Pocket Gofer 10

**ON EDUCATION IN THE U.S.A.**

THE PROBLEM AND ITS CAUSES

A SOLUTION, ITS POTENTIAL, AND A BARRIER

DETAILS OF OUR RECOMMENDATION

CONCLUSION

Chinese proverb: “If you plan for one year, plant rice. If you plan for 10 years, plant trees. If you plan for 100 years, educate the people.”

"In 1787, Jefferson wrote to Madison, wondering: '----- whether peace is best preserved by giving energy to the government, or information to the people. This last is the most certain and the most legitimate engine of government.

“'Educate and inform the whole mass of the people. Enable them to see that it is their interest to preserve peace and order, and they will preserve them.’" (from James Barber: The Book of Democracy).

If a society puts a higher value on **whom** **we know** than on **what we know** there is no need for a good system of education. Limited resources (as they must always be) will be diverted from their most productive uses.

In the Washington of today the name of the game is whom you know and whom you can buy. We will see why insiders don't put much value on education of us citizens, even while they strive to convince us otherwise.

Someone once said "That society which routes its best and brightest young people into the public sector, which spends wealth, instead of into the private sector, which creates wealth, shall not long endure as a viable society."

THE PROBLEM AND ITS CAUSES

Government at all levels keeps getting larger. They keep hiring more bright young bureaucrats, who immediately dig in for the duration without fear of being canned.

And there are those thousands of bright young lawyers, lobbyists, "consultants," etc. homing in on Washington. Makes us wonder where it will end.

A dose of horse sense is in order, so we thought about the situation and came up with this insight. Take **any government** and the mass of citizens where each feels they are alienated politically from the other.

That is, the people feel like their government is not responsive to their concerns. In this situation government **officials will see that it is in their interest to discourage quality education**.

Sounds crazy? There is logic in this; hang in there.

In 1984 a blue ribbon commission did a huge study of our nation's education system. Its report is titled "A Nation at Risk." Inside was a stark warning: time is running out, and if we don't shape up immediately, for sure it will hit the fan at some time in the future.

What has been done in the 36 years since, based on the recommendations in the report? Damn near nothing.

Oh yes, we have heard the rhetoric: elder Bush calling himself the "education president" (did anyone else call him that?) and Clinton trumpeting its importance (another one of those famous promises).

Good education produces thinking citizens, and this type of citizen scares the bee-jeebers out of the privileged class. The specific risk is that some of the peasants may get to thinking, develop suspicions, investigate them, and expose what the government is really doing behind the rhetoric (as we do in Pocket Gofer 19).

The kicker here is that “probably less than five percent of the people do any original thinking on any subject. The greatest torture in the world for most people is to think (paraphrased from Luther Burbank).”

Much better to keep the rabble dumbed down. Logically, this is done most efficiently if government retains control over education. Therefore the rhetoric we get almost daily flogs the virtues of public education.

**PROOF OF GOVERNMENT INSINCERITY**: In 1990 elder President Bush gave a heart-stirring speech in which he proudly introduced his "Goals 2000" program for overhauling education. Within months the teachers’ unions got all the momentum arrested, and the public lost interest.

Forward to 1997 and Clinton’s equally stirring speech calling for a "crusade" for education. But he emphasized a goal of having everyone get at least two years of college.

However, it is the K-12 grade system that is failing. Seems hardly productive to patch the roof before working on the foundation.

Funny: in his state-of-the-union speech that year he said nothing about teachers’ unions. These organizations had been blocking improvements in the system for years.

Diane Ravitch was elder Bush’s assistant secretary of education. She urged Clinton to have his proposed national testing program supervised by an independent agency, not the Department of Education. It did not happen.

Why? National testing would bring out for all to see the sickness in the K-12 system, so it would force an overhaul in which thousands of bad teachers would get the heave-ho. These people pay their union dues, much of which pours through a spigot aimed at politicians. They don’t want to see that spigot turned off. See PG3.

The testing program will remain under central government control. Therefore it will probably emphasize contemporary "whole language" theories of reading and "fuzzy math," where the process of problem-solving is more important than getting the right answer.

These theories are impractical for educating kids, so critics lined up their heavy artillery for public hearings to be held before the bill hit the floor in Congress for a vote. But the administration canceled those hearings and plunged ahead.

In late 1999 almost 200 top mathematicians and scientists urged the secretary of education to dump fuzzy math as an educational tool. Their letter expressed concern that instruction will end up being dumbed down.

Four recipients of the famous Nobel Prize also signed it. The letter had the predictable effect on Big Government: zilch.

Friends, some may accuse us of skepticism, but we cannot avoid the suspicion that several years ago the Department of Education was created in order to **discourage** good education. Yeah, we heard the rhetoric. But we are working with reality here.

From the *Wall St. Journal* 1/18/2007: "*Our future depends crucially on how we educate the next generation of people gifted with unusually high intelligence*. How assiduously does our federal government work?

"The only program to improve the education of the gifted got $9.6 million, one-hundredth of one percent of expenditures. In the 2007 budget, President GW Bush zeroed it out."

Well, that’s the government for you. *The Economist* 3/2018, scouted around.

“Singapore’s approach ------ traditional form of ‘gifted’ education, ------ intelligence tests

“Just how important is suggested by the Study of Mathematically Precocious Youth (SMPY), founded in 1971. Julian Stanley, then a psychologist at Johns Hopkins University, over 25 years recruited 5,000 precocious children, each of whom had intelligence test scores in early adolescence high enough to gain entry to university.

“Research into how these children did in adulthood has emerged over the past two-three decades. Of the SMPY participants who scored among the top 0.5% for their age group in maths and verbal tests, 30% went on to earn a doctorate, versus 1% of Americans.

