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Humanities

9 October 2022

Schools Are Not Real Life

If you grew up in the United States of America, your childhood is most likely tied to the public education system. In the United States, a high school education is a minimum requirement for being hired into most jobs paying more than minimum-wage. In many ways, society views school as a necessity to prepare young people for a successful life. However, our current public education system has numerous drawbacks in fulfilling this purpose. The current public education fails to prepare its students for success later in life, primarily due to a lack of instruction on necessary skills, an unrealistic system of measuring success, and a dissimilar social environment.

To prepare for a student's future life, schools should be teaching topics that are necessary and apply to everyone, such as finance and civics, but consistently fail to do so. If people were properly knowledgeable on the topic of US government, what should they be able to do? They should, at the very least, be able to name the branches of government, right? As it turns out, according to a 2016 survey by the Annenberg Policy center, only twenty-six percent of Americans can do so. Additionally, nearly forty percent of respondents falsely stated that the president has the power to declare war, and ten percent incorrectly agreed that Congress could outlaw atheism. People are not educated enough to properly understand our government,

which is necessary knowledge for life outside of school. Alongside civics as a necessary life topic, finance immediately comes to mind. In *Horace's School: redesigning the American High School* by TheodoreSizer, it is stated that "We can't teach every student the tax code forever, but we should be able to expect every one of them to do some sort of tax return" (Sizer, 222). Teaching kids to manage their money, finances, and taxes is usually seen as a job for the parents, but data suggests that teens are not receiving proper instruction. In a survey by EverFi, Inc, it was found that only twenty-six percent of parents feel prepared to teach finances. A 2016 survey by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC), reported by Lauren Diaz, revealed that only 12% of elementary to high school courses teach finance in any way. So, neither parents nor schools properly teach their kids civics and finance, which suggests that students are not being given a proper education for future success.

Schools provide a structure of student success through baseline standards and achievement through effort; this is far removed from the economic structure of the United States, which has far different avenues of becoming successful. The usage of baseline standards is explained by Horace Mann, the 'father of American Public Education', in *The Common School Journal*, where proclaims, "In the great march of society, it is rather our duty to bring up the rear than push forward the van" (Mann 215). This explains the tendency of public education to favor bringing failing students to the baseline standard rather than better advancing the talented students. Outside of school, "bringing up the rear" does not happen. If you are unsuccessful, there is very little that helps bring you to par with the successes of others. This connects to the other fault of public education – its definition and method of success. In schools, students are rewarded for their talent and effort with high grades and class ranks, and those are the only factors that

determine a good student. A successful person outside of school is determined by economic success, such as income. That income is not nearly as correlated with effort and talent as school grades are. In a study conducted in January of 2016 by the National Bureau of Economic Research, and analyzed by FiveThirtyEight, there is a distinct positive correlation between your parents' income and your own income later in life. This demonstrates the idea the success of a person is more determined by the environment they came from than by their own effort. Overall, schools have a system of student success that will leave them unprepared for the truth of what is required for economic success.

There is an argument to be made that there are other real-life measures of success than financial success. This may include being happy, having stable relationships and families, or living a long life. Despite these measures being seemingly separate from income, they each have a correlation. According to Michele W. Berger of PennToday, Matthew Killingsworth, a senior at Wharton School, conducted extensive research about the link between money and happiness in 2021. He found that people's incomes and their overall wellbeing had a clear correlation. While it may not be the biggest determiner of happiness, it is a significant contributor. In 2014, a data scientist from Michigan State University, Dr. Randal S. Olson, analyzed data from a study by researchers in Emory University. He found that "wealthier couples are less likely to end up divorced". At the extreme ends of the data, couples making \$125,000 or more are 51% less likely to have a divorce than those earning below \$25,000. Couples with a higher income are more likely to have a stable relationship. Finally, life expectancy shows a clear connection to income. A study collecting data between 2001 and 2014 shows that "The gap in life expectancy between the richest 1% and the poorest 1% of

individuals was 14.6 years ... for men and 10.1 years ... for women". Additionally, "inequality in life expectancy increased over time" (Chetty et al.). People with greater financial success live longer lives. The data clearly demonstrates that income has influence over any other success a person would have, making it the best general measure of success. The methods to attain success in school do not apply to real life.

Schools facilitate a working environment that is far different from the environment that adults experience in their working life. One of the most important aspects of a working life is collaboration. To get anything done, whether in a professional or home environment, it is essential to work with others. Otherwise, nobody would learn anything new, and nobody's work would fit together. In Theodore Sizer's *Horace's School: redesigning the American High School*, he creates a conversation between teachers about the importance of collaborative and relevant assignments: "In the real world, lots of people do taxes with others" (Sizer 222). However, in our public education system, students mostly partake in assignments individually, as well as engage in competition for class ranks. "Group projects" do not facilitate collaboration as well as they should, as typically the work is not evenly divided. It is extremely common for the work to be delegated to the 'smart kid', whereas the others, especially 'popular kids' use their social influence to justify doing no work. In a real job, it is impossible to do complete your assigned tasks without properly collaborating with coworkers, and it is impossible to use their work to keep your job.

This argument applies to a casual social environment too. In *The Geeks Shall Inherit the Earth* by Alexandra Robbins, we are shown the social life of a typical 'popular' teen. In this story, this teen shown to have success in being a part of the school environment, in addition to using her

popularity for special treatment, but Robbins states, “popularity in school is not a key to success and satisfaction in adulthood” (Robbins 177). Navigating a school’s social environment is far different than the outside, which is exemplified in *Friends with Boys* by Faith Erin Hicks. A homeschooled student is thrust into a public-school environment and is shown facing major anxiety in the process. Overall, these two stories demonstrate the major differences between the ‘real life’ social environment and the environment of public schools, which leaves students thoroughly unprepared to face the outside world.

Schools fail at their assumed primary function – being a method of preparation for young people entering society because of their overall dissimilarity from society. That doesn’t mean that schools are not necessary – their functions extend beyond general life preparation. However, we cannot continue to pretend that going to school will give you everything you need to enter society as an adult. Either the education system should be redesigned to better emulate the reality of society, or society needs to change to allow students to be on track after they exit public education. In the state they are now, schools do not do what we pretend they do.

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