

Community Lead Education

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The Education Professionals

In recent times, education has increasingly become dominated by highly trained professional educators and administrators. There are now a slew of professionals that know how to teach, how to run a school, how to comply with volumes of legal text, how to budget for a school properly, and also what is important to teach. Our universities produce volumes of education research papers, and teachers must undergo far more continuous learning requirements than any other profession. And yet, our national academic scores keep plummeting. When half the nation can not read at 8th grade level after 13 years spent in one of the most expensive education systems in the world, there is enough blame to go around.

Clearly, the professionalism we are investing in as a nation does not produce the outcomes we want. For what every reason, it is no longer rational to continue down this path of what may be over-educating teaching and administration professions. Forcing teacher to ever-increasing levels of certifications and qualifications limits the pool of job-seekers, but seem to have no affect on the students themselves.

Through this transition to professionalism, the community and families are now completely left out of these processes and decisions. The community may well have opted out, happy to hire professionals to do a job for them. Unfortunately the outcomes are not as expected.

It is true that there are curriculum review boards for local school district, where parents volunteer to review curricula and make recommendations. And yet, the curricula is always pre-filtered to those choices which meet standards that are set by other agencies, written by highly educated professionals.

It is also true that parents can run for school board, and thereby have an influence on the operations of the school. There may be a few examples where a few highly-dedicated school board members are able to transform a school with very poor academic achievement into a high achieving school. The challenge is that there are just too many different stakeholders involved in a public school for that one parent, no matter how dedicated, to make a real and tangible difference on the school board.

Our institutions have grown far too complex over time, too calcified with regulations, too enamored with education expertise and too reliant of standards to deliver exceptional education. The only path forward is to restore the responsibility of education to the primary stakeholders, the families who seek their children to be educated.

The education professionals are not doing their job, but the blame may well lie at the feet of the community who has become conspicuously absent in the education of their children. And instead of taking on the weight of responsibility, we have enjoyed turning the education system into an adversary, and perhaps even a punching bag. To train up children in the way they should go, is fundamentally the responsibility of the family.

Stakeholder Alignment

All business, markets, and successful endeavours align the desire with outcomes. When we expect mere humans to take actions for the sheer benefit of others, and not entirely in their own interests, we consider this virtuous behavior. Market systems and well-operating businesses do not rely on virtue to be successful, they rely on alignment of benefit to goals. Successful systems reward good work and correct bad decisions.

Education is a system whose effectiveness is no different than any other well-functioning system. All stakeholders in education need to experience benefit from positive academic outcomes and receive a little adversity from poor outcomes.

The education system is misaligned in the following ways:

- Teachers are provided fixed pay, their job performance is immaterial. There is absolutely no incentive to go the extra mile to help out a particular student or to improve in teaching ability.
- Teacher's continuous learning requirements are developed by college professors who are not in the classroom, while education researchers and politicians keep piling good ideas onto teachers so they can do better, but never test their ideas out on their own children first.
- Administration executives are hired based on their ability to manage union negotiations, compliance with regulations, and lead a large, complex organization. There are few superintendents with pay structures that reward improved academic outcomes.
- School funding is based on the number of students who show up to school each day. Schools make more money by enrolling more and more students, and by harshly punishing absences. The funding model makes super-large schools the most financially attractive, students have long commutes, and become just one person in a huge crowd.
- School boards have to rely on the superintendent for most decisions since the complexity of regulation and difficulty of union negotiations is beyond the grasp of the average elected parent. Big schools are just too complex for average-qualified parents to make a difference.
- The Parent is now the adversary of the teacher, no longer the partner. The systems are so complex and calcified that when a parent wants the system to bend to the needs of the individual student, the system can't and the teacher is blamed.

With such misalignment of incentives and outcomes, it is fair to conclude that the virtue of participants is the only reason why some students learn at all. When the community and family takes back the responsibility of educating students, the outcomes will be properly aligned so that students get a solid education.

Now let's imagine a teacher running a school as small business, where the teacher is the owner-operator.

- The teacher would like to increase the number of clients, and so must establish a good reputation as a great teacher.
- Because each client matters to a small business, every student is very important to the teacher.
- The parents are paying tuition, and so they are properly incentivized to bring their students to school on time.
- The business must deliver results, and demonstrate to parents improved educational outcomes, or else why would the parent pay the bill.
- There is distant administrator making financial decisions that affect the students, the teacher who knows the students manages the business finances to the benefit of the desired outcomes.
- The budgets are simple enough to manage.

Now let's imagine many, many different small business schools.

- When there is a clash of personalities, parents can just switch their students to different small business, one who synchronizes better with the family.
- Families can self-sort according to their needs, so that one size does not fit all.
- This is more than school choice, this is teacher choice, direct choice on the environment students experience.

Small Business Makes it Happen

Parents care about who comes in direct contact with their students, they care about teachers, and they care nothing at all for administrators. But school organizations are limited in how much flexibility they can provide parents when choosing teachers. Obviously a school can not allow a few teachers to have hundreds of students and others a handful, this kind of popularity contest is demoralizing to all employees.

The key is to get the school out of the way when a parent selects a teacher. This is accomplished by regarding the teacher as an independent contractor rather than an employee. After-all, teachers who are employees all need to be treated equitably, getting paid the same regardless on their job performance. With this approach, the school endeavours to recruit as many quality teachers as possible to become independent contractors, and the teachers recruit their own students.

- The school is motivated to find great teachers since they have better recruiting credibility
- The teachers are motivated to look after the interests of the students in order to retain their revenue stream.

The school's responsibility to the teacher is to provide quality on-line curricula, training, and a platform to manage student outcomes. The school's responsibility to the student is to ensure the course work advances the student's learning. The school's responsibility to the family is to ensure the school meets the accreditation standards and certification standards that are expected.

The Rise of the Teaching Para Professional

With computer-based learning, students are streamed the same kind of direct instruction that highly-qualified teachers have done for years, they can watch the best explainer-videos. They have responsive learning software applications that help them fill in the learning gaps. The computer auto-grades at least 80% of regular assignments. Teachers can now use computer dashboards and click their way to student management. So what does the teaching profession look like when students are learning mostly from the computers anyway, why are they even lecturing all day?

The type of education required to manage a group of students learning online is very different than that which most teachers study in college. Lesson plans are not needed, lectures are not needed, and grading papers is easy. Teachers spend a tremendous amount of time learning about standards in college, when the on-line curriculum provider takes care of addressing standards. A differently qualified teacher 'para professional' can excel at helping students be successful at computer-based education.

These para professionals are more learning coaches, and their primary function is to keep students engaged and getting their work done. When they help students with academic content, they only need to help with specific problems, the coach and the student can figure it out together.

As there is no certification or bachelor's degree for 'education coach' as yet, ambitious and caring community members have an opportunity to step into this void. With a major shift to computer-based learning, the specific, academic requirements of a traditionally educated teacher are just not as relevant. Most high school graduates can become a learning coach with a few weeks of refresher training, some computer technical training, and solid business sense.

Computer-Based Learning is the Key to Taking Back Education

The advancement of computer-based learning is the pathway for community members can take back education through operating a school as a profitable small business, or facilitating a group of parents to operate a small school as a co-op. A well thought out virtual school partner can dramatically drop the administrative overhead of delivering course work, managing records, and fulfilling accreditation requirements, so that the people closest to the students retain the majority of the tuition fees.