best way of ensuring retention and effective use of the material taught.
- **Social Order.** “School” must fit into the social order economically and practically. It should not interfere with parents’ ability to produce revenue with which to house, clothe, and feed children. School hours must accommodate the ever-evolving social circumstances of our society.

- **Variety and Duration.** School must be of sufficient variety and duration to keep students interested and involved, and to ensure students spend adequate time reading, studying, repeating, exercising, drilling, and teaching.

Problems

Our present system of education is grossly deficient in several respects, and that is shown by a number of problems, the primary one of which is listed first:

- **Student Literacy.** Many if not most of our children, upon graduating from high school, are barely literate, and are certainly ignorant of their responsibilities to society and fellow individuals.
- **Lack of Study.** Students do not study at school. If the typical parent asks the typical student what he learned at school, the typical answer is a blank stare or prolonged period of silence. Studying occurs after teachers impart basic instruction about the material to students. Proper study converts mere information into real learning. Studying includes reading, looking up and using misunderstood words and phrases as they are encountered, re-reading, drilling, doing exercises, and explaining the material. The reason students do not study at school is that they do not spend sufficient time at school, and so the school administrators cannot fit study into the daily schedule.
- **Community.** School days do not fit community needs, and in fact, they contribute to severe problems in the community. I am guessing that roughly 30% of the students come from single-parent homes, and those parents must work. 80% or more of the students come from homes in which all adults work. That means when children leave school at 2 PM, around 50% must go into day care at a cost of about \$100 per week (sometimes discounted for more than one child), and another 30% or more are left on their own with no adult supervision. Those who are unsupervised are likely to get into all kinds of trouble, including drugs, sex, and crimes. I heard a recent TV commentator claim there are 2 million pregnant teenagers in America, and that most had sex the first time in their own homes. That means at least 4 million are sexually active and insufficiently supervised at home.
- **Education Time and Direction.** It takes 12 years to educate the student to the high-school graduate level, and many high school graduates are inept because they do not have the aptitude for classroom schools. 12 years is far too much time for the actual learning level achieved. **Lack of Useful Skills.** presently requires home.
- **Budget.** The state government is under constant pressure and strain to increase the education budget and to find funds to pay for it without raising taxes. Part of this is because of burgeoning enrollment as a result of people moving into the state. It is also a result of running school systems inefficiently and not making proper or best use of the facilities and other resources available. Specifically, school buildings are underutilized, and teaching staff is off for 2 to 3 months out of each year. Consequently, children must spend 12 years to get a basic high school education. They should graduate after 9 to 10 years.



- **Teaching Staff.** I imagine the state does its best to hire qualified, competent, energetic, and efficient teachers. Low pay is not likely to attract the very best, but then most teachers do not become teachers out of financial greed, nor because they are too inept to find other gainful employment that pays more. They simply like to teach. However, if teachers are not being hamstrung by school administrations, they are themselves bound to be part of the cause of the educational problems. There are two primary reasons for this
 - **Public Ignorance of Teacher and Student Performance.** Since the public is ignorant, it cannot bring public pressure to oust ineffective teachers and replace them with good ones.
 - **Unions.** Bad teachers can hide in the system, protected by unions and civil service regulations that make it expensive and difficult to replace them. Unfortunately, the same is true of school officials. Unions should have absolutely no say over whether a government employee in a position of public trust is fired or replaced.

Solutions

Solving the above problems effectively and efficiently will require sweeping and dramatic changes in the structure of the educational process. There will be much resistance to them because they are different, difficult, and require change by people who are ingrained in a government-run institution that is a self-perpetuating quasi-failure that is overburdened with both politics by those who want to force a social agenda on students, and trappings of “political correctness” that produce professional pressures which make any practical improvements next to impossible. Elements of the solutions need further study and investigation, but these fundamental solutions will cure the problems I have enumerated.

