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Propelling Schools Forward: Five Initiatives to Improve American Public Education

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Propelling Schools Forward: Five Initiatives to Improve American Public Education

We rely on the American public school to do so much. It is affixed as a pillar in our lives. We expect it to serve our educational, civic, vocational, social, and personal needs. However, we are slow to move the public school in a forward-thinking manner that best serves the public. Because public schools are just that, public, the direction of the school rests in the hands of those (e.g., legislators, school board members) who do not necessarily study research or theory closely aligned to best practices with how I believe schools should operate. As a case in point, pundits or policy makers sometimes put reforms upon the public school that run contrary to what the evidence and theory points to. An example is the contemporary infatuation with high-stakes standardized testing as a transformative reform. Despite evidence that clearly points out the failure of this reform, it remains to have a seemingly cult-like following among reformers (Ravitch, 2020). Nevertheless, the drum of testing continues to beat across the country's classrooms.

John Dewey (1897), the renowned philosopher and most prolific voice on the role of public schools in American society, crowned the public school as “the fundamental method of progress and reform.” In stating this, Dewey meant that schooling has the unique role of moving American society in a forward fashion. One only needs to look at the desegregation efforts of the second half of the twentieth century to clearly understand how school can be used to transform cultural habits that may be in opposition to the country's democratic mission. In sum, if we want to have a better society – looking at how to improve schools should be one of the primary areas we target. But, as education journalist John Merrow (2017) recently put it, we are already addicted to reforming the public school. The sad truth is that these reforms seldom make sense, or if they do, they often collide with our stubborn infatuation with failed past reform efforts. Rather than re - “form” the public school, I would like to propel it progressively forward. A progressive public school system, in my estimation, is one that runs contrary to traditional conventional practice if there is an approach that is better supported by current research and is also closely aligned with the philosophical underpinning of the pedagogical progressive movement from the early twentieth century. Schools that are progressive are rooted in pragmatism, and are intelligently designed and adaptive to change, as opposed to those that are stuck in an ideological attachment to conventional practice or a reform effort proven to have failed. Frankly, there is much that the public school does well that we would be wise to not take for granted. But, schools can be better than what they are! This essay represents what I see as a forward direction for our public schools, as I have selected five initiatives I firmly believe should be openly and whole heartedly considered as we seek to improve our public schools. As you will see, these initiatives are supported by research and historically rooted theory. By no means do I think this is an exhaustive list of efforts we should take to improve schools, but I do believe these are the most significant steps we should prioritize in our efforts to provide better public education in the United States. This essay should be viewed by you,

the reader, as my attempt to ignite further dialogue on school progress through this journal with hope that the ideas may make their way to the public square.

Ditch High Stakes Testing, Move Toward Accreditation

The high stakes standardized test movement is an utter failure. The goal of strict testing protocols was to ensure schools were held accountable for providing a rigorous academic curriculum for all students. However, evidence does not demonstrate that this goal has been achieved (Ravitch, 2020). Scores from the National Assessment for Education Progress (NAEP) and the Stanford Achievement Test (SAT) reveal little to no improvement in scores over the past several decades. Yet we continue this mad path toward testing. And, it is a costly path. Recently, the American Federation of Teachers reported the annual cost for testing ranged from \$200 to \$400 per student for grades K-2 to \$600-\$800 per students in grades 3-8 (Nelson, 2013).

Rather than spend so much money on a movement that doesn't work, why not spend this money on something that has proven to work in higher education? Accreditation is widely accepted at university and college levels to uphold institutional accountability. Many colleges of education, for instance, must successfully meet criteria set by both a national accreditation policy (i.e., Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation- CAEP) and their state departments of education. According to CAEP's website, accreditation is described and explained in the following manner:

Simply put, accreditation is quality assurance through external peer review. When an institution or specialized program is accredited, it has demonstrated that it meets standards set by organizations representing the academic community, professionals, and other stakeholders. To maintain accreditation the institution or program must undergo a similar review on a regular basis. Typically, reviews are conducted every 7 to 10 years. (Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation, 2018).

As someone who works in higher education, accreditation is a professional norm for me. Assessments, data collection, annual reports are all part of what we naturally do to meet accreditation requirements. It is not a perfect system, but it's not all that bad either. While there may be too many bureaucratic hoops to hurdle that appear to do nothing but foster stress and worry, the accreditation process ideally propels institutions to collaborate with one another and to assess student learning across a wide array of dimensions. The most positive aspect of the accreditation is its comprehensiveness. No singular assessment is high-stakes, each assessment is part of a larger evaluation process. Strong accreditors provide constructive suggestions as a formative means for educational institutions to improve. This is much different than how we currently hold elementary and secondary public schools accountable.

