

ADDRESS TO THE SOUTH CAROLINA INDEPENDENT
SCHOOL ASSOCIATION

by

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Dr. Grice, Dr. Aimar, Mr. Rudisill, Mrs. Goddard, members of the South Carolina Independent School Association. It is a great pleasure for me to have this opportunity to address you, for I consider all of you as extremely valuable soldiers in a new American revolution, a quiet, non-violent revolution to renew our basic American ideals. Our founding fathers could not have foreseen all of the dangers to freedom which this nation would have to face, but they had no doubt that substantial dangers would arise. Our Constitution is not perfect. It has been used and abused. But as long as it has continued to provide the citizenry with some means to counter the incursions made against them by power-hungry government through its politicians and bureaucrats, it will continue to be respected. You still respect the Constitution because it permitted you the freedom to leave the public school system and start your own independent schools.

It should be noted that our Constitution made no provision for education. Our founding fathers, with very few exceptions, believed that education was primarily

a parental responsibility and should not involve the state. They did not conceive of a hard-fast separation between school and state in the same way that they conceived the separation between church and state. But one wishes that they had. How much turmoil and conflict this nation would have been spared had our founding fathers been able to foresee the institution and growth of public education to its present monstrous proportions. To my mind, our public education system is the greatest threat to American freedom, because it is in that system that the vast majority of our children are being taught to accept a totalitarian America run by social scientists, bureaucrats and politicians with unlimited funds collected by rapacious taxation.

In my book, HOW TO START YOUR OWN PRIVATE SCHOOL, I made a modest attempt to write a revisionist history of public education, to show that the idea was foreign to our ideals in the first place and that intelligent opposition to it existed from the beginning and continued to exist. Recently, for example, I became acquainted with a fascinating book entitled POISON DROPS IN THE FEDERAL SENATE by Zach. Montgomery, a scathing criticism of public education published in 1886. Yes, there were books being written in 1886 warning us of the dangers to our country inherent in our public educational system. The author had made a statistical study and discovered that the more public education a state had, the higher was its crime rate. He believed that the reasons for this was loss of parental authority and home influence over children in the state-controlled schools and the neglect of moral and religious education in the government schools. Massachusetts, he found, with a long tradition of public education, had one of the highest crime rates in the country in 1870. And things haven't changed much

since then. Let me quote to you a few lines from an editorial in the Boston Herald American of October 4, 1974 -- just about two weeks ago -- to give you an idea of how the citadel of public education is faring today:

From four different official sources the citizens of Boston received further grim evidence this week how the inexorable increase in criminal violence is ripping great rents in the fabric of community life.

The most recent FBI crime statistics show that though the upsurge of violent crime continues unabated almost everywhere, Boston appears worse off than most large cities. . . .

But it is also disturbing that the FBI statistics reveal that while cities and suburbs alike are in the same predicament, Boston is winning for itself the dubious distinction of being first among equals. . . .

In its upward spiral during the first half of this year, the total index of serious crimes in Boston, including homicides, rape and aggravated assault, shot up at the rate of 26 percent over the preceding year, in contrast with 16 percent nationwide.

So the city with the oldest public school system in the nation is the one plagued with the greatest crime rate. Obviously, public education has not had the moral or intellectual impact it was supposed to have. Now, with court-ordered busing, a long, protracted struggle between whites and blacks has broken out. The poor whites, tenaciously attached to their neighborhoods through long settlement and tradition, don't have the money to flee to the suburbs. And the blacks, largely confined to a dilapidated, crime-infested area in the middle of the city,

are anxious to break out. The public educational system, through a program of forced busing, is being used to accelerate the break out and to destroy the old poor white neighborhoods. If you can find any education going on in the middle of all of all of this, let me know. The only thing that can save the poor people of Boston from losing everything they have worked for all of their lives, is to abandon public education and to start their own private schools, just as you have done here in South Carolina and in other parts of the South. Let us not kid ourselves. The last thing the public educational system is interested in is education. It has always been, as present events now make obvious, a political and social instrument of the government.

Everywhere you turn, the public school is in conflict with the public it is supposed to serve. In West Virginia we have seen violent protests over the immoral textbooks being used in the public schools. There have been shootings, beatings, the closing of mines, business places and schools over textbooks. If these people invested their energy in creating private schools instead of beating their heads against a stone wall, they could have the kinds of schools they want using the kinds of textbooks they want. In Brockton, Massachusetts, a woman has been crusading for a non-denominational prayer room in the public schools. She, as well as many others, are also working to get a Constitutional amendment permitting prayer in public schools. If only this woman and the many other parents who want their children to get religious instruction would start their own schools, they would not have to spend years in courtrooms and thousands of dollars on lawyers to get what they can get by building their own schools. Perhaps these people simply enjoy a steady diet of frustration.

