Education Reform Essay, Research Paper

The educational system of New York City is in a state of turmoil at this point. There are a number of teachers, many students are failing and most parents have lost faith in our unqualified educational system. This brings us to the question of who is responsible for the problems and how can we rectify our educational system through the use of

school reform.

According to Webster’s Dictionary , the definition of the word school is a place for teaching and learning(218). There are a group of persons devoted to similar principles.

In other words, a school is where someone goes to learn and be taught. The schools start

to break down and fail when children are not learning and teachers are not relaying the

proper information. There are basically three types of institutions a child can attend, They

include public, private or catholic and charter. A public school is a school that is open to

all city children without the cost of expense i.e tuition fees. A child has to attend the

the school that the district mandates. This is the traditional form of education for a large majority of children. There are many noticeable problems with the public school system.

There is overcrowding in the classrooms where there are often thirty to forty children

in one room. This makes the ability to learn and to concentrate very difficult. Each child does not always get individual attention when necessary. The school buildings are often

run-down and in an advanced state of deterioration. The paint is coming off the walls,

the floors have cracks, and sometimes there is evidence of lead and asbestos contaminants within the buildings. The supplies that the children receive are not all in

good condition. Their textbooks are very old with torn and missing pages.

I recall that when I was in school during my elementary and secondary years my textbooks were mostly in bad condition. The books were barely held together by tape.

There were many pages missing and the books themselves were old. The conditions of

the classroom were not great either. The desks were very old and in need of repair. The

teacher to pupil ratios are way too high and this disturbs the learning environment and makes things difficult. The lighting in the rooms were not very bright and sometimes we were not even in a designated classroom. It was a different room that was turned into a classroom. If there is such a high expenditure per pupil then there is absolutely no reason

for these horrible conditions to be present. If proper budgeting and allocation of

funds is done there should not be any problems. One can get the sense that tax dollars

are being totally wasted and used on things and people that they are not supposed to be used on. A lot of individuals in general believe that there are many inequalities in

school spending and this does have an effect on the states role. Some educators

believe that a school should be funded according to the quality of education it provides.

So if it is a highly ranked and successful school, then they would receive a lot of monetary support as opposed to a failing school that is not making the grade. I totally

disagree with this notion because all schools need to receive proper funding to maintain

their services. Everyone should receive a fixed amount of money to use for students,

services, and programs. The schools should practice proper budgeting guidelines and

assign the monies where they belong.

Charter schools use a form of child based funding where the school districts are not involved in taxing and they provide necessary services to schools on a competetive

basis. The charter school itself is a highly controversial yet very successful alternative to

public schools. They provide unique services nap deliver them in ways that the traditional

public schools do not offer. Charter schools serve a disproprtionate number of students

traditionally considered to be at risk or low achievers. These schools first came into play

about five years ago and since then has influenced education and it’s policies in a

positive manner. There are nearly five hundred charter schools in existence that were opened between 1996 – 1997. Unfortunately, a lot of these schools have been discredited

by administrators, union officials, and administrators. Charter schools have proven to be successful according to studies. These schools and catholic schools normally appeal to the most successful students.

A Catholic and or private school are institutions that require tuition costs in order for a

child to attend. The private school as opposed to the public school is usually very rigid and run under strict rules and management. They have very strict guidelines and offer

punishments when rules are broken and not followed. These schools are less bureaucratic

than public schools, enforce conduct and dress codes and have fewer discipline problems.

It has been shown that catholic school children on average, performed one grade level

higher than public school students. In terms of financing, the average catholic school

tuition is around $2,178 compared to an average per pupil expense at public schools of

$6,459. In my opinion those figures are absolutely ridiculous. Why do the public schools

allocate so much money for each pupil and where does it all go? If the catholic schools can survive and thrive with their budget spending about $4000 less than the states, that

should be something to take note of. In some instances the tuition for these school can

be as low as $1,300 per year or as much as $10,000 for the entire year. A private school

is a good alternative to the public school system but some families face the obstacle

of affordability. A tuition fee is required to attend these schools and some families just

cannot and do not make that type of money. Some families have multiple children

and a lot of expenses so spending money on a school in the two thousand dollar range

and up per year is just too much for some people to handle.

This is where the idea of school choice comes into play. This particular term refers to

The opportunity and power that parents are given to choose the school their child

will attend. This gives lower income families an advantage because now they do not have

to allow their child to attend their zone or district school if they do not want to.

This system gives children better opportunities for success. Most school choice programs

are done by full choice which is through the use of vouchers. The parents are provided

with a portion of the public funds for their child and the child can use it to attend the school of his or her choice. It can be a parochial, public, charter or private school.