The public desires accountability for use of its tax dollars. Unfortunately, how we hold schools accountable is an ineffective use of taxpayers' money. We

currently hold schools accountable through a singular standardized test, mandated by a school's respective state, that is usually administered near the tail end of a school year leaving no opportunity for the teacher to address the instructional needs of the student revealed by the test. By the time the test results are revealed, teachers already have a new batch of students in their classrooms. Throughout the year, teachers prepare students for this singular event near the end of the event despite it having no diagnostic value for teaching and learning. Schools and their faculty are evaluated based on the students' test scores. The curricular effect of this high-stakes testing environment is detrimental to both the comprehensiveness of the curriculum and practice of sound, research-based pedagogy. Curricularist Peter Hlebowitsh (2007), a critic of high-stakes standardized testing, explained what this damaging effect looks like:

We have known for years that school experiences in high stakes-testing environments generally reduce themselves to what is being tested. The effect is that art, music, and such skills sets as critical thinking, creativity, cooperative behavior, and many others get short shrift in the classroom, primarily because such matters typically have little or no place on the exams. (p. 28)

Not only do high-stakes testing environments limit the school curriculum, they also reshape how time is spent in a school. We know that in some schools, for instance, recess is stripped from student schedules in order to put more emphasis on test preparation. An overemphasis on testing jettisons the school away from the recent surge of research in the learning sciences (e.g., Gopnik, 2009, 2012) that reveals the necessity of play and exploration in an individual's learning process.

I propose that each public school district have a research center. This research center should be charged with the mission to collect and analyze data and then report findings throughout their respective district. Wouldn't it be useful for administrators and teachers to know some answers to the following questions: How often, and for what purpose, is the school's media center used? What is the relationship between socio-economic status, including parent education level, and student achievement? What are some trends regarding disciplinary measures taken toward the student body by the district? The exploratory possibilities of such a center are endless. Another responsibility of the research center would be to facilitate district-wide assessments collected by administration and teachers centered around commonly held criteria.

Table 1. Current Evaluation Program versus Proposed Evaluation Program

Current Evaluation Program	Proposed Evaluation Program
End of year standardized test	District-wide standardized test (sampled to garner a general idea of status of student achievement)
	Tests provided by teachers as part of classroom curriculum
	Social-emotional surveys
	Field interviews of faculty, staff, students
	Field observations of classrooms and school programs

These assessments should be varied in nature, including but not limited to social and emotional surveys, student performance portfolios, low-stakes tests used by teachers to inform instruction. This research center, while collaborating within the district as a means to spur the district forward in a data-driven manner, also provides a report to an accrediting body, that could simply be their respective state department of education. This accrediting body should periodically visit school districts in order to conduct classroom observations as well as interview faculty, staff, students, and their parents or caregivers. Table 1 displays how this proposed evaluation program greatly differs from our current evaluation program for schools. This is essentially what we do in higher education. It works. Why can't we do this in the B-12 public school experience?

Empower Teachers to Develop the Macro-Curriculum

Many factors play a role in student achievement. Although schools inherit many factors such as the socio-economic status and the family life of students, there are factors that directly involve school. Educational researchers John Hattie (2008, 2015) and Jenni Donohoo (2015) make the case that teachers' beliefs on the meaningfulness of their work makes a significant impact on student achievement. The term applied to this concept of teacher beliefs is collective teacher efficacy (CTE). Specifically, CTE is "collective self-perception that teachers in a given school make an educational difference to their students over and above the educational impact of their homes and communities" (Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004, p. 190). In order to build stronger collective efficacy amongst teachers in a school district, the teachers must be empowered to make curricular decisions that impact students.

Teachers in the United States are customarily treated as street-level bureaucrats when it comes to the functioning of their respective school. A street-level bureaucrat, according to political scientist Michael Lipsky (1980), are individuals who work directly with the public and thus must fulfill government sanctioned policies regardless of the bureaucrat's view of the policy. This approach to teachers is problematic because the hallmark of a profession is to trust the judgement of those within it. Although our current high-stakes testing climate positions schools to practice things that run contrary to research in the learning sciences, teachers must cooperate within this climate or else run the risk of losing their job. Sadly, teachers are accustomed to having their voice

marginalized in school decision making. Centralized decision making within a school setting is common practice (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2017). Far too often a district administrator, in the name of efficiency and progress, may make a curricular decision without true collaboration with the teachers who will be implementing it. This lowers morale among teachers and subsequently lowers collective efficacy amongst teachers.

