

EDUCATION

“Our high schools are obsolete...they were designed fifty years ago to meet the needs of another age...limiting — even ruining — the lives of millions of Americans every year.”

— Bill Gates, chairman of Microsoft and co-founder of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

Moving high schools into the modern world

In an article recently printed in the *Los Angeles Times* titled “What’s Wrong With American High Schools,” Bill Gates explores the issues that contribute to the failures students are currently experiencing. Gates basically explains that the foundations of secondary education created during the 20th century are still implemented in modern formal public education. Thus, they are outdated and need to be revamped.

According to his article, Gates states that only one-third of today’s students graduate from high school ready for citizenship, work, and college. He believes this is a result of old-school concepts of preparing “an adequate work force by sending only a small fraction of students to college, and that the other kids either couldn’t do college work or didn’t need to.” Unfortunately, this is happening in too many schools across the country.



By Vicki Isacowitz

ON THE CHALKBOARD

He points out wealthy, white students are given the opportunity to challenge themselves in college preparatory courses, while minority and low-income students are taught basic life skills, such as balancing a checkbook. Gates suggests that new designs recognizing the ability of all students to accomplish demanding tasks be imple-

mented as a remedy to the existing problem.

Resolving the situation involves reorganizing schools around three key philosophies:

1. Provide a challenging curriculum that prepares all students for college or work.
2. Relate courses to students’ lives and goals.
3. Surround students with adults who encourage them to find success.

In order for this type of reform to occur, restructuring high schools must happen.

Back in 1900, students took classes where 20-30 kids tried to learn with the teacher situated in the front of the room. Teaching consisted of lectures, demonstrations, discussions, or quiet work while sitting at a desk. Homework was often assigned for students to complete for their next class. Procedures and systems have since that time remained rel-

atively the same with some resistance to change. Despite the fact that contemporary teachers utilize more hands-on and out-of-the-box methods of learning, the practice of teaching and process of learning in 1900 closely resembles that of today.

In the year 2005, efforts are being made to improve the current state of affairs regarding both primary and secondary education. Implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act, along with increasing the weight of standardized testing, are a few of the measures being exercised. It is interesting that decision-makers believe that holding students more accountable for their testing will increase their knowledge. I tend to disagree and follow more of the Bill Gates’ beliefs which call for a re-evaluation of existing structures in education.

Students are living in a different world today. Between the rise of the Internet and cell phones, technology

continues to reach new heights every day. At the rate we’re going, students will be “beaming” themselves instead of driving cars. A bit ridiculous, but the point is that a new generation is preparing to enter the world outside of school, and it is the responsibilities of educators, tax payers and decision-makers to ensure their capability to succeed.

Restructuring education costs money. However, it is important to consider what is at stake here. The future of our society is dependent on the achievements of today’s teenagers. Improving our schools is the first step in creating better opportunities for tomorrow.

— Vicki Isacowitz is a secondary English teacher who has been educating students since 1996. She is co-founder of *Clever Minds Educational Services*, providing tutoring for students in grades K-12. Call (530) 582-1707 or e-mail vicki@cleverminds.org.