Several months later, *The Economist* 9/2018): “What other countries should learn from Singapore’s schools.” There is no teachers’ union there.

“How did it become one of the world’s great trading and financial centers? The strategy, explained Lee Kuan Yew, its first prime minister, was ‘to develop Singapore’s only available natural resource: its people.’

“Today Singapore’s education ------------- best in the world. -------- consistently ranks at the top of the OECD’s Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), a triennial test of 15-year-olds in dozens of countries, in -------- maths, reading and science. Singapore pupils are roughly **three years ahead of their American peers** in maths (our emphasis).”

State universities in Michigan have apparently bought into some goofy new ideas. A report showed that standards, grammar, grades, and judgment are discouraged as bad. What is good are self-expression, self-esteem, and personal rules.

Apparently good writing is now seen as a tool of the rich and powerful as they oppress the poor and downtrodden. An article in the *English Leadership Quarterly* urged teachers to make intentional errors in English as "------ the only way to end its oppression of linguistic minorities ------." This krud strains our credibility.

Good, tough standards are essential for effective control of any operation. Recently Britain started testing students and publishing the results.

The first reaction among parents generated more excitement than a soccer game. They naturally want the best for their children, and here came an opportunity to choose the best schools.

There is a good test available here, called the National Assessment of Educational Progress. But most states have ignored this control tool and formulated their own,

watered-down standards. This is aimed at calming concerned and critical parents by faking them into believing that the right thing is being done.

The Department of Education commissioned a study by Charles Glenn in 1989. The result was a book titled Educational Freedom in Eastern Europe.

It showed that there are places where parents have more school choice than in America. Reformers there saw education as important for the revival of civil society after 40 years of communism.

The book was not published during the remainder of elder Bush’s watch, and Clinton canceled it in early 1993 right after taking office. In 1994 the Department finally published, get this, **200 copies**.

We saw above how Bush and Clinton trumpeted the importance of education in our fair land. Now we see that it was all rhetoric, baloney.

George Will in a 12/1998 column: "Poor parents are rebellious about their children’s assigned role as fodder for one of the Democratic Party’s must muscular sources of money, the teachers unions."

Therefore in a pseudo-democracy such as ours the government wants to arrange things so that only a small elite receive a good education. These "best and brightest" young people are then routed into cushy jobs in government.

In the old days on the farm parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles could and did teach kids nearly all they needed to know. With the coming of the Industrial Revolution, the machine age and bigger cities and towns, governments saw a need for formal education. (In the early days all basic formal education was private.)

Most folks did not see this need at the time, so government seized the initiative. We had leaders in government back then, or so people thought.

Andrew J. Coulson wrote a book called Market Education: The Unknown History. In it he reviewed thousands of years of history to show that free-market education consistently beat government-controlled schools in providing what parents most desired for their children.

To the present. Coulson studied the output of three reliable organizations: the National Assessment of Educational Progress, The International Evaluation of Education Achievement, and the Young National and International Adult Literacy Surveys. Results

of all agreed that student achievement has stagnated or fallen in most subjects since 1970; the worst area is basic literacy.

Friends, this is disturbing, to say the least. Is Coulson right? Twight cited his work in her current book Dependent on DC: The Rise of Federal Control over the Lives of Ordinary Americans. She verified Coulson’s arguments, and went on to cite 19th-century philosopher Bastiat.

"For what precise and definite object are all the citizens today to be stamped, like the coinage, with the same image? On what basis would they be cast in the same mold? *And who will possess the mold*? A terrible question, which should give us pause."

As the evidence piled up, Twight didn’t stop there. She quoted Isabel Paterson (1943): "Every politically controlled educational system will inculcate the doctrine of state supremacy sooner or later ------. --------.

“It has had his body, property, and mind in its clutches from infancy. An octopus would sooner release its prey. A tax-supported, compulsory educational system is the complete model of the totalitarian state."

Baron Henry Brougham: “Education makes people easy to lead, but difficult to drive; easy to govern, but impossible to enslave.” There are four thoughts here. Two apply to democracy; the other two to a totalitarian government.

Ante-bellum plantation owners did not want their slaves going to school. They believed that smart slaves would rebel. Today’s American high government officials think in the same way, and for the same reason.

Columnist David Brooks (News & Observer 2/17/13): "The big federal early childhood program, Head Start, has been chugging along since 1965, and the outcomes are dismal.

That said, maybe we should have expected a recent gimmick: No Child Left Behind. Big Government passed this one into law to win votes. This much is obvious.

 What is not so obvious are the goofy results (which we suspect the government anticipated). Much depends on students passing state tests by correctly answering 70 percent of the questions.

From a 10/2006 Raleigh, NC newspaper column: “Schools get no credit for moving a student from a 15 to a 69, or from a 70 to a 95. Yet if ------ nudge a student from a 69 to a 71, the school’s passing rate increases.

“The stakes are enormous. So it isn’t surprising that many educators game the system by reaching first for the low-hanging fruit, ------- closest to passing.” Schools are concentrating their resources here, while neglecting all other students. “------- creating the illusion of progress where none exists.”

NCLB permits private tutoring after school. All too often the same teachers who are failing the students during school hours are hired as tutors.

Furthermore NCLB allowed states to set their own standards. They predictably set them low so they could show rising test scores even tho there was no improvement.

In 2/2010 the *Economist* was sniffing around. "A state-wide review of standardized tests ------ Georgia's state schools in the spring of 2009 ----. -------- looked for unusually high numbers of wrong-to-right erasure marks, --------.