Many parents, however, justify public education because they believe that that is the only way their children can get an education, whatever that is. In most cases it merely means getting a diploma. But in San Francisco last month a superior court judge threw out a one-million-dollar lawsuit brought in behalf of a high school graduate who achieved only a fifth-grade reading level. "There is no duty under common law to teach a child to read," argued the assistant city attorney. On that basis the judge found the suit had no legal merit. So there you have the entire sham and fraud of public education: a compulsory educational system which forces parents to bus their children to dangerous schools but has no duty to teach the children to read. The government will move heaven and earth at your expense to create racially violent situations endangering the lives of your children. But they will not be held accountable for the education which does not take place.

And the reason for this is not too difficult to discern. Public education doesn't educate because it has a vested interest in ignorance. For only an ignorant public could possibly tolerate anything as wasteful, expensive, and morally destructive as public education. Why does it continue to exist? Because too many people in the public educational system are making more money out of it than ever before.

"Public education is expected to cost \$108 billion this year," reported the Boston Herald American of October 6, 1974, "and accurate valid methods to evaluate how effectively the money is being spent are virtually nonexistent."

\$108 billion is a powerful incentive to keep the public educators in business. It's a heck of a lot safer than selling heroin. But the results are about the

same. It's no wonder that the kids are taking to drugs, which, incidentally, are bought and sold right in your big public schools. Some of the kids are actually being drugged by the school authorities themselves to make them more amenable to the softening up process of public education. Why do so many parents tolerate this? They tolerate it either out of ignorance, helplessness, or indifference. And when they turn to their politicians for guidance, they are simply told to "obey the law."

But to create the independent schools which you have created required intelligence, initiative, and interest. It also required courage and financial sacrifice. Above all, it required love: love for your children, concern for their safety and well being. You started small, in private homes and churches. Ten years later you have your own buildings, libraries, gymnasiums, and your own state-wide organization. You are now a force to be reckoned with. And all of these are the results of the efforts of people who value their freedom. You created islands of educational sanity in a sea of educational chaos. And your islands keep growing larger. You proved that public education is not necessary. You proved that parents and communities could control and oversee the education of their own youngsters if they took the financial responsibility for it. You are the educational success story of the decade. And your success is also one of the best kept secrets in America. Why? Because the bureaucrats and leaders of public education don't want to lose their hold on \$108 billion.

And now that you have created your own independent schools you must decide what kind of institutions you want them to be. You must decide what kind of teaching is to go on within those walls. You must get down to the nitty gritty

of what education is all about. So much hot air on the subject has been vented by public educators over the years that the public has grown weary of understanding what they were talking about. And that was exactly the reason for the hot air, so that parents and taxpayers would pay through the nose for public education and not ask what they were getting for their money. If they did ask, the hot air vents were opened, and pretty soon everyone was asleep.

But the parents who send their children to your schools have that school bill, along with the electric bill and the phone bill, staring at them. They want to know what they are getting for their money. And so the private school must prove its value rather clearly. It must teach. It cannot pretend to teach, not for long anyway.

So you are confronted with the question of what should you teach. Most parents have a very vague notion of what formal education should consist of. They generally expect their children to go through the same thing they did when they were in school. Few ever stop to evaluate the education they got. Few ever stop to wonder if the education they got could have been better. But as a writer I have spent much time thinking and writing about education, and there is one thing that has struck me more than anything else about education during my life: and that is that the truly educated person is really self-educated.

Now, you will ask, what do I mean by an educated person. By educated I mean someone who knows how to use his mind, who exercises independent judgment based on knowledge and experience and knows how to obtain both, someone who knows the difference between fact and opinion, someone who does not deceive himself. Yes, I would consider a man educated, no matter how little formal education he had,

if he knew how to use his mind.

But, you may think, the self-educated man is one in a hundred. He is not the average student you must deal with. But you are wrong. Everyone starts out as a self-educator. We all start educating ourselves at a very early age. In fact, by the time we are ready for the first grade, we've taught ourselves to speak a couple of thousand words of our own language. Not bad for a start. So a child is an avid self-educator during his preschool years. Not many of us appreciate how much a child achieves for himself during those years. But by the time he is six we feel he is ready for formal education. So we send him to school. Now, as far as I am concerned, the primary aim of formal education is to provide the youngster with a familiarity and working knowledge of the tools needed for greater self-education. In other words, formal education should be an aid to continued self-education, not a hindrance to it as it has become in the public schools.

