

# Why the Federal Government Should Get Out of Education

By Samuel L. Blumenfeld

The real issue is Limited Government versus Unlimited Government

Most Americans want less government, smaller government and lower taxes. The only way to accomplish this is by abolishing federal departments and bureaucracies. As far back as the Reagan administration, Republicans promised to abolish the Department of Education. They couldn't do it then because they lacked a majority in Congress. But whatever happened to the plan to abolish the Department of Education when Republicans became the majority? Not only did they forget their promise, but in September 1996 they passed the single largest increase in federal education funding: \$3.5 billion. Who were the Republicans trying to impress? The National Education Association?

The basic question is: Can good education be provided in the U.S. without the help or intrusion of the federal government? The answer is clearly yes. In fact, there is ample evidence indicating that the present decline in educational quality is a direct result of federal funding which has been used by the educators to fund more and more expensive educational malpractice.

A little historical background will help us understand why the federal role in education in America is more of an aberration than a natural development. There is no mention of education in the U.S. Constitution. However, in 1785 and 1787, while the United States were still under the Articles of Confederation, the Continental Congress passed the Northwest Ordinance Acts which provided for the orderly settlement of the Northwest Territory and encouraged the establishment of schools in the territory by stating: "Religion, morality and knowledge being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall be encouraged." The new states were required to set aside the 16<sup>th</sup> section of each township to be used for educational purposes. But there was no requirement that the schools be government owned and operated.

Seventy-five years later, in 1862, Congress passed and President Lincoln signed the Morrill Land Grant Act providing each loyal state with 30,000 acres of land for each Senator and Representative, the land to be used for agricultural and mechanical schools under a measure proposed by Senator Justin S. Morrill of Vermont. Five years later, in 1867, a federal Office of Education was established. Its purpose was:

"To collect such statistics and facts as shall show the condition and progress of education in the several States and Territories, and to diffuse such information respecting the organization and management of schools and school systems, and methods of teaching as shall aid the People of the United States in the establishment and maintenance of efficient school systems, and otherwise promote the cause of education throughout the country."

It should be noted that the National Education Association had been founded ten years earlier in 1857 and that its members called for the establishment of a federal department of education at the founding convention. And it is obvious that in that statement of purpose was an expansionist view of the government's future role in education.

After World War I, the NEA began a long range campaign to get federal aid for public education. From 1867 to 1940--a period of 73 years--the Congress passed about 11 minor pieces of legislation related to education. The fear of federal control of schools kept most legislators from voting for federal aid to public education. But resistance was gradually broken down by such acts as the National School Lunch Act of 1946, the School Milk Program Act of 1954.

But it was the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 passed during the Johnson administration which opened the floodgates of the U.S. Treasury for the benefit of the education establishment. From 1965 to 1983--18 years--there were 43 education acts passed by the Congress, including the establishment in 1979 of a U.S. Department of Education with cabinet status. In the year 1994 alone, there were about 180 educational restructuring bills before Congress! The three most important bills enacted were the Goals 2000 Act, the School-to-Work Opportunities Act, and the Improving America's Schools Act, a reauthorization of the ESEA of 1965. All of this legislation was passed with much Republican help. In short, *the Congress launched an avalanche of bills which virtually amounted to a cultural revolution.*

It seemed as if all restraints had been removed on government expansion and intrusion into education, and the Republican Congress did nothing to reverse the trend. That is why the federal government has become a government of unlimited power.

We must return to the principle of limited government if we wish to reduce the cost of government and its unwarranted intrusion in the education of our children. A limited federal government does only those things that cannot be done by the states or the private sector. *The purpose of taxes is to pay for government not change society.*

There is no doubt that the federal intrusion in education has harmed education and produced the dumbing down effect. Test scores attest to this bizarre phenomenon. Since 1962, SAT verbal scores have declined despite billions of federal dollars pumped into public education. In September 1993, the U.S. Department of Education revealed that some 90 million adult Americans have grossly inadequate reading and writing skills, despite compulsory school attendance. The more federal money Congress pumps into education the worse it gets. Why? Because educational malpractice is very expensive, and without federal funding we'd have much less of it.