The choice is totally up to them. I think this is a wonderful idea because more educational

opportunities have been created because of it. A child can now afford to attend a better

institution than he or she would have otherwise been able to attend. Besides the full choice programs there are also private scholarship programs which award children

with scholarships to attend a particular school. Usually the children are high achievers and have excellent grade point averages.

A person can easily state that school choice is the answer to most the problems within

the system but there are some problems. The main issue is the subject of school funding.

Depending on the cost of the school that the parent chooses, he or she is supposed

to receive the cost of the school for their child. This poses a problem because some educators oppose this notion. The option of school choice actually imposes better

standards on schools which is good news. The charter and private or parochial schools

do indeed have and maintain higher standards than those of the public school systems.

There are two types of criteria that standards fall under and schools need to meet this criteria.The first one is content and the other is performance. Everyone expects good content in order for learning to take place. It is important that the information in the schools in terms of what every pupil needs to know must be clear and concise. It is

imperative that teachers, text authors, students, parents, and test makers work together

to achieve this goal. There is evidence that states have been trying to create rigorous

standards but not nearly enough is being done. Only nineteen of forty-nine states have adopted clear and specific standards according to the American Federation Of Teachers. Only seven states now require that students meet standards in order to be promoted to the next grade compared to three in 1996. Many schools do not have decent policies,

quality board members, teachers and officials. According to scholars of the Thomas

B. Fordham foundation they only found that only one state had truly rigorous standards

in English, one in History, three in Geography, three in Math and six in Science.

In some cases there is community conflict over curriculum where parents and educators do not agree. Some parents wonder why certain courses are necessary and

if the children have to know certain things for everyday life like a supplementary angle

is 180 degrees. I the children do not know certain facts then they are penalized

and end up losing out because of it. In some cases children are totally miseducated

by their own teachers. I was told in elementary school that Christopher Colombus discovered America. I did not find out that the Indians really discovered America until I started my freshman year at this college and took a History 101 course.Where are the level of standards within the states? All states require the use of the (NAEP) exams which

is the National Assessment Of Educational Progress exam to measure general knowledge

of the different subjects on different grade levels. This test is used as the most valid

barometer of student achievement. I chose to compare the report cards of two other

states including New York according to the results on the National Assessment Of Education exam.

The results are as follows:

NEW YORK

% = Scoring Proficient

\*1996 8th grade math 22%

\* 1996 8th grade science 27%

\* 1996 4th grade math 20%

\* 1994 4th grade reading 27%

In the area of Standards and Assessments the grade was: A

In their Efforts To Improve Teacher Quality the grade was: B

New York is attempting to create a reform package that improves new standards for

Teachers and beefing up requirements to maintain a teaching liscense. They are also implementing new tests for students and they are trying to intervene and create a program

for low performing schools

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The grade report and test results for the state of Texas are as follows:

TEXAS:

\* 1996 8th grade math 21%

\* 1996 4th grade math 25%

\* 1996 8th grade science 23%

\* 1994 4th grade reading 26%

In the area of Standards And Assessments the grade for 1999 is: B+

In their efforts to raise Teacher Quality the grade was:C+

Texas is going through with one of the biggest comprehensive accountabilty systems in

the nation. The state has strengthened it’s requirements for teacher education programs.

In 1998, a record number of schools earned an exemplary rating under the state’s

accountability system. Schools and districts can receive cash awards for exemplary student performance. However, they are subject to intervention and ultimately takeover if achievement falls below a minimum standard.

The grade report and test results for the state of Washington are as follows:

WASHINGTON

\* 1996 8th grade math 26%

\* 1996 4th grade math 21%

\* 1996 8th grade science 27%

\* 1994 4th grade reading 27%

In the area of Standards And Assessments the grade for 1999 is: C+

In their efforts to raise Teacher Quality the grade is: C

According to the(AFT) which is the American Federation Of Teachers, Washington State’s language arts and social studies standards need work. The only accountability

provision they have so far is that districts are held responsible for reducing the

number of fourth graders who don’t meet the state’s reading standard. A proposal was made last year to permit charter schools but it failed.

As one compares the three states of New York, Texas and Washington, you can see

that they all have low percentages of proficiency in the subjects. The report cards of New York and Texas are excellent but Washington needs a whole lot of improvement.

Why have the students scored so low on the NAEP exam? One theory is that the test

may be biased and difficult. Do the questions really fit what children are supposed to know at that grade level? In some cases the linguistics used on the tests are not in their

everyday vocabulary. This can obviously cause a big problem because if you do not understand the language or mechanics of a question, then you cannot answer the question

correctly. It is unfair to judge a child’s capability and intellect just on a standardized

test. I think capacity and capability encompasses many factors. Everyone at this point

needs to find out who should be held accountable either parents, students or the people

I believe are the blame, teachers.