Linda Darling-Hammond and her research team (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2017) recently researched high-performing school systems across the world. They discovered that a characteristic unique to those systems that set them apart from the United States was how they treated their teachers. In high-performing systems such as those in Australia, Canada, Finland, Shanghai, and Singapore, teachers were intentionally recruited, developed in a high-quality manner that privileged collaboration, provided leadership and career advancement opportunities within their respective schools, and given a significant voice in decisions that affected student learning. Teachers in those systems were revered and honored as essential leaders in their culture.

Imagine if public schools in the United States treated their teachers like those systems that Darling-Hammond studied. What if schools balanced centralized decision-making with decentralized decision making in how they address the macro-curriculum? What if teachers were provided avenues to advance to different career paths while remaining a member of the teaching faculty?

Perhaps public schools need to look no further than the university environment and the nature of the professoriate to understand how this new conception of teaching may work. For instance, university professors serve on various curricular committees that regularly analyze and update their department and university-wide curriculum. In ideal situations at the university level, these faculty-led decisions are sent to an administrator for approval in a collaborative manner. University professors also have various opportunities for career advancement to jump from Assistant to Associate and finally, Full Professor levels of their career. Professors also may take various leadership roles such as serving on a university-wide program or as a head of a department while remaining a faculty member. Although anyone who works at a university could testify that the system has its flaws, I believe it is still a far superior way to treat faculty than how teachers are customarily treated in the traditional public school.

If we want to take student learning seriously in our public schools, then we need to take teacher efficacy seriously. In order to increase teacher efficacy, we should treat our teachers as professionals, trust their judgement, and position them to collaborate closer with their district administrators to fashion curriculum. We should also allow teachers various pathways within their district where they can be promoted, rewarded, and serve in new and challenging capacities – all while remaining as a teacher. This promises to provide teachers an environment where they can clearly see and believe they make a true difference in student learning.

Increase Social Services

Perhaps the most significant challenge facing public schools today is the rise of concentrated poverty. While poverty is not new, the phenomenon that those in poverty seldom mingle and share public spaces with those not in poverty is new. Robert Putnam (2015), a political scientist, published his research that demonstrated the nature and effect of this concentration of poverty that has risen over the last few decades. While disparity between income levels within social classes has risen, the gaps in a multitude of areas has also widened between the top and bottom levels of social class. For instance, in terms of education level approximately 40% of the top quartile of family income earners had a college degree as opposed to roughly 5% of the bottom quartile in 1970. By 2011, nearly 80% of the top quartile had a college degree with only about 10% of the bottom quartile possessing a college degree. This widening gap in income and education, according to Putnam, greatly affects gaps in a plethora of experiences between children from affluent and educated backgrounds and their peers from less affluent and less educated backgrounds. Matters as simple as dining together as a family is happening less often among the latter group, leading Putnam (2015) to conclude that children from lower socio-economic backgrounds do not reap the developmental benefits of serve-and-return interactions. Participation in extracurricular activities also vary greatly amongst students based on their socio-economic status (SES) as does parental spending on their children. The top earning households in 1972 spent just under \$3000 (in constant dollars) on each of their children, as opposed to the lowest earning households spending around \$550 per child. This gap dramatically widened by 2008 with the top earning families spending approximately \$6,500 per child and the lowest earners spending around \$700 per child (Putnam, 2015). Of course, this entails expenditures on enrichment activities and materials that further demonstrates that teachers have students from differing backgrounds that are ever widening from one another.

While poverty does not explain away all behavioral challenges that schools experience amongst their respective student bodies, its negative effect on student performance is significant. Children raised in poverty face significant challenges in their life that leads them to adjust to their adverse conditions in ways that undermines positive school performance (Jensen, 2009). Poverty often results in children with emotional and social challenges that originate from a lack of a stable, nurturing home environment where reciprocal interactions were commonplace. Some researchers (e.g., Denny, Clark, Fleming, & Wall, 2004) point out that parents of children in such conditions often suffer from low self-esteem and an inability to cope with the challenges of life which, in turn, creates a cyclical effect as the children of parents in these circumstances often experience depression as they age.

