

We Are Failing Our Children

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In 1983, the famous report, “A Nation at Risk” concluded that our country was failing to effectively educate our children. The authors were so critical of our schools that the preamble of the report summarized their findings by saying that; “if an unfriendly foreign power had imposed our schools upon us, we would have considered it an act of war.” That was 1983.

In 1991, President George H.W. Bush held an education summit, called “Goals 2000.” Bill Clinton was the chair of that summit. After days of deliberation, another report was issued stating that, “by 2000, all children will enter school

ready to learn and 90% of our children will graduate from high school.” Many other goals were listed, none of which were achieved.

In 2001, President George W. Bush and Congress passed a bill called the, “No Child Left Behind Act.” This legislation was designed improve accountability and to help schools meet the needs of every student. It failed to make any meaningful difference in student performance.

In 2009, “Common Core” was launched as a new curriculum and testing regimen that would help children learn what they needed to learn, and the tests would prove it. Alas, academic achievement did not improve for the vast majority of our children.

Here in Idaho, we have continued to increase school funding, hoping to see improvement in student performance, but it has not occurred. Over half of Idaho students are not scoring at grade level in math, only 73% of third graders are reading at grade level, 20% of our students drop out of high school prior to graduation and only 42% of our students achieve a post-secondary degree. Basically, almost 60% of our young people will reach adulthood ill prepared to successfully participate in our 21st Century economy.

After almost four decades of programs, studies, goals and spending, our schools are performing pretty much as they always have. That performance continues to fail a majority of our children.

Isn't it time to think about doing something different? Isn't it time we had a school system that focuses on the child, not the adults, not the curriculum, and certainly not the test! Isn't it time to decide what our children need to know and be able to do as they enter adulthood?

We have a 19th Century school system attempting to prepare students for the 21st Century. That will not work, no matter how many studies we do and no matter how much money we spend.

We need to re-think our notion of school and the time to do it is now. In fact way past time! Why shouldn't Idaho lead the charge!

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