Some parents are contributing factors to their child’s passing or failing. In today’s society there are lots of single parent households mostly run by women. In the low income neighborhoods some of these women became mothers at very youg ages.such as 15 or 16. When a child becomes a parent at that age they do not have much to offer a

child because they are still children themselves.Some of these girls have to drop out of

school to support their children so how in the world can they teach that child without

knowledge. It is easy to see how the parents cannot be of much help in some cases.

If the parent did not graduate then they might not stress getting an education to their children. The students themselves lack motivation and common goals. These kids do not

see what the point of an education is and what the benefits of school are.

If the paremts do not show any interest do you really expect the child to do so?

Some of these kids live in bad environments surrounded by crime, poverty, and hopelessness. A lot of the children just live day to day and sometimes do not expect to see tomorrow. The whole issue of school and academics in general, they believe, is irrelevant to their lives. Other students lack motivating and caring teachers to give them

helping hand. These teachers are mostly not qualified to perform the position that they

were hired for in the first place. The results are that the child ends up failing and so does the system. The system is failing the kids by giving them unqualified and uncertified

teachers

Most studies show that too many teachers are either un or underqualified. The process

by which teachers become recognized by the state as expert teachers is called teacher

certification. That is a very nice definition but we all know that certification does not equal qualification. Ill prepared teachers contribute to the country’s difficulty in raising

student achievement. The recruitment of qualified teachers for urban schools is particularly difficult so two-thirds of urban districts allow people to teach without a

license. There is a heavy demand for teachers and it is expected to increase not decline

because student enrollments have reached their highest level ever. There are experts who

predict that more than 2 million new teachers will be needed by the year 2001. According

to the National Center For Education Statistics report America’s Teachers: Profile of A

Profession, 1993-1994 about 93% of teachers are fully certified in their main assignment

fields.

It shows that 39.5% of science teachers had not studied science as a major or minor;

34% of math teachers , 25% of english teachers and 55% of history teachers were teaching “out of field”. It is no surprise that the urban schools have the most unqualified

teachers employed in their institutions. If one teacher is lecturing on mathematics but

her major was in English this could be a very big problem. If there was a problem with

you computer you certainly would not call the plumber to fix it. It is absolutely ridiculous

that individuals are supposedly “teaching” in a field that they have absolutely no

training or first hand knowledge of. I certainly would not want someone untrained and

non qualified to try and teach me information because it just will not work in most cases.

In some cases the teachers themselves have no incentives except to receive a paycheck

every week Some of them do not care about their students and the fact that they are not

learning. In my opinion being a teacher is one of the most important professions on earth

and people should take it seriously. It should be an educators main objective to teach the

children in their classrooms and make sure that they do indeed learn. If that is not their main objective than they are definitely in the wrong position. The only way to ensure and

make sure that changes take place and qualified individuals encompass these positions is

through the use of school reform.

The teachers unions have stated that teachers are just not paid enough and that is the

reason why their work performance and quality is low. If their salaries were to increase

then their job performance would also. I certainly do not believe that there is any correlation between wage increase and quality of performance. The solutions need to

be much more concrete and specific than that.The future teachers should be tested on

their knowledge and skills just the possession of a degree and course taking is not enough

The accountability factor for student performance is one of the key issues at the state and

local levels at this point in time.

In many states policymakers are moving towards rewarding success and punishing failure. In this fashion the effort is made to ensure that children are getting a good

education. Only sixteen states have the power to close, take over, or completely overhaul

failing schools. This to me is a big problem because all states should be allowed to shut

down and rebuild a poorly managed insitution and run it as they see fit. There would be less failing schools if this was the case. In general the idea of school reform begins with

six elements. There should be tests that measure if students have met standards, summarizing the performances of schools through the use of report card; determining

adequacy of school performance with ratings systems; rewards for schools based on their

performance; and the authority to close,and take over schools that have failed over a long

period of time.

Unfortunately many states have only put these practices on paper and have not really come through with any actions. There are few states that are ready and willing to impose

penalties. Many educators believe that if schools are given more encouragement, resources, support, and information then they will be able to make changes and be successful. In my opinion if a state or school district wants to really improve their schools, have more children passing and to improve the quality of their teaching staff then they would do whatever it takes to see success be their reality. I believe the states

recieve enough monetary support that they can certainly use to make big changes. All states should be committed to making a change and putting all the proper reform principles into effect.

The New York educational system is failing at this point. The system is riddled with

unqualified staff, administrators and officials. The children are the ones that end up paying the price of state and local incompetence It is time that everyone take responsibility for their positions and make the necessary changes. School reform is the first step to ensure our children’s success..