

Four Keys for Successful Schools

Excerpt is from *Character Under Attack and What You Can Do About It*

The educational crisis facing America today is a philosophical crisis: should the inherent values of our educational system be based on moral relativism that there are no absolutes, or should our educational system be based on America's historical value system? There are four main crisis areas facing schools: educational, disciplinary, racial, and moral, and the key to success in each of these areas has to do with which value system is chosen.

What would happen if educational leaders would declare from America's heritage this value from the Declaration of Independence? "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." As a consequence of our Constitution that all men are created equal, regardless of your color or background, *all* students must behave and respect every teacher and student in their desire of life, liberty and pursuit of happiness.

Could you envision the transformation of our schools if there would be a sign over every school entrance: "Once you enter these doors, we will *not* tolerate misbehavior!" Everything would be done to help misbehaving students, but those refusing to change—reform school. I'm not endorsing carrying a bat and clobbering any kid who disobeys. That's how opponents would like to paint those believing in discipline. But proper discipline creates a loving atmosphere that refuses to tolerate misbehavior so that all students can receive the best education. Fair, firm, and loving discipline works wherever it's applied: classrooms, schools, families, or businesses. Effective discipline needs all three. Eliminate any one of these three principles of fair, firm, or loving, and discipline will be ineffective.

Some may ask, "Why are you so strong on discipline?" I'm strong on discipline because I've witnessed firsthand as a substitute teacher the frustration of teachers and the fear of children sitting in undisciplined classrooms. I've documented in my book, *Schools in Crisis: Training for Success or Failure?* the ruinous effect that undisciplined schools have on children's educational experience. In undisciplined schools, might makes right, and bullies becomes the leaders. All the lofty goals of leaving no child behind can never be achieved unless schools are disciplined. Effective education is only possible in a disciplined atmosphere. Others may contend, "You're much too hard. What about children's rights?" That's exactly the problem. What about the rights of the innocent children being deprived of a proper education? What about the right of not being abused by bullies? Put yourself into the shoes of those who are bullied.

Listen to how it affected Erika Harold, who was chosen Miss America. Harold has been so affected by bullying that she goes on speaking tours telling about her experience of being bullied in ninth grade. "It started out with people calling me names, and then it got worse," Harold said. "They threw things at me, they vandalized my house, and they sang nasty songs about me in school hallways and classrooms. It got so bad that I felt like I was in danger physically."¹

What about Miss America's rights when she was bullied in ninth grade? Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, a national advocacy group that consists of over 2,000 law enforcement officers

and victims of violence, reports that each year for children in grades six through ten nearly one in six, or 3.2 million, were victims of bullying and 3.7 million were bullies. Of those labeled as bullies in grades six through nine, nearly 60 percent of the boys were convicted of one crime by the time they reached 24. Those bullied, the report stated, citing U.S. and European studies, are five times more prone to be depressed and more likely to be suicidal.² A study by Vanderbilt University estimates that each high-risk juvenile that is saved from a life of crime would save the country from \$1.7 to \$2.3 million.³ What would happen if *all* schools would implement a fair, firm, and loving discipline policy?

In the early 1980s, two social scientists advocated what became known as the broken-window theory. They claimed that if a broken window was not fixed in a neighborhood, other windows in the neighborhood would likewise be smashed. Why? It sent a message that no one cared. This produced further vandalism and criminal-minded individuals would be attracted while law-abiding citizens would leave. The key was to immediately fix the broken window. Charles Colson in his book, *How Now Shall We Live?* cites what happened when New York City implemented the broken-window theory:⁴

In the early 1990s, New York Police Chief William Bratton took the broken-window theory to heart and persuaded New York's newly elected mayor and tough ex-prosecutor Rudolph Giuliani to give the theory a try. The order went out to police in Precincts 69 and 75 and to Brooklyn, where Officer Sal was stationed, to 'fix broken windows' — that is, to arrest petty offenders and clean up the neighborhoods. The police adopted a policy of zero tolerance for any violation of public order, and in the process they soon discovered that there is indeed a 'seamless web' between controlling petty crime and restraining major crime. Whereas before they had ignored turnstile jumping at subways, officers now nabbed the offenders, who, as often as not, turned out to be muggers. Whereas before they had turned a blind eye to minor traffic violations, they now stopped all traffic violators, which often led to the discovery of drugs and guns in the cars. They chased away loiterers and panhandlers, many of whom were drug dealers looking for a sale. In three years in Precinct 75, once one of the most dangerous places in America, the number of homicides dropped from 129 to 47.⁵

How many school problems would evaporate if administrators would insist that every student respects the rights of others and if "zero tolerance" would be implemented for misbehavior? That would send a strong message about the character virtue of respecting others.

Schools should also provide programs that every child, regardless of race or color, has the opportunity to achieve his or her fullest constitutional right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Standards for each grade should be implemented, materials should be provided that teach and encourage children to reach their full potential, and teachers should be evaluated on their teaching.

Those opposed to such programs would like to portray this as being judgmental and as forcing one's beliefs on children. They present themselves as champions of being nonjudgmental and of supporting individual liberty. It's the exact opposite—this method creates an environment where *all* children can be taught the values of how they can become

successful and enjoy their full liberty. Those opposed to training children in proper behavior, in their perverted view of liberty, allow children in undisciplined schools and permissive learning environments to fall further and further behind. The result? Today, America ranks close to the bottom in the industrialized world in educational achievement.

Here are four keys to successful schools:

1. Educational: Insist that every child receive a proper education by providing appropriate teaching materials for every grade, eliminating automatic promotion, administering standards for every grade, and evaluating teachers.

2. Disciplinary: Insist that every school provide a disciplined learning environment so children are protected and can receive a proper education.

3. Racial: Create a learning atmosphere that treats all races the same, and provide resources so all children can reach their full potential.

4. Moral: Reject moral relativism by providing textbooks that teach the values that built our nation, and promote virtues that help children develop successful habits.

I could go into much detail about the educational, disciplinary, racial, and moral solutions. I addressed these issues in detail in the book I wrote: *Schools in Crisis: Training for Success or Failure?* The 335-page book is available free on our website under “Free Resources” at www.advancepublishing.com. The book provides many principles for successful schools that are still applicable.

Our Founding Fathers built this nation because they believed in values. They did not believe in moral relativism. My hope is that Americans will wake up and return to our constitutional heritage. Imagine what would happen if educational leaders would implement these four steps for successful schools across America. I know there are strong forces opposed to these common-sense methods. It’s much easier to take a permissive hands-off policy and let schools and children find their own way. Concerned individuals must insist that something be done that American schools can once again become models of achievement and promote the values that made our nation successful.

To read more, order **Character Under Attack and What You Can Do About It* by Carl Sommer.

**Character Under Attack and What You Can Do About It* by Carl Sommer, author of the award-winning Another Sommer-Time Story™ series, can be purchased from Advance Publishing.

¹ Bullying not just kid’s burden, *Houston Chronicle*, September 6, 2003.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Charles Colson, *How Now Shall We Live?* Wheaton, Illinois, Tyndale House Publishers, 1999, pp. 363-364.