- **11-Hour School Days.** Children should be attending school for 11 hours per day, probably from 7AM to 6PM, at least 5 days per week. This schedule will allow all parents to be at home in order to dispatch the children to school and to greet the children upon arrival back home. Parents will no longer have to subject their children to potential molestation in day care centers, spend a small fortune on day care, nor allow their children to run the streets because they cannot get home from work in time to supervise them. Furthermore, the school schedule will allow intramural sports, football/basketball/track practice, marching band practice, and study all to be done during school hours.
- **11-Month School Years.** Children should be on similar work scheduled to parents. They do not require 2 or 3 months off from school each year. Furthermore, a 3-month hiatus provides no known benefit to children, parents, or society. In addition, it increases idle time that diminishes both discipline and learning to have too much time off. By contrast, using the school facilities for 11 months out of the year allows a month for both vacation with family and for special maintenance or enhancement of school

facilities. It also more fully utilizes the facilities for which taxpayers are spending a lot of money.

- **Study in School, Not at Home.** The school day should contain at least two hours of organized supervised study consisting of repeatedly going over the material (“Chinese Drill”), reading additional materials, drilling with other students in such a manner that drill twins rotate between coach and student, doing written exercises, practicing penmanship, practicing proper oral communication, role playing, and so on. Children should not be expected to study at home, but should be given extra credit for showing measurable results from home study. Study skills, including looking up misunderstood words and phrases, should be rigorously taught in school, and periodically reviewed and tested at all levels. The results of study should be tested daily, if only briefly.
- **Students Become Teachers.** It is axiomatic that we all owe a debt to those who have taught us, and the only way to repay it is to teach others. It is also axiomatic that teaching is the best demonstration of learning. In other words, if you can’t teach it, you don’t know it. Therefore, all students past kindergarten, even the “stupid” ones, should be taught and guided in the teaching of other, junior students. The brighter and more accomplished students will love the stimulus of teaching others, and the less accomplished will better solidify and demonstrate what they know by the teaching process. Real teachers should supervise such teaching activities and test the students to validate their ability to instruct juniors. Having such student teachers will tremendously reduce the burdens on the actual teachers, and it will produce smarter students.
- **Teacher Sabbaticals and In-House Training.** Teachers need to keep up to date on the latest technology for their profession, as well as on the latest discoveries in their fields of special knowledge. The state should sponsor special in-school “retraining” of teachers, supervised by a committee of the most respected and skilled teachers in the school. For this purpose, educators from universities should visit schools and impart new knowledge to teachers; teachers should also avail themselves at school and during school time as needed of video tapes, internet, and university-related distance-learning techniques to keep abreast of new subject matter and teaching methods. However, once every 7 years, teachers should take a year off to attend university, go on extended vacation, and otherwise get a break from academic life as a teacher. This time-honored tradition needs to be restored to help invigorate and revivify teachers.
- **Statistics - Broad Publication of Teacher/Student Results.** It is axiomatic that the public cannot see it cannot regulate. Since the public is paying for the education of society’s children, the public has a right to know what each teacher and each student is accomplishing *before* it is too late to do anything about it. And, *if* the public is adequately informed, it can pressure the school boards and legislation to take effective action to improve results. For this reason, schools should publish in local newspapers and on the internet the results produced by each teacher and student for the school quarter. In addition, schools should maintain and post these results on statistical charts inside the schools for all interested parties to see. Students should plot their own progress on the charts daily using a points



system for various kinds of work and results produced by the student, including study, practical ability, and scholarship test scores. Teacher results should include the average and exceptional (low/high) student grades, as well as a rating for proficiency given by students, leading student teachers, and other teaching staff. Student results should include grades in each subject and attitude/comportment. All should include attendance. By broad public dissemination of the results, neither students nor teachers will be able to escape the inevitable repercussions, be they admonishments or praise.