"--- 13 teachers in GA were punished for cheating, including the principal and assistant principal at one elementary school. They changed answers ----- for fear that otherwise their school would not make 'adequate yearly progress,' as required by ----- NCLB.

If a school fails for two years running it must offer students an opportunity to change schools. Teachers and administrators can be fired.

Now we can see how these dismal results fit into a grand plan. Therefore other people and organizations can and must take the initiative. In this pocket gofer we will see why this is an idea worth discussing.

But wait. Here comes Arne Duncan, President Obama's secretary of education. His glittering record includes supporting charter schools, merit pay, accountability and transparency. Is he our savior?

Unlikely. The education unions are masters at welcoming reforms in theory while torpedoing them in practice. Their lobbyists regularly come by congressional offices while dragging huge bags of tainted money.

That record could be tarnished. Will (*News & Observer* 3/2010) wrote that Duncan "vowed to unleash on public schools legions of lawyers wielding Title IV of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. He is unhappy with too many white students in advanced-placement classes.

"No policy denies minority or low-income students 'access' to AP classes." Duncan's reference to Title IV goes backward to a "groupthink" era in education, which was necessary then in order to rectify discrimination. Will continued:

"Plainly put, the best predictor of a school's performance is family performance ----. ----- research suggests that about 90% of the difference among the proficiency of schools can be explained by five factors: days absent from school, hours spent watching TV, pages read for homework, the quantity and quality of reading matter in the home --- and the presence of two parents in the home." Duncan and Title IV can't do much about these.

Duncan and company knew that parents were still unhappy. State-set standards are out. A policy states that by 2015 states must adopt new standards for English and math, so that students will be "college and career ready" by 2020.

Today's parents will be impressed, but not favorably. This policy only kicks the can down the road. 2020 is here, but results are scarce due to Covid-19 lock-downs.

**HUMAN NATURE**: We think it is a natural human tendency to seek information, learning. Just watch a child in a good school or in some other interesting learning situation.

His/her mind is like a sponge, furiously soaking up everything that comes his way. Some of us envy those kids, and wish we could again have a mind like theirs (but retain what we have already learned, of course).

Let's watch a five-year-old. He/she asks Mother "Why this?" "Go ask your father." "Daddy, why this?" "Because of that." "But, why that?" "Because of this." "Yeah, but -----" etc. This can and does bug parents.

Patience, folks. The kid is theorizing. Theory is free and open inquiry leading to a tentative explanation of what we observe. Inquiry is learning, which is what we are doing as we read and discuss the pocket gofers.

We should not discourage children from attempts to learn why. We recall our Navy days decades ago. There was a sign on the wall (bulkhead) that said "The man who knows how works for the man who knows why."

But this is not restricted to kids. Take any organization where the top brass doesn't make a strong effort to keep everyone informed about what is happening. Employees' natural tendencies to learn are frustrated if they are kept in the dark, so the rumor mill cranks up to fill this unmet need for information.

As time goes by rumor is gradually believed as truth, and this guides employee behavior. Then instances keep increasing where the top dogs cannot understand why (theory) the troops keep screwing up.

The outfit slides downward. The good people leave. Those who remain watch the organization slide further down the slippery slope.

We call this a vicious cycle. Soon it is time for an obit.

Does this cycle apply as well to government? The situation here is that we citizens have been kept in the dark for decades. The other day our ears caught another rumor .........

Fisher (5/2000 column) described how slick marketeers gradually flimflammed us. "Think back to the time before focus groups and the triumph of marketing over content. The ‘pop’ in pop culture ------ was content that sprang from the people, from the bottom up. Pop was born in folk: -------."

Slowly there entered a new era. "Technology made mass culture possible: Radio, movies, TV, the car, the mall, the mobile phone. And then marketing took over.

Pop culture became something imposed from above, created by elites. The ‘pop’ --- the people --- became the targets, rather than the creators."

Fisher argued that bottom-up gradually flipped over to top-down (see Pocket Gofer 4). "Today, due in large part to the deterioration of the American education system, consumers more often lack the ability to identify truth, in government as well as in the marketplace. Thus the subtle switch in both areas, from bottom-up to top-down." Today thinking citizens are up against a post-truth, populist, disinformation and fake news society. We are beginning to cry out: What happened to truth? Stay tuned.

In the coming open society there will be information flying around everywhere (Pocket Gofer 5). As we satisfy our desire for information, we can pick and choose. Most of us will find that we are getting smarter, even when the education system has failed to help us sharpen our learning tools.

This means that politicians will be able to flimflam us less and less often. If they don't start being straight with us their only recourse is a police state, where we are kept under their thumb against our will. Friends, we all know how long **that** brand will float.

Lots of folks bitch about companies exporting jobs when their managers decide to build that plant in Mexico or somewhere else. Many of those decisions are not due to cheap labor abroad, but to the sobering fact that enough of the right kinds of labor skills are not available here.

Now, in these instances politicians assure us that the problem is cheap labor abroad. Many of us believe them. This says something about our education system as it is today that we don't want to hear.

**PROGRESSIVE EDUCATION AND STANDARDS**: About 65 years ago a lot of folks got concerned about our system. Nothing wrong in this; in fact it is healthy to criticize any institution. Keeps it young and flexible.

However, they came up with a philosophy called "progressive education." It encouraged teachers to get away from the basic three Rs and classroom discipline and do other things. A subtle government plot?

Belfast, Northern Ireland has always been staunchly conservative. Convinced that the old way was best, citizens there didn't drastically change their system when practically everyone else did.

Now parents can choose to which school to send their children, standards are excellent, and top graduates of university schools of education are lining up to teach in the system. They are breaking down the doors. And all this is a city where until recently to go from point A to point B a person risked being killed or maimed by a bullet or bomb!