Let me explain what I mean by the tools of self-education. The first tool the child learns to use is language itself, and this he starts learning by himself. Language is a symbolic system and the child learns through trial and error that certain sounds coming out of his parents' mouths stand for certain things. To make himself understood to them he tries to imitate those sounds. He learns the use of a sound-symbol system for the purpose of communication, to make his feelings and desires known. As a newborn infant, his only means of communicating his needs was by crying. But by the time he is six, he has learned to use a highly complex sound symbol system which he now uses to communicate his needs, desires, and discomforts. Language is a mind tool he has learned to use. In his mind he

accumulates the meanings of thousands of sound symbols. Memory is reinforced through repeated use, until he can use language without thinking about it.

We send a child to school at six in order to teach him additional tools of learning: that is, reading, writing, and arithmetic. These are the three basic skills which the child must master in order to pursue his own self-education, and nowhere has public education failed more than in teaching these three basic skills. Why has public education found it so difficult to impart these skills? I think it has something to do with the \$108 billion. There's a TV commercial these days showing how children in the public schools can be taught to read with the aid of expensive IBM electric typewriters, earphones, and other audio-visual equipment. One wonders how George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison learned to read without them. But you and I know that it really doesn't cost much to honestly teach a child to read, write, and calculate. But in order to bilk the taxpayers of \$108 billion you've got to make it as complicated as possible. And the more complicated you make the teaching of reading, writing, and arithmetic, the more complicated you make teaching everything else, and the more money you need with which to do it all.

The trouble with public education is that it destroys the child's self-educative processes by convincing him that he really can't educate himself, that only his teachers can educate him, and that if he doesn't grow smarter through their efforts, then there is something wrong with him. They impress him with the importance of education; they warn him that he will never become anything without an education; and they make sure that he understands that they hold the key to his education. From the active self-educator he was as a child, he is transformed

into a passive receiver of schoolroom indoctrination.

Many of you who came into the private schools from the public ones probably brought something of this attitude with you. I hope, though, that you have lost it. Public educators tend to have an inflated sense of self-importance, especially if they've gone to a college of education. The worst educators of all, of course, are the professors of education. There may be a few honest men among them, but I think that every professor of education is a fraud by definition, not at all interested in education, but rather in manipulation. I think if we called them professors of manipulation, we would have a better understanding of what it is they are preoccupied with. Their interest is in the manipulation and control of young people, not in facilitating their students' self-education. The very fact that the behavioral scientists now have such a hold over the theory and practice of public education, is a dead giveaway that manipulation and control are the objectives of public education. In fact, I was looking through a reading program the other day in which each lesson had a behavioral objective, not a learning objective.

So your role is much different from that of the public educator, or more correctly the public manipulator. You have a direct responsibility to the parents who pay your salaries. And to earn that salary you have to be a value to your students. Your greatest value can only come in being an aid to a student's self-education. And that doesn't mean standing around and watching a student make mud pies. I'm talking about the uses of the mind, not the uses of mud. Our chief tool of self-education is language, and the child starts teaching himself language at an early age, even before he starts making mud pies. I'm talking

about his intellect and the organization of knowledge, which is why we have such a thing as "formal" education. Language is the basis of all learning, because it is our primary tool of learning, and therefore formal education, to be of greatest value, must concern itself with language and its uses.

That doesn't mean having all of these so-called language arts programs. Language is not an art. It is a tool. As a tool it can be used to create art, but the creation of art is not why language was invented. It was invented primarily to help man survive. You can survive without art. But you can't survive without tools. So we must help the child develop a skillful use of the primary intellectual tool of life: language. Language is the vehicle of all thought, all communication, all debate, all problem solving, all mind expansion. Thinking is internal dialogue. We define everything in terms of words. That vast sound-symbol system is the very heart of our civilization, and perfecting its use should be the heart of formal education.