- **Teacher and Administrator Pay.** All teachers should receive a basic subsistence pay just for being teachers, and those with more time as a teacher should get slightly more pay. However, the “profit” portion of teacher pay should be directly tied to the results they produce, not tenure. Those who produce smarter, more demonstrably able students should get more pay. The same is true of school administrators. Teachers should rate them, for it is up to the administrators to set up teaching and classroom schedules so that the operation is harmonious and productive. By rebalancing the pay structures this way, the brighter and more energetic and able teachers will be recruited, and the less able will drop away into some other enterprise more suitable to their abilities. Since our children are the future of our world, they should be put only in the hands of the most competent teachers and administrators. The rating system should be statewide, and all teachers and students should be compared to all others, regardless of race or ethnicity. The bottom line is: school staff should compete for jobs and paychecks just as do all others in society; only by setting up a visible system of competition will teachers and administrators be forced to be the best they can be. Our children deserve nothing less.
- **Revamp Educational Echelons.** The echelons of our educational system need to be revamped.
 - In Germany, students graduate from high school at age 15 and then go into an apprenticeship program or “gymnasium” (pronounced goom-nah-ze-oom), a 2-year program that prepares students for University or “fachhochschule” pronounced (fahk-hoke-shoo-luh) or special skills high school in which students can learn special commercial abilities like computer programming. The classical German educational system is the best and most efficient in the world. It is a way to channel students into their likely paths. Slow or inept learners are not allowed to burden the school system or slow down the fast learners. In lieu of the advanced schools, an apprenticeship program of 3 years guarantees that students are competent at some kind of trade before being unleashed into the business world.
 - We should institute an official state-sponsored apprenticeship program in which all businesses are encouraged to hire, train, and certify apprentices who participate in the. Once students get through basic high school, if they do not want to go, or are not scholastically capable of going to advanced school, then they should be directed to apprenticeship programs where they can earn bare subsistence pay and learn a trade like carpentry, plumbing, electrical, painting, housekeeping, gardening, sales, or clerical work. The state government

and local industries should collaborate on these programs, and they should be removed from the trade unions, most of which are simply fronts for organized crime and methods of foisting incompetent and overpriced workers off onto companies that are struggling to earn any kind of profit. After the apprenticeship program, the graduate is free to join a union. The benefit of this program is that young people who are employed in the basic trades develop certifiable competence, and employers contribute to society by training them. Employers also benefit by getting cheap (minimum wage) and malleable work force for a 3-year apprenticeship program. However, after the apprenticeship is over, employers can be required to pay graduate apprentices 1.5x or 2x minimum wage. It is important to note that many parents will still be paying for housing and/or food for the apprentices, so minimum wage is fair for all concerned.

- We should institute a 3-year Commercial Skills Institute for high school graduates who do not want to enter a profession like doctor, lawyer, or scientist. This would be equivalent to Junior College, and would produce an associates degree. This kind of school would be funded partly by the state and partly by the student or his parents, scholastic standards would be high, and the percentage of state funding would be based strictly on academic performance. These institutes would be encouraged to offer services to private industry at lower-than-normal commercial rates, and the money earned should go into the funds to support the institutes, hire competent staff, etc. A congressional oversight committee should monitor local review boards whose job would be to assist in setting commercial rates for services offered by the institutes, and to ensure that education (not earning money) is the top priority and is kept in balance.
- **Commercial and Charitable Projects.** We should institute a program in High Schools of allowing students to perform commercial projects at school and on school time in an organized group fashion for local businesses, and to balance this with charitable group activities for the community in general. All revenues produced should go into that school's budgets for basic solvency, and 50 percent should be available to purposes agreed upon by the student body. The local school board should have an oversight committee to keep the commercial activities of the schools in proper context with educational goals.
- **Increase Financial Contributions by Parents.** Since implementing a longer school day will save on child care and give families in which all the adults work some additional revenue, the state should require all such parents to pay some reasonable portion of the revenue saved into the school system as a tax to be spent only on education. Most parents will be relieved to know their children are not on the streets, and their net revenue will increase.
- This will provide money to the schools to help cover education needs, and it is the fairest tax of all. Furthermore, it is fair for parents to pay their shares.