A 2006 study ranked 15-year-olds in 30 advanced countries. America ranked 21st in science and 25th in math.

Recently the largest international research project on educational standards that we know of was published, involving 41 countries. The top rank went to Singapore, followed by South Korea, Japan and Hong Kong.

The top European country was the Czech Republic, ranked 6. This country spends about a third as much per student as we do.

Many of the big spenders had mediocre or worse results. And the USA? We were afraid the question would come up. We grit our teeth and spit it out: ranked 28 out of 41.

Michael Badnarik’s book Good to be King: “When the Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) was established in 1953, American students ranked number one in the world in the fields of math and science.

“Our schools are now filled with children who can’t read or write, and we spend ten times as much per student as we did in 1953. Even if the Department of Education (replaced part of HEW) was constitutional, which it is not, it should still be eliminated for doing such a terrible job.”

Walter Cronkite on education: "----- lies at the bottom of every problem we have. If the people were truly self-informed, were truly philosophical, were truly aware of our

associations with one another, (then) presumably our dialogue and our reporting would be considerably better than it is.

"The tragedy is, we aren’t educated to any degree. Education levels are so low that the public does not have a capability of making an informed judgment …. so we’re handicapped from the beginning." Career politicians and other elites thrive under these circumstances.

We might think this is bad, but we have yet to really see into the academic wasteland being created (Will in a 1/2001 column). "And now there is a movement to abolish homework, partly because it widens social inequalities by disproportionately benefiting children with attentive parents."

HOLY MAMA MIA!! This is incredible. Social inequality is what built this nation: people with money investing it in enterprises that provided work for those without.

And homework helps greatly to bond parents to their children. Kids see their parents interested in learning, and it rubs off.

It surely seems like there is a message here. And it seems like we are getting it.

Right along with relaxation of academic standards came a gradual abandonment of school discipline. Eventually the lawyers smelled money. John Leo (12/1999 column) tore the cover off this one.

"What happened to PC (politically correct) codes is now happening to zero-tolerance rules in public schools. ------ seems to make zero sense: the 12-year-old boy expelled for waving a stapler around on a school bus, the Florida girl suspended for bringing a nail clipper to class, ------."

We are amazed that a society that (presumably, in the Constitution) preaches tolerance among different ethnic groups would go down this road. Does zero-tolerance suspend or expel a student for coming to school while Black? Hispanic? Asian?

"Some school officials imagined that by-the-book penalties, by eliminating discretion, would reduce parental protests and litigation. But one-size-fits-all punishment merely removes one form of arbitrariness (shall we punish him or let him off with a warning?) and replaces it with another (shall we consider zinc cough drops a drug offense?).

“So expect no let-up in litigating." No solution. Just more money for lawyers.

Of course the *Economist* (6/2002) jumped on this one. "------ underground student newspaper -----. ----- called one of the teachers a ‘former porn star,’ the district tried to shut it down. The pupils cried censorship; the district backed off.

“Then both ------ head to court. Before the smoke cleared, both sides were suing not each other, but the LA school system. ------ jury awarded the teacher a cool $4.35m."

This is stupid. Why not just ask the newspaper for proof? But then, for years the standard news media have been getting away with reporting undocumented stories, and customers (that’s us) have permitted them to do this.

We got to thinking about this one. Maybe the teacher, aware of the screwed-up legal system, engineered the porn-star caper in hopes of getting an award from a jury? And she got the student publishers to cooperate by promising them a cut? --------- NAH!

"An increasing number of pupils and their parents ---------. ------ are suing schools in record numbers, siphoning money out of education, costing taxpayers millions, and prompting federal legislation to shield teachers from frivolous claims."

A lawyer approaches a school superintendent with a demand for a bunch of bucks or he will sue. The latter realizes that even if he wins it will cost more than this amount in lawyer fees, so he caves. We can’t seem to stop thinking: Soon this business will be a racket, if it isn’t already.

It is not just the schools. Friends, this amounts to a parental disciplinary cop-out.

"And it’s hard for students to respect authority when all the authorities are busy suing one another, ducking suits, or cracking down on Advil violations." This is the example that many of today’s adults are setting for their children to follow in the future.

In a November 2002 column Silberman described a neophyte teacher’s reason for leaving the profession (one of a large and increasing number). "The students were unruly, frequently acting out, hitting each other, and sometimes hitting her."

The school administration provided little support. "New teachers, often left to fend for themselves -----, are leaving ------ despite robust salary increases during the past six years."

A second column in the same edition (*News & Observer* 11/2002) interviewed another beginning teacher. He ripped into President Bush’s No Child Left Behind Act, which makes the job at least twice as difficult as it was beforehand.

"There is no federal mandate that every doctor cure every patient. There is no federal mandate that every financial planner make money for every client on every investment.

“There is no federal mandate that every lawyer win every case. Why is there a federal mandate that every teacher make a success out of every student?"

This can’t be done; the act was passed simply to win votes. Bush and his mandarins count on us feeling sorry for that poor child, and not thinking the matter through.

Well, it looks very much like **we must grab the bull by the horns**. Who else? So, let’s hit it.

**MONEY**: We begin with a torpedo aimed at a prominent myth. *Economist* 7/2008: “Spending per pupil in Washington, DC, is a whopping 59% higher than the national average, yet the city’s public schools are atrocious.” If it were a state, its pupils’ test scores would rank dead last.

In Kansas City, Missouri in1986 the city school system had the dubious distinction of being among the worst in the entire country.

It had the whole nine yards: drugs, crime, guns, vandalism, and attacks on teachers. A judge got all bent out of shape and ordered that a whole new system be built.