Learning to read is merely expanding the use of the tool of language by way of graphic sound symbols. When you know how to read, you have at your disposal all of man's literature: you learn from the knowledge and experience of countless others, dead and living. Above all, reading becomes the principal tool of self-education for the rest of one's life. That is why it is so important for a child to be taught to read well. Why should the teaching of reading be a problem today? It is only a problem because the educators have made it one. The inventor of the alphabet made reading easy as pie. But the trouble with the educators is that they had to justify the existence of teachers colleges and professorships of education. So they concocted a way of making the teaching of reading more

complicated than it was in the time of Egyptian hieroglyphics. You and I know of the millions and millions of dollars that have been poured into reading programs which have turned out functional illiterates by the thousands.

When the child teaches himself to speak, he is learning a sound-symbol system. When we teach him to read, we teach him another symbolic system: the alphabetic system. The invention of the alphabet was based on a remarkable discovery: that all of spoken language, those thousands and thousands of words we utter, could be reduced to a very small number of irreducible speech sounds. The English language is composed of only 44 irreducible speech sounds. We use an alphabet of 26 letters to represent those 44 sounds, which is why our alphabetic system must be taught in a logical, organized, and systematic way. In The New Illiterates and How to Tutor I stressed the importance of teaching the alphabetic system in an organized, logical way so that the child would also learn something about methodology, how knowledge could be organized so that it could be learned easily, without confusion. In most schools of this country, the alphabetic system is taught in the most illogical, confusing, irrational, and nonsensical manner possible. The wonder is not that so many children don't learn to read proficiently in our country, but that so many manage to overcome the obstacles of bad teaching and do learn to read despite everything.

But if formal education is to be of any value, it must cease to be a guessing game or a circus. It must provide clear, unequivocal, positive assistance to the youngster in his continuing efforts to educate himself. It should not sabotage his efforts or deliberately retard them. I am a little weary of hearing teachers tell me that English is not a phonetic language. In the first place every

alphabetic writing system is phonetic by definition. Our writing system is 85 percent consistent, and the 15 percent which make up our irregularities and inconsistencies can be learned without the terrible trouble so many teachers make them to be. And once you learn them, they are learned. The irregular spellings don't change once they are learned. It is a pity that the vast majority of Americans never learn to understand or appreciate their own alphabetic system. Most adult Americans can't even define the alphabet correctly.

I can write a book about the educational malpractice that goes on in this country in the primary grades of our public schools, educational malpractice which turns perfectly normal youngsters into so-called dyslexics and disabled readers, which in turn turns many of them into vandals and delinquents. Kenneth Polk and Walter Schafer, in their recent book, Schools and Delinquency, write:

"Only in recent years has the enormity of educational failure been fully recognized. The rising rate of juvenile delinquency and adolescent alienation are causing increasing alarm We propose that educational failure -- by schools as well as by students -- is directly related to delinquency Unless basic, radical, and immediate educational changes are made, delinquency will continue to increase -- and will be accompanied by the spread of other social ills that stem from the same roots."

Of course, they were talking about the public schools, and to change anything in the public schools you practically need a constitutional amendment because the professors of education refuse to admit that they can make a mistake. I have yet to hear any of the authors of Dick and Jane apologize for the mess they've made of a couple of million young minds. Of course, private schools make mistakes also.

But you don't need a constitutional amendment or a nationwide movement to get you to change. All you need is a small meeting of the people in charge who discuss the problem and then make the necessary changes overnight. What a marvelous invention is the private school! What a better and more efficient way it uses human energy!

My dear friends, you may not know it, but you are the salvation of America. Or let me put it this way: you can be the salvation of America for you have the power and the means to create the nation's best instruments of self-education. I stress self-education because I don't want you to develop any inflated sense of self-importance as educators. You are only valuable to the degree that you can help a child in his continuing process of self-education. When it comes to the learning process, you are his assistant. That does not mean that you can't insist on discipline or tests to see if he is learning what you've been teaching. But testing is not only a means of evaluating a child's learning performance, it is also a means of measuring your teaching performance. Your skill as a teacher is being as much tested as the child's skill as a learner.

You must also have discipline. But discipline is inherent in good, logical instruction. It is part and parcel of good instruction. When a child is being taught to swim, he doesn't misbehave if he is being taught correctly. He is too interested in learning to become a good swimmer to misbehave. The same psychology applies to learning an intellectual skill such as reading, or writing, or arithmetic. And don't make the mistake of believing that only intellectuals have to develop intellectual skills. Everyone has a mind, and everyone has to use his mind in order to survive. Garbage collectors and truck drivers have to use their minds.

Yes, even professors of education have to use their minds once in a while, although begrudgingly. Everyone can benefit from being trained to use his mind better. The mind is man's primary instrument of survival, and in this age when man's survival is being questioned, he has to learn to use his mind better than ever.