Unfortunately, schools are ill equipped to appropriately address the significant needs that their low-income students may bring to the classroom. It is more than unreasonable for a teacher to perform their instructional duties while also trying to meet the growing social-emotional needs of their students, yet that is what they are expected to do today. This creates a daunting challenge for teachers and sets everyone up for failure and leads to more affluent parents withdrawing students from their public school in place of options where the

student body has a higher social capital, thus further concentrating poverty toward the public school (Boschma & Brownstein, 2016). Put simply, schools must be robustly prepared to meet the growing social-emotional needs of students. Yet schools across the country fail to support their students' needs particularly in the form of social services, such as counseling services, and behaviorists, to meet the growing needs of students.

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) and the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NCAAC) (2015) recently reported that the national student to counselor ratio is 482:1 that falls way short of ASCA's recommended 250:1 ratio. The position statement of these organizations on resolving this discrepancy across the country is as follows:

Both NACAC and ASCA advocate for more state and federal funding to hire, train, and equip school counselors in public schools. Our intention in producing this data is to shed light on the often unmanageable caseloads public school counselors must serve. Research shows that access to a school counselor can make a significant difference in student persistence/retention, students' postsecondary aspirations, and students' likelihood of enrolling in postsecondary education. To realize such results, school counselors must operate in an environment free of overwhelmingly large student caseloads.

According to their report, only three states (New Hampshire, Vermont, and Wyoming) have a ratio lower than what was recommended. Some states, such as Arizona (924:1) and California (760:1), are well above this recommendation.

Evidence shows that more students than ever before are experiencing challenging life situations that greatly affect their school performance as well as school climate (Putnam, 2015). Evidence also shows that schools are ill prepared to meet this challenge. It is time for us to collectively ramp up our efforts to combat these forces that schools inherit by providing schools with a more robust supply of social services.

Include Exceptional Learners in General Education

Historical narratives usually paint that school segregation ended with the Supreme Court's 1954 ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* (Pellegrino, Mann, & Russell, 2013). This is not true on several fronts. First, efforts to combat racial segregation was a decades long process that is trending today toward schools being racially segregated once again (Orfield, Frankenberg, Ee, & Kuscera, 2014). Yet there is a form of school segregation that remains and seldom receives its due attention: the segregation of children identified with disabilities (exceptional learners) removed from the general education classroom. Excuses abound for why this segregation exists. Often these excuses circulate around the need to provide a homogenous student body for teachers to target in the classroom. This excuse speaks more about the school's desire to be efficient than anything else. Sometimes these excuses revolve around a benevolent concern for

the well-being of children identified with disabilities since, according to this view, it may be better for them to be placed in a learning environment with children more similar to them and where they have teachers who are prepared to work with them. However, I believe segregation of any sort runs contrary to the democratic mission of the public school. This segregation is juxtaposed against a growing body of research and legal precedents that say integration of exceptional learners are best served in a contained general education classroom.

Individuals identified with disabilities have generally lived lives “reflecting a remarkable ambivalence toward their place in American society” (Osgood, 2008, xiii). Education for these children often consisted of exclusion from the general population in special schools purposed for them. A significant push toward inclusion of children identified with disabilities into the general mainstream occurred in 1975 with federal legislation entitled the *Education for All Handicapped Children Act*. This federal statute compelled schools to educate “handicapped children” to be “educated with children who are not handicapped” to what the act described as the “maximum extent appropriate.” This required local schools to provide accommodations that eventually required receipt of federal monetary support. The law was reauthorized in 1997 and later 2004 with a less stigmatic title, the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA), that further emphasized inclusion of children identified with disabilities into the general classroom. However, the narrative of full inclusion of children identified with disabilities into the general school curriculum is still being composed. Unfortunately, responsibility for the education of children identified with disabilities largely rests upon special education teachers. As a whole, general education teachers are poorly prepared to address the needs of these children (Mader, 2017). One study on teacher preparation (Cameron & Cook, 2007) reported that, on average, general education teacher candidates take only 1.5 courses in special education as opposed to 11 such courses taken by special education teachers. While this study is nearly a decade old, its findings still hold true (Mader, 2017). The lack of preparation of teachers to address the needs of all students prohibits the spirit of IDEA to encourage inclusion as a norm in the American school experience.