To work. About **$1.3 billion** was spent, or about $36,000 per student. The result was many new and refurbished buildings, beautiful physical education facilities, art, science labs, computers, ------ everything, it seemed, that money could buy.

So, how did the system make out during the next seven years? Although near the bottom in 1986, **math scores dropped** still further. The **dropout rate**, already bad, **increased** to a mind-numbing (Ouch! Sorry) 60 percent.

We understand that some folks around those parts are still shaking their heads. And not just around those parts.

No need for this. About 200 previous studies had showed the same result: the more money the poorer the performance.

Mortimer Zuckerman in *US News* 9/23/96: "Per-student spending is 25 percent higher than 10 years ago, after ------ inflation. The teacher-student ratio was also improved greatly. But academic performance remains low.

“A generation ago, public schools were usually the solution for students from poor or immigrant families trying to work their way up. Now, the same schools are usually the problem."

Senator Carol Moseley-Braun has argued that the central government must inject more money into schools. This would do more harm than good.

Taxpayers have shoveled megatons of money at education during the past 40 or so years. The result has been a horrendous deterioration in quality.

In early 2005 a NY Supreme Court justice ordered the state to give NY City’s floundering schools an extra $5.6 billion to operate its schools, plus $9.2 billion for construction. This court order was buried under politics as usual.

In 1998 Massachusetts give its first statewide test for aspiring public school teachers. Almost 60 percent failed. Thirty percent failed a basic reading and writing test; 63 percent failed the math test; 18 percent even failed in physical education.

A recent study by the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, includes the 30 richest nations) showed that America is alone in having an education system in which more than half the employees don't teach. Friends, this is bureaucracy gone bananas. And we are being asked to feed this monster still more money?

There is a logical explanation for this dismal turn of events, **if we think about it**. That is, more money enables insiders to do more of the same wrong things that they have been doing for decades to make the situation so bad.

The obvious answer is that **the system is wrong**. This will not change no matter how many beautiful buildings we throw up. The Kansas City judge asked for a new system, not new buildings.

Teachers and administrators don't deserve all the blame, and this problem is not limited to education. In any government bureaucracy the majority go for standard salaries, as those who are talented and dedicated and who should earn much more are always in the minority.

This guarantees a mediocre performance. Why should we bust our hump when the teacher in the next classroom is just putting in time and drawing the same or a better salary? A dedicated minority do anyway. They have no other choice, as they are prisoners. Their love of children and learning confines them.

Many just give up and do something else (News & Observer 10/2013): "---- she is free to live her life unburdened by the oppressive hands of incompetent legislators and school board members who wish to micromanage education without actually getting involved with the people in it.

"As each passing year of new policies and tests fails to deliver the results they desire, rather than reforming their thinking, these officials create new policies and new tests and pile them on top of the old ones." Once again for effect: public bureaucrats thrive on problems, not solutions.

Teachers can earn tenure, which means in effect that they cannot be fired. We can imagine what this does for excellence in performance on the job.

**UNIONS**: Thomas Toch was a reporter for *US News*. He apparently mounted a crusade for educational reform. He teed off on unions (2/26/96): "The nation's future lies in its classrooms. But teachers' unions are driving out good teachers, coddling bad ones, and putting bureaucracy in the way of quality education."

We appreciate someone who spits out the truth, in-your-face-like. We have often argued that the union movement as originally conceived performed several badly needed functions. Among these was changing horrendous working conditions in an economy where unskilled laborers had few options (early 20th century).

However, most unions have by now forced appropriate changes. There is a reason why teachers' unions have gone way beyond these.

It is the same reason why Bill Clinton in a State of the Union speech said nothing about unions in his ten-point proposal to improve our country's dismal education system.

They don't want change, so they dump megabucks into the congress and White House in order to preserve a sweet deal for incompetent and uncaring teachers.

Tax-financed educational vouchers give parents choices. Opponents claim that vouchers contain public money, so it should not be spent on private education.

But tax money already goes to Catholic universities such as Notre Dame, GI Bill money can be spent by a veteran to study religious subjects, and faith-based schools already receive public money for textbooks, school buses and special education. Also, vouchers finance students and not schools.

Toch: "By embracing old-style industrial-labor tactics, the unionism of traditional auto plants and steel mills, the AFT (American Federation of Teachers) and NEA (National Education Association) have given teaching the feel of classic blue-collar work, where winning workers big checks for the shortest possible hours has been the aim and the quality of the product is considered to be management's worry.

“Under this ethic, good teaching is often punished, poor teaching rewarded, and bureaucracy placed squarely in the way of common sense." This character is our kind of man.

Greene and Winters, (*Wall Street Journal* 2/2/07) reported that the bureau of labor statistics found that teachers earned $34.06 per hour in 2005. This was 36% more than the average white collar worker.

During the past 40 years per-student spending has more than doubled, including inflation. Public education now costs taxpayers around $500 billion per year. And yet higher teacher pay does not improve student achievement.

"In 1990, Cathy Nelson, a young PhD history teacher -------, was named Minnesota's Teacher of the Year. But ------ students weren't enjoying the fruits of Nelson's outstanding teaching: She had been laid off months earlier, under a union-bargained 'last-hired, first-fired' policy." Clever, eh?

"----- tremendously difficult to fire even the most incompetent instructors. ----- the average cost to fire a teacher is $200,000. Instead, they often cut deals with unions, giving bad teachers satisfactory ratings in return for union help in getting them transferred to other schools --- a cynical practice known as 'the dance of the lemons' or 'passing the trash.'"

Helluva way to run an outfit! Toch went on to demonstrate the political clout union money swings in state governments and in Washington.