I have discussed formal education in the primary grades as a means of enabling a child to master such mind-tools as the alphabetic system, or cursive writing, or arithmetic. The purpose of all of this is to help him develop his own personal instrument of survival: his mind. If you can do that much, you can certainly justify your existence, your value, and you will be rewarded well for it. But what can you do beyond that? You are basically in competition with television, the media, and a couple of thousand free-lance philosophers. So what can you offer the youngster to justify your existence beyond elementary education? I suppose you must prepare him for the college and university, providing those courses of study which will gain him admission. But if you limit yourself to that you fall into the danger of merely being a way station to the university. You must do better than that. Your education must be an end in itself; therefore it must be of value to the student whether he goes on to more formal education or not. It should certainly be a stimulus to further self-education.

What courses should you offer? First, since I consider language the central tool of learning, I would offer a foreign language because it teaches so much about the instrument of language. And it opens to the student the literature of an entirely different culture.

Then I would teach economics and the history of capitalism, because a child starts using money early in life and most of his life will be taken up working for a living and satisfying the economic needs of his life in a capitalist society. You will find excellent materials available from such organizations as the Foundation for Economic Education. You have every right to give your course a pro-capitalist bias because you know that once the student gets to college he is going to learn a lot about the magical, mystical benefits of socialism.

I would teach him about the political system we live in and how it can be made better in the interest of individual freedom. I would teach him that the income tax, forced busing, and public education diminish individual freedom. I would tell him why he goes to a private school instead of a public one, and why public education is in conflict with individual freedom and parental responsibility. I would teach him geography, so that he can get an idea of the physical world we live in and the many different kinds of people who inhabit it and why he has as much right as anyone else to cherish his own ethnic and cultural values. I would teach him history so that he could understand the origins of some of our political and social problems. Above all, I would teach him political philosophy so that he could understand why our founding fathers created this nation and why we are now in such danger of losing our freedoms.

Then there are the sciences: chemistry, physics, geology, biology, etc. Each opens a door to a world in its own right and can lead to a life-long interest and career. And then there are our contemporary social problems. What do we tell our high school students about such issues as Women's Liberation or abortion? Should we discuss them at all in our school, or should we leave them to television and newspapers and magazines? It depends on the mandate given you by the parents.

And it depends also on your capabilities. One should not expect of a school more than it is capable of doing. Yet, your high school students are at the age when they have to know how their reproductive systems work. Some of them are going to be mothers in a few years. Shall we leave all of these issues up to Seventeen magazine, or Mademoiselle, or Playgirl?

You have a limited number of hours in which to teach a limited number of subjects. You must decide how that time can be most productively spent. But I think that if you have taught your students how to use their minds, you will have accomplished the most important task that formal education can perform. You will have made them self-educators for life, youngsters capable of thinking for themselves, and capable of dealing with the complex problems their generations shall have to face. Technology and moral uncertainty have made their problems far more difficult than the ones we were confronted with thirty years ago. There is much more to learn of a technical nature, and much more to learn of a moral nature. Our society has decided to question all moral values, to take nothing for granted, to take nothing on authority. Should a school take part in this moral re-evaluation or concern itself with technical skills only? Only you people, who have created your schools, can answer that question. Only you know your own competence, your own ability, your own limits. No amount of public schooling saved America from getting involved in two world wars, the Korean War, or the Vietnam war. Nor has it reduced crime, or poverty, or disease.

So we ought not to overestimate the benefits of formal education, public or private. No amount of education can prevent people from making mistakes, wrong judgments, and wrong choices. But a good education may help a person recognize

his mistakes, minimize their number, and prevent others from being made. Life for all of us involves risk taking. But a well trained mind can be a great asset when we have to decide which risks to take.

If I have tended to stress the limits of formal education, it is because public education has made of education something all-embracing, all-powerful, and of inflated importance. Your school, at best, should be a civilizing institution in which the best values of learning are passed from the older generation to the younger. It should also be a means of inculcating those community values which the parents wish to impart to their children. Your schools, however, have an additional value aside from those imparted in the classroom. The fact of your independence alone in an area of American life which has become so totalitarian, is perhaps the greatest value you can represent to the parents and children you serve. While your success is still the best kept secret in America, I shall do what I can to see that the word gets out. My hope and prayer is that you will strive to make your schools the very best that you can. Meanwhile, my deep appreciation and gratitude go to all of you for pioneering in independent education, for standing up for what you believe, for setting an example that others in America can follow.