There is a strong argument that conventional practices of exclusion of exceptional learners from the general education environment is a violation of the Equal Protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. For instance, the provision of separate learning environments for students with disabilities often becomes a barrier for these students to access the general curriculum (e.g., Frattura & Cooper, 2007; Spooner et al., 2006). Schools all too often justify separate learning environments for students with disabilities by asserting they make it easier for teachers to address those students’ learning needs. To the contrary, research informs us that such self-contained environments require special education teachers to teach across grade levels and content standards (Ryndak et al., 2008/2009) resulting in an impoverished general education experience resembling a compilation of activities rather than a curriculum aligned with a scope and sequence (Causton-Theoharis, Theoharis,

Orsati, & Cosider, 2011; Kurth, et al., 2016; Olson & Ruppard, 2017; Ruppard, 2015).

The benefits of inclusion are numerous for both students identified with disabilities and those who are not (Baker, Wang and Wahlberg, 1994; Fisher, Pumpian, & Sax, 1998; McDonnell, Thorson, Disher, MathotBuckner, 2001; Waldron and McLeskey, 1998). Students who are enrolled in special education and have an Individualized Education Program (IEP) are more likely to achieve their IEP goals as well as learn academic standards in the general education curriculum at a greater rate when they are in an inclusive classroom (Causton-Theoharis & Theoharis, 2008). Additionally, research demonstrates that teachers who learn in classroom environments where students with disabilities are included create differentiated lessons to meet all students' strengths, emphasize the teaching of interdependent skills, and are more likely to increase students' access to technological resources that may otherwise not be offered (Kasa-Hendrickson & Ashby, 2009).

Morality, constitutionality, and research supports inclusion of exceptional learners in the general education classroom. This should serve as a mandate for states to reconfigure teacher licensure so that a sturdy special education preparation exists for all teachers, not just those who major in special education. This also means that classroom practices should be reconfigured to include more co-teaching between general education teachers and their special education colleagues so that special education in schools are services to the general curriculum rather than a curriculum provider in and of itself. To paraphrase from the U.S. Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education*: separate learning environments are inherently unequal.

Take Civic Education Seriously

The American public school system was created to support the country's burgeoning democracy (Ravitch, 2013). Thomas Jefferson (1853), the primary author of the Declaration of Independence and third President of the United States, lobbied for state supported public education in his native Virginia as a means for "rendering the people safe, as they are the ultimate guardians of their own liberty" (p. 159). In fact, several states christened the public school system in their respective states as closely aligning with the democratic aims of our country. As a case in point, Massachusetts' constitution, ratified in 1780 and primarily authored by John Adams, says the following about public education (Chapter V, Section II): "Wisdom, and knowledge, as well as virtue, diffused generally among the body of the people, being necessary for the preservation of their rights and liberties ..." Likewise, the state of Minnesota, who ratified their constitution in 1857, stated that a "general and uniform system of public education" was necessitated because "the stability of a republican form of government depending mainly upon the intelligence of the people" (Article XIII, Section 1). However, while the written purposes of school may flourish with democratic aims, the reality is that "democracy has not seriously been undertaken as a curriculum project in this society" (Parker, 1996, p. 11).

A primary obstacle that restricts a school's emphasis upon education for democratic citizenship is the overwhelming emphasis that policies place upon vocational and college preparation as the primary aim of B-12 public education (Kozol, 2005). The most recent and prominent national policy-based effort to transform the national public school experience was one that surfaced in 2009 in the form of the Common Core Standards. These standards, widely accepted by most states, emphasize college and career readiness. In fact, its motto is: "Preparing America's Students for College and Career." This emphasis on vocational and college preparation can also be seen at the state level. For instance, the state of Minnesota requires its school districts to adopt a comprehensive strategic plan to better prepare students for college and career. The Minnesota legislature is explicit with its vocational-centered purposes for this initiative when they called it "The World's Best Workforce." A significant amount of modern philanthropy towards education aligns to these policy measures as typified by the mission of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation K-12 program to assure elementary and secondary education programs provide a "proven path to social mobility, economic prosperity, and a bridge to opportunity like no other." Whether these policy and philanthropic efforts are worthwhile is debatable. What I believe is not debatable, however, is that civic education takes a backseat to other aims for the American B-12 public school experience.