Unions in NY City may have created the nation’s biggest wart on the arse of progress. At a city council meeting in November 2003 several witnesses were apparently intimidated into not attending.

Others testified on audiotape, with their voices disguised. Hey, wait a minute! Was this a public hearing?

Right after young George Bush became president and concerned parents’ antennae perked up a bit, the *Economist* published an article titled "Education Betrayed." RATS!

"The educational establishment --- the teachers’ unions and, to the extent these two can be separated, the democratic party --- applauded the early emphasis on more money for schools, but deplored the partisan, divisive, immoderate, knee-jerk, reckless,

ideological idea of allowing a few parents a bit more say in their children’s education. The timidity of the plan’s thinking on vouchers, and the hostility that greeted even that, spell doom for hopes that a Bush presidency might transform American education."

Like father, like son, we suppose. Neither wants the rabble acquiring smarts.

A 12/12/10 *News & Observer* article attempted to put the blame on parents for their children's poor performance. "---- Joyce Epstein, research professor of sociology at Johns Hopkins University. 'Without programs to educate parents, everyone is working in some stage of ignorance.'

Epstein said." There is predictably no mention of government involvement in this vital issue. We honestly believe that even the experts don't know the root cause of the difficulty."

Many if not most parents are no longer qualified to help children and schools, simply because they too were denied good educations due to the same root cause. That is, top government officials don't want educated citizens.

They want to keep the peasants dumbed down, as we have argued so often. Either said experts remain naive or BIG GOVERNMENT is not allowing this truth to be published.

A 4/07 *Wall St. Journal* article described "A School in South Carolina." Its house voted against giving $4,000 vouchers to poor parents with kids in failing public schools.

Operating on a shoestring, "---- Faye Brown, ------ opened a private school to give low-income families an alternative -----. Two things have happened since an article appeared: an outpouring of financial support from *Journal* readers and a vote by the state legislature that would undermine the school.

"That may change now. To date our readers have donated some $32,000. For the first time in the schools' history, it has all of its bills paid in full and it has $26,000 in reserve."

George Will pointed out that "In 1994 the senate, enacting the ‘Goals 2000’ education bill, issued, ------- commands to the future. Only two goals were quantifiable: By 2000, America’s high-school graduation rate would be ‘at least 90 percent’ and students ‘will be first in the world in mathematics and science achievement.’ Sen. Pat Moynihan ---------------- said: ‘That will not happen.’

"And of course it did not. In 2000 the graduation rate was about 75 percent, a figure inflated by ‘social promotions’ (see below). American students ranked 19th among 38 surveyed nations in mathematics (right below Latvia) and 18th in science (right below Bulgaria)."

The *Economist* (3/2006) weighed in. “’Teachers, teachers, teachers.’ Thus the headmistress of a school near Helsinki, -------- why Finland has the best education system in the world.” Looks to us like three very solid reasons.

“It has achieved all this by changing its entire system, delegating responsibility to teachers and giving them lots of support.” Finnish 15-year-olds rank tops among all advanced countries in math, science, and reading.

Once onto something worthwhile, the *Economist* often stays with it (9/2006): “------ over the past 30 years Alberta has quietly built the finest public education system in Canada. The curriculum has been revised, stressing core subjects (English, science, math), ----.

“And in international tests ----------- the province’s 15-year-olds scored among the top four of 40 countries in mathematics, reading, and science -------.” This is the first education article we have seen in a long time in which there was not a single mention of “union,” “teachers union” or “bureaucracy.”

In 10/2010 Michelle Rhee, the feisty chancellor of schools in Washington DC lost her job, due indirectly to union action (It caused her boss, the mayor, to lose an election). Oprah Winfrey invited her to her talk show, where she received a standing ovation.

A short time later Joel Klein, the top schools chancellor in NY City resigned. Both of these officials were revamping the city's school system, closing failing schools.

The *Economist*: "---- leading democrats, and above all, Barack Obama, with a crucial test: will they be willing to confront a core part of their (union) membership in the interests of America's children?" Surely yes, one would say. But always remember that politicians love money, especially teachers’ union money.

*Parade* magazine 11/17/2010: "The US is now the only industrialized country in the world where young people are less likely than their parents to graduate from high school."

**CHEATING STUDENTS**: The *Economist* 2/10/1996: "It is called 'social promotion,' and it is only just being realized how much of it goes on in American schools. A pupil, at the end of a school year, fails to pass ----- tests, ------. Instead of staying in the same class ----- allowed to move up to the next class, where ------ the chances of once more failing are presumably even bigger.

"----- upwards of 2m young Americans may be going through this experience every year." If this is true, why have any requirements?

Apparently it is. A 12/2005 Raleigh, North Carolina newspaper column stated that 4,000 NC 5th-graders failed one of both tests given (reading and math). About 3,500 of them were promoted anyway.

Why not just push them along until they come out the other end? Seems similar to government agencies that promote people largely on a basis of seniority rather than merit. A flunky puts in his/her time and moves onward and upward.

"A pupil fails one or more courses; the parents ask school officials not to hold their child back; the officials put pressure on the teachers; even if the teachers resist, the school's principal may overrule them, and the failing student goes merrily on his way. That happens a lot."

Parents who behave in this way are doing their kids no favors. They should be combining efforts with the schools to give children the best start possible in life. This is what parenting is about. (See Pocket Gofer 9.)

Some of the parents who care about their children’s future have started home schools. During the school year to Summer 2000 registered home schools increased 31 percent to 16,623 nationwide. These parents obviously believe they can outdo the public education system, and they have acted on their beliefs.