The simple truth is that federal education programs cost the taxpayers billions of dollars, yet not one of these programs has actually improved education. Claims have been made that Headstart is a successful program. But research indicates that whatever gains children make in Headstart are lost by the third grade.

Federal education grants subsidize a liberal academic elite with its secular humanist, socialist agenda, thus violating the Constitutional prohibition against establishing a state religion: Humanism.

The Data Collection System of the National Center for Education Statistics threatens family privacy and freedom. Children are not a “national resource” to be monitored and controlled for use by the state or industry. They are individuals whose lives belong to themselves, not to “the economy.”

The federal government has institutionalized educational malpractice by supporting unsound educational theories and practices which have found their way into the public schools via the federally funded National Diffusion Network. Federal aid to public education simply reinforces a socialist, government owned and operated education system which distorts market values and encourages monopoly union practices.

Meanwhile, the education establishment continues to grow and prosper. In 1982, the average public school teacher’s salary was \$19,274. In 1995 it was up to \$37,643., and in 2008 it us up to \$47,602. In 1982, per pupil expenditure was \$2,726. In 1995-96 the national average was up to \$6,213, and in 2009 it was up to \$9,963. In 1984, total expenditure for public education was \$134.5 billion. In 2002 it had risen to \$420 billion.

In short, never has public education been more generously supported by the taxpayer and never have our schools seen more violence, academic disarray, and parental dissatisfaction than the present. What is even more shocking is that over four million students must be drugged daily with Ritalin in order to be able to attend class.

Today, well-connected change agents like Mark Tucker are busy imposing on America the new Human Resources Development System, exuberantly described by Tucker in an 18-page letter to Hillary Clinton when her husband was elected President. Tucker described his system as “a seamless web of opportunities to develop one’s skills that literally extends from cradle to grave and is the same system for everyone--young and old, poor and rich, worker and full-time student.”

And so, in place of academic excellence, we have Outcome Based Education, Whole Language, Multiculturalism, Skinnerian Mastery Learning, National Teaching Standards and Certification, School-Based Clinics, Attitude Assessments, Global Citizenship, and Socialized Medicine for every student.

What is actually taking place is a cultural revolution engineered by behavioral psychologists, humanist educators, and socialist change agents using a whole galaxy of education programs to implement their agenda, financed by the federal government.

And much of this has taken place when Republicans were in control of Congress. And that accounts for the extreme frustration of conservatives who vote Republican but get liberal results. When will this change?

The takeover of the White House and the federal government by radical leftists has finally awakened the American people to what has happened to this country since we started allowing the federal government to exceed all limits placed on it by the Constitution. But in order to succeed in restoring the principles of government held by our founding fathers, we must return to limited government. This can only be done if the American people realize the potential for tyranny inherent in a government education system.

The most important institution in a socialist state is a government owned and controlled school system wherein children can be indoctrinated to accept a socialist way of life. And the best way to prevent this from occurring is to return to the concept of educational freedom in which the federal government has no role in education.

Local public schools can easily become private institutions governed by local trustees and supported by tuition fees. This would greatly reduce the tax burden on home owners and provide more than enough resources to pay for the tuitions of poor families. The costs of education would decrease dramatically since education would once more become reality based wherein the fundamental academic subjects would be taught without the added costs of educational malpractice. Individual intelligence would be enhanced, while collectivist group-think would be discarded.

Can this be done? Only if America's conservative leaders demand that it should be done. The home-school movement has already proven that parents can actually teach better than our high-priced professionals, 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.

If Americans want to once more experience what it means to be free, they must burst out of the high-priced straitjacket imposed on them by the socialist education tyrants. If they want better education at lower cost, then the prescription for success is simple: get the government out of education.