

Are Compulsory School Attendance Laws Good for America?

By Samuel Blumenfeld

Should a child be forced to attend a public school that will turn him into a functional illiterate? Since no public school will guarantee that a child will be taught to read in a manner that will help him achieve high literacy, why should a parent send a child to that kind of school? Indeed, why should compulsory school attendance laws force parents to do something that will harm their children?

It is assumed by the vast majority of Americans that the issue of compulsory school attendance is a settled matter, part and parcel of every civilized nation-state, and a prerequisite of a democratic society. We all acknowledge that a representative form of government requires an educated electorate for its survival.

But what happens when that government's schools no longer know how to teach children to read and write, when those schools turn children not into civilized citizens, but into barbarians? What happens when millions of parents feel compelled to remove their children from government schools in order to make sure that their children do get an education? What happens is that the basic premises of compulsory attendance and government education come into question.

The glaring fact is that despite our compulsory attendance laws, we now have more illiteracy and more ignorance among Americans than before such laws were enacted. The first compulsory school attendance law was passed in Massachusetts in 1852 and by 1918 every state in the Union had such a law. Yet, the fact is that these laws have merely increased the amount of time children spend in school, not the amount of learning or knowledge they acquire.

The Way It Was

To find out how much better educated Americans were before compulsory attendance laws and government schools existed, all we have to do is read DuPont de Nemours' fascinating little book, *National Education in the United States of America*, published in 1812. He writes:

"The United States are more advanced in their educational facilities than most countries. They have a large number of primary schools; and as their paternal affection protects children from working in the fields, it is possible to send them to the school-master--a condition which does not prevail in Europe.

"Most young Americans, therefore, can read, write and cipher. Not more than four in a thousand are unable to write legibly--even neatly....

“England, Holland, the Protestant Cantons of Switzerland more nearly approach the standard of the United States, because in those countries the Bible is read; it is considered a duty to read it to children; and in that form of religion the sermons and liturgy in the language of the people tend to increase and formulate ideas of responsibility. Controversy, also has developed argumentation and has thus given room for the exercise of logic.

“In America, a great number of people read the Bible, and all the people read a newspaper. The fathers read aloud to their children while breakfast is being prepared--a task which occupies the mothers for three quarters of an hour every morning. And as the newspapers of the United States are filled with all sorts of narratives...they disseminate an enormous amount of information.”

Obviously, back in the very early days of this republic, education was a family affair closely connected to religious practice. A nation built on Biblical principles had to be a highly literate one. In addition, all of this education was achieved without any government involvement, without any centralized educational bureaucracy, without any professors of education, or accrediting agencies or teacher certification. And, most significantly, without any compulsory attendance laws.

The Way It Is

Contrast that happy picture of complete educational freedom and high literacy with the present situation in which the State has assumed the function of educator, at great expense to the taxpayer, with all sorts of laws and regulations forcing the population to patronize a system that is turning out functional illiterates by the millions.

According to an article in the Spring 1989 issue of *Education Canada*, published by the Canadian Education Association:

“It is currently estimated that one million Canadians are almost totally illiterate and another four million are termed ‘functionally illiterate.’ In the United States these figures are estimated respectively at 26 million and 60 million.”

Both Canada and the United States have had compulsory attendance laws for decades. The purpose of these laws was to make certain that every child was educated. The laws were particularly aimed at the children of the poor, and yet it is they who have suffered the most at the hands of government education.

Even Secretary of Education Cavazos, in 1989, admitted in the frankest terms that the government education system was failing the American people. In his sixth annual report card on American schools, he repeated the well-known litany of failures that still plague American education: declining SAT scores, declining interest in math and science, declining literacy, and a soaring dropout rate in Washington, DC. He said that we were still wallowing in a “tide of mediocrity,” and that “we must do better or perish as the

nation we know today.”

Has anything changed since 1989? Yes, it has all gotten worse. In fact, it was an alarming report on American literacy issued in 2007 by the National Endowment for the Arts that informed Americans that the reading problem had deteriorated further since Secretary Cavazos issued his own alarming assessment. The chairman of the Endowment, Dana Gioia, stated:

“This is a massive social problem. We are losing the majority of the new generation. They will not achieve anything close to their potential because of poor reading.”

The Endowment report revealed that the number of 17-year-olds who never read for pleasure increased from 9 percent in 1984 to 19 percent in 2004. Almost half of Americans between the ages of 18 and 24 never read books for pleasure. Why? Because reading has become a painful, tortuous exercise that they wish to avoid.

The simple truth is that literacy is not at all difficult to achieve, provided the schools use the right phonetic teaching methods. Indeed, the home-school movement has already proven that parents can actually do a better job of teaching reading than our high-priced professionals.

It has also been shown that children progress better academically when taught at home, and that the cost of educating a child at home is less than \$1,000 a year.

So why do we need compulsory attendance laws? We need them so that the ruling liberal elite can dumb down the population and make sure they can't read. For proof of this, listen to the words of Professor Anthony G. Oettinger of Harvard University, given in a lecture to an audience of Telecom executives in 1982:

“The present ‘traditional’ concept of literacy has to do with the ability to read and write. But the real question that confronts us today is: How do we help citizens function well in their society? How can they acquire the skills necessary to solve their problems?

“Do we, for example, really want to teach people to do a lot of sums or write in ‘a fine round hand’ when they have a five-dollar hand-held calculator or a word processor to work with? Or, do we really have to have everybody literate--writing and reading in the traditional sense--when we have the means through our technology to achieve a new flowering of oral communication?

“What is speech recognition and speech synthesis all about if it does not lead to ways of reducing the burden on the individual of the imposed notions of literacy that were a product of nineteenth century economics and technology?...

“It is the traditional idea that says certain forms of communication, such as comic books are ‘bad.’ But in the modern context of functionalism they may not be all that bad.”

I doubt that there are any parents in America who send their children to school to learn to read comic books. If anything, they want their children to be taught to read and write in the traditional manner. They don't consider learning to read as a "burden imposed on the individual." Rather, if taught in the proper phonetic manner, learning to read becomes a joyful experience for children eager to expand the use of their minds and language.

Although the compulsory attendance laws were enacted to make sure that everyone learned to read, their new application by the likes of Professor Oettinger and his liberal colleagues is to make sure that the population can be controlled and manipulated by schools that serve the agenda of the ruling elite.

There is no longer any need for compulsory attendance laws since the ruling class no longer believes that literacy is for everyone, the poor and the rich. In reality, the compulsory attendance laws are the linchpin in the plan for a socialist world government. Such laws have been used by every modern dictator to control the people and mold the minds of the children. Such laws are not only not needed in a free society, but ultimately lead to its demise.