In 1981 home schooling was illegal, but today it is a right in all 50 states. Big Government did not initiate this sweeping change; irate parents forced it. Shows what can be done **in spite of government**, when citizens get organized.

Many cities have group activities for home-schooled children, and most colleges have special admissions programs for these young ones. The Internet has become a major resource for parents. The first three places in the 2000 national spelling bee were won by home-schooled kids.

Today there are about 1.5 million home-schooled students, or about 3% of the population. Parent/teachers find teaching materials on the Web and swap tips via email.

School system insiders are calling for more reform **within the system**, and of course for more money. As with any old system encrusted with barnacles, real reform can come only from the outside. Inside, there are always too many vested interests to protect, too many arses to cover.

These days insiders get little ink. So here we discuss President Obama’s “common core” program. Or, Maybe: Jan 2014 webcast.

Another high school student at Farragut High School in Knox County, Tenn. is receiving widespread attention for an eloquent speech he made against Common Core at a school board meeting.

"This time the student, Kenneth Ye, gave a rousing speech before the Knox County school board urging it to drop the Common Core standards because they make learning joyless and, in fact, turn American schools into something approaching Chinese sweatshops.

“'Our schools are being turned into data-run factories,' Ye charge around the 4:30 mark in the video. He observes that he has been a student of both the American and Chinese education systems.

**THE OLD COLLEGE TRY**: While we want to emphasize the K-12 system in this gofer, we should not overlook the potential (or lack) for those who wish to continue their education. Is the college and university system today geared to the needs of the aspiring student?

The National Association of Scholars studied college catalogs of 1914, 1939, 1964, and 1993. From 1914 to 1939 institutions with required literature study declined from 57 to 38 percent.

By 1993 only 14 percent retained this requirement. The same pattern appeared in philosophy, religion, social science, natural science, and math.

The average number of days per year that classes were held was 204 in 1914, and down to 156 days in 1993. Saturday classes were held in 98 percent of colleges in 1914, down to six percent in 1993.

What we hear locally is that the end of the week for today’s students comes on Thursday evening. Apparently they simply skip Friday classes.

Ordway Tead was a prominent educator during the 1920s. Two quotations: “That in learning to learn, the student is hopefully learning to **like** to learn. And “To learn to want to go on learning is a priceless asset of the right kind of collegiate experience.”

Columnist Robert Samuelson: "You should treat skeptically the loud cries now coming from colleges ------ that the last bastion of excellence in American education is being gutted by state budget cuts and mounting costs. Whatever else it is, higher education is not a bastion of excellence. It is shot thru with waste, lax academic standards, and mediocre teaching and scholarship."

This is from columnist George Will and *The Economist* 11/2015) "What kind of parenting produces children who, living in the lap of Ivy League luxury, revel in their emotional fragility? One answer is: Parents who themselves are arrested-development adolescents, with all the anxieties and insecurities of that developmental stage. They see themselves in their darlings."

Friends, Will does not mention Alexei de Tocqueville, but he surely could have. Recall how, writing in 1830 (not a misprint), he argued that a nanny state would educate its children to conform to government's druthers with no consideration devoted to preparation for a future in a healthy, capitalistic nation. Yes, our education system has gradually deteriorated toward an academic wasteland and the whole society is suffering.

We don’t pretend to defend this situation. However, we might point to the condition of the K-12 system that has fed educationally deprived students into this system over the past 50 years.

Small wonder an unusually high proportion of the brilliant students are those who come here from foreign lands to study. See results of an international study, reported earlier in this pocket gofer.

The K-12 system in California is no better than elsewhere, and may be worse. The University of CA may have figured a way around this problem, as it has cancelled the SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test) as part of the admissions process into the university.

The *Economist* (2/2001) was shocked. "So what on earth is this university, with 170,000 students and 20 Nobel Laureates, doing leading the attack on SATs? -------.

“The politics is simple. The abolition of affirmative-action programs in 1997 led to a dramatic reduction in the number of Blacks and Latinos in the university, in part because ------ worse than whites and Asians in SATs. --------. ------ scrapping SATs is simply the next step in adjusting the balance (if you are on the left) or dumbing down (if you are not)."

"It is hard to suppress the worry that ------ getting rid of SATs not because they are uninformative but because they are all too informative: they consistently give whites and Asians higher scores ------. It is foolish to deal with unpalatable information by shooting the messenger.

“The right way to deal with it is to work like fury to change California’s schools. And that surely means more testing, not less."

In this business lag time is a sticky wicket. It took educators 50 years to ruin the system. How long will it take to get it squared away? We're not sure.

What we are sure of is there are a lot of folks around who are pretty steamed about the problem. Let's examine a recommendation that can work for us.

A SOLUTION, ITS POTENTIAL, AND A BARRIER

We are agreed that education in this country is one bad, bad scene. Some experts have argued that the average worker's real wage (with inflation figured in) has not increased and has possibly slightly declined since the 1970s.

We have had "progressive" education since the 1960s. There may be a connection, although other factors are also involved.

**ON LEARNING**: Warren Bennis wrote a book called On Becoming a Leader. In it he described **maintenance learning** as "------ the acquisition of fixed outlooks, methods and rules for dealing with known and recurring situations .... It is the type of learning designed to maintain an existing system or established way of life."

**Shock learning** occurs when events "overwhelm people." We call its result crisis management.

Over the past 80 years our government institutions have not radically changed, and today it is obvious that those that did change went in the wrong direction. This is a result of an emphasis on maintenance learning and a long tradition of public education.