- As it is now, marching band parents must pay the extra costs the school does not pay them. That can amount to the equivalent of a tax of \$1000 to \$2000 a year. The reasoning seems to be that marching band students benefit in some way the other students do not, so they should be required to pay. By the same token, homes in which both parents work are benefiting financially by the fact that they work *and* are home when their children are out of school, so they should contribute some of their excess to the education of their own children.
- **Pillage All Surpluses.** There really is no excuse for the government to build up money surpluses. A surplus of money in the bank accounts of government, such as the huge surpluses in the retirement fund over the past several years, is merely the equivalent and result of higher, and therefore unjust, taxes than citizens should pay. For this reason, legislators should force the government to pillage all surpluses in order to pay for the cost of education.
- **Change the Lottery and All Other Gambling Rules.** It is absurd that a lottery is allowed to grow to the size it does (tens of millions of dollars), and such a paltry amount of it goes to the state for education. The state should tax all forms of gambling, particularly the lottery, and give the money to education. However, the tax should be at the source, not at the destination. In other words, the state should take 50% of all lottery money paid in before deductions for costs of advertising and winnings. Likewise, the state should tax all floating gambling casinos a flat rate to operate the casino off shore or to dock, and the tax should be paid monthly on the earnings of the boat. If lottery and gambling officials do not like this, shut them down. Gambling is bad for society.
- **Feed the Children at School.** Children who are hungry or undernourished do not learn well, and children who do not drink sufficient water do not think well and have bowel and other organ problems. There are no established and enforced nutritional standards in our society. There are some substantiated facts, however. Fresh, raw, organic food is dramatically more nutritious than any cooked or processed food. Therefore, the schools should feed the children two meals a day at state expense, and parents who can afford it should be required to pay for it. They should not be entitled to send food with a child to school. The school should serve a breakfast as soon as the child arrives, and it should include fresh raw fruit juices, nuts, and cereals. The noon or early afternoon meal should include legumes, grains, and fresh, raw vegetables (such as salads) and vegetable juices. It is much less expensive to outfit school kitchens with the equipment to prepare fresh raw fruit and vegetable juices, and much more nutritious than any kind of cooked or preprocessed food. Children should be required to drink ½ ounce of pure water per pound of body weight during the school day, and they should be granted ample opportunity to use the toilet for relief. Children will be brighter, healthier, happier, and smarter if schools implement this diet plan. Furthermore, it will cost about the same as the present cafeteria plan that has expensive cooking equipment and feeds children preprocessed and cooked food in excess of common sense.
- **Some Study Needed.** I have not conducted an in-depth study of the proposed solutions herein. However, I do not think such a study is needed,

for the solutions are common sense. The only aspects that need study are the economic profiles of the changes and the manner of implementation so as to minimize the transitional havoc. Some of these issues may need to be brought before the voters.

Benefits and Results

The benefits of the foregoing changes to the Educational system should be intuitively obvious from my explanations. So, I will summarize here.. The chief benefits are:

- In summary, the foregoing goals are accomplished.
- Better-educated (smarter) children.
- Children graduate from High School at 14 or 15 instead of 17 and can enter a gainful apprenticeship or advanced school earlier than normal. This makes them fully available to society's work force earlier in life and with greater competence, without depriving them of a "childhood".
- Children will have been trained to teach and to work as effective citizens and employees.
- The cost of an education is reduced because the length of time required to educate children is reduced. Furthermore, some activities of students can actually produce the revenue needed to pay for the education.
- Children are healthier and happier
- Children are supervised all day long, whether or not all of the parents in the family work.
- The net revenue to the educational programs is increased
- Teachers become more competent or leave, and the school system attracts more competent teachers by compensating them according to competence and achievement.
- Society has more visibility of the real results of the education we all pay for, and can therefore respond intelligently by applauding jobs well done, or pressuring school boards and legislators to correct deficiencies in time to do it effectively.

Proposal and Offer of Assistance

I hereby propose that the Florida School Boards and Legislature enact and enforce regulations that implement the changes outlined in the Solutions topic. I hereby offer any assistance that may be needed, and of which I am capable of rendering, in bringing about the changes.

Bob Hurt