Education for democratic citizenship should be taken seriously by schools not only because of its importance but also because it directs students toward necessary skills and dispositions that are unnatural. The likelihood that a citizenry develops democratic skills and dispositions greatly increases if the school is charged with this mission (Parker, 1996). Democracy, according to civic educator Walter Parker (1996) "does not arise spontaneously but in institutions – democratic institutions – and then only with difficulty" (p. 3). The reason democratic education does not occur spontaneously is because it requires individuals to consider others in addition to one's self. This is a challenge. According to John Dewey (1916/2005), democracy is a habit of living together in ways that propel society forward. This notion of living together as a core component of democratic citizenship runs contrary to what ancient Greeks referred to as idiocy, or self-centeredness of individuals. Parker (2003) explained the nature of idiocy:

Idiots do not take part in public life – do not have a public life. In this sense, the idiot is immature in the most fundamental way, his or her life fundamentally out of balance, ajar, untethered, and unrealized: The idiot has not yet met the challenge of 'puberty,' the transition to public life (p. 3).

The unnaturalness of democratic citizenship brings a persistent challenge to the public school experience because it requires the public to extend outward rather inward upon individuals' own self-interests.

The social studies curriculum of a school district is specifically charged with the mission of cultivating democratic education. Social studies education is

a broad field that includes history, government, geography, economics, sociology, psychology, and other disciplines related to the study of society. A strong social studies curriculum should center around problem solving and decision making with an emphasis on contemporary issues that prepare students with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to be effective democratic citizens. However, I believe a school district is doing a poor job of fulfilling its civic purpose if it exclusively relies upon the social studies curriculum to deliver democratic education. All subjects within the school curriculum should, in some way, intentionally develop students' civic skill set. For instance, a science teacher may direct students how they may get involved in policymaking as it relates to environmental issues and/or funding for science research. All curricular areas should take into consideration how the school equips students to be cooperative with one another, to deliberate over issues with one another, to treat one another with respect and dignity, and to be vigilant with assuring individuals who may be subjected to marginalization within the school community are protected and welcomed.

Table 2. Proposed Civic Education Program for Schools

Courses	Pervasive Skills	School-Wide Projects
U.S. Government U.S. History World History Cultural Studies Contemporary Issues	critical inquiry problem solving discussion deliberation tolerance cooperation political and social agency/advocacy	Student government Mock legislations Mock trials Service activities Voter registration Student clubs and team sports

In Table 2, I propose a multi-faceted approach schools may use to bulk up their civic education program. First, schools should ensure that they are providing rigorous social studies courses tailored to develop democratic minds. I suggest that schools make sure that, at the very least, they provide a U.S. Government course and a general U.S. History and World History course in their general curriculum. Those courses are customarily offered in a school curriculum. However, I assert that it is also important that students take a cultural studies course to develop students' global perspectives, which is paramount if our American democracy is able to adapt to the ebbs and flows that an increasingly interconnected world bring to the United States. I also believe it is essential that students take issues-based social studies courses that intentionally engage students in analyzing and solving contemporary issues and challenges.

Second, I believe it is essential that school districts integrate certain socio-civic skills pervasively throughout their curriculum. Such skills as critical inquiry, problem solving, discussion, deliberation, tolerance, cooperation, and agency/advocacy can and should be taught in nearly any course in the curriculum. For instance, a science class might integrate critical thinking and problem solving but also how to deliberate and advocate for certain issues, such as environmental protections, central to their interest in those issues.

Finally, I believe that certain civic oriented projects should be conducted by an entire school. Most schools include some of these such as student government and extracurricular programming like clubs and team sports. However, schools should consider how such projects might perform better as an instrument to improve education for democratic citizenship. Additionally, schools should extend such large projects to also include mock legislations and trials that mobilize the student body to become more familiar with processes related to democratic governance. Schools should also have a robust voter registration drive, spearheaded by students, during election seasons. I also suggest that further emphasis on service activities will further develop students' patriotic resolve to help others and to serve their country. Frankly, the opportunities for the entire school community to engage in democratic education are seemingly endless. If it is a robust democratic society we desire, we must then desire a robust civic education program in our schools.

Conclusion

It is not difficult to find individuals who desire to improve public education in the United States. What is uncommon, however, is to find a mobilized faction within our citizenry who are committed to make positive change happen. The proposals I offered to you in this paper will have no life to them without the support from a groundswell of citizens who courageously take steps to inform the public of the need for such reforms and who are willing to persistently lobby policy-makers to adopt them as they craft the future of American public education. The American public school, at its core, I believe exists to develop good people and a good society. If American public education is to be what it should be, it is essential that we propel it in such a way that is strongly rooted in educational theory and research. Public education is a demonstration of the type of individuals we want to develop and the type of society we desire to live in.

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