Changes in our society are inevitable, but people trapped in this type of learning cannot anticipate them. Therefore many of us are destined to suffer through one crisis after another. Everyone agrees that Covid-19 is forcing shock learning

Bennis described **innovative learning** as "anticipation, learning by listening to others, and participation." By the latter he means people actively shaping events instead of being shaped by them. See Pocket Gofer 16, where we discuss direct or participative democracy.

At first blush it seems silly to have to promote learning among citizens. But we have seen that the government is not serious about it and democracy is individual initiative and responsibility, so we will have a go right here.

Maybe we are being too hard on our government. Here comes the New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce.

It wants kids to know more about the world, think outside the box, become more capable in handling information, and have better people skills. Sounds good, but the report said nothing about implementing its recommendations.

Sebastian Thrun raised his hand (Economist Technology Quarterly, 9/5/15) "In 2012 Mr. Thrun left full-time work at Google to found Udacity, a startup dedicated to reinventing education for the 21st century. Udacity's 'nanodegrees' combine on-demand video lessons, short online quizzes and longer projects, and are designed in collaboration with high-tech companies desperate for skilled and creative workers. The idea is that anyone with a few minutes to spare can log on and work thru a programming course at their own pace.

A really new teaching technique with potential is machine learning. A computer is programed to teach itself thru algorithms. Given a specific task, it combs thru huge data bases searching for similar situations. With this acquired skill it can then accurately predict events. One example is using a young person’s personal data that closely matches the machine’s created data base to predict suicide in advance.

*Economist* 11/2010: "Marie Hanson, a single mother who runs a community project -------------. 'You have to see it to believe it,' says Ms. Hanson, recalling children squabbling for a turn solving sums online. They are transported to their 'own little world,' where they aren't embarrassed to make mistakes. ----- find anything to do with computers exciting." Ten years later we see a need for discipline in iPhone usage.

In 1995 college graduates earned on average 74 percent more income than high school graduates, and they had half the rate of unemployment. These stats mean more tax revenues for governments and lower payments for unemployment benefits.

Beyond the numbers, learning-oriented people learn about themselves. These insights enable them to better discipline themselves.

This in turn means better individual adjustments to surroundings, and hence a lower crime rate and better psychological health. Therefore we have lower taxes to support police and prisons, fewer sick days off the job, a lower premature death rate, and more parents helping children with their education.

Self-discipline leads in turn to virtue and honesty in dealing with others, increased self-esteem, tolerance of folks that seem weird to us, and eventually to better government. We get the latter because if we can discipline ourselves we can discipline a democratic government, simply because as active citizens we can press honesty and virtue on our public officials, who will feel the heat.

**NEW THOUGHTS**: We move to a different kind of vision. The new government that we will create will recognize the value of education to society.

The reality is that in a true democracy **public officials need smart citizens.** Pocket Gofer 20 really brings out this need.

In fact they cannot do a good job without them. They must work hard at getting to know citizens, so they can plumb their deep thinking, learn from them what is desired, and help them act on it.

This is democracy, bottom-up style (Pocket Gofer 4). In such a democracy ordinary citizens are not only the bosses; they are also valuable resources for public servants to consult.

We think each child should receive a "scholarship" to cover the expense of a K-12th grade education. When done right this is a major step toward equality of opportunity for all, as provided for in the Constitution.

The idea of local taxation has merit: raise money where it is to be spent. In this case we might recommend that local governments tax to support schools through vouchers.

But this is risky because of its implications for political skullduggery. Money can and does buy undue influence.

A thought just occurred to us. It is quite possible that a new non-government institution will be invented to provide for K-12 education. In the general sense it could consist of a group of foundations oriented to education.

A community foundation might collect funds from a combination of wealthy donors and request donations from businesses that anticipate hiring graduates. This policy would conform to what is obviously our bias: get the government out of everything except very narrowly defined activities.

The policy also conforms to democracy. Public officials in any type of government are always subject to temptation, so let’s minimize it. In this way it would be easier for us to hold officials accountable (Pocket Gofer 7).

There are precedents. We understand that wealthy individuals and some businesses have lost patience with public schools and are moving ahead on their own. They operate private voucher programs in 32 cities, and have attracted $45 million in contributions.

The Children's Educational Opportunity Foundation announced that it would donate $50 million over the next ten years to provide vouchers to any low-income Edgewood, NJ student who wanted one.

"--------- program was successful over those ten years. Some 4,000 students claimed vouchers, their test scores improved, and only two dropped out. (Invited to create a public version, the state legislature passed.)

The National Math and Science Initiative encourages students to become math and science teachers. Exxon Mobile Corp. donated $125 million to help get this initiative off the ground.

This is the biggest gift in the company's history. Lesson: businesses need sharp young people and managers are going after them.

KIPP (Knowledge is Power Program, *WSJ* 3/2007): "-------- academies are charter schools, which are public schools freed from the grip of the public education bureaucracy. The school day runs from 7:30am to 5:00pm. Some Saturdays and a couple of weeks in summer are also included.

A formal contract commits students, parents and teachers to do all they can to see that students graduate and go on to university. In general about 7% of low-income students graduate from college. KIPP's rate so far has been over 90%.

"They can pay teachers based on skills and performance rather than seniority. And ----- can fire and replace staff who are underperforming. Highly motivated teachers are breaking down the doors to go to work in such schools.

Donors include the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Doris and Donald Fisher Fund, the Michael and Susan Dell Foundation and the Walton family.

The Gateses have also contributed to the Newark (NJ) Charter School Fund. Charter schools, including KIPP, have started training their own teachers.

There is a KIPP school in the run-down Mississippi delta town of Helena. Before KIPP kids were scoring in the 18th percentiles in language and math on the Stanford Achievement test. Several years later these averages were 76th and 82nd, respectively.

In 5/2008 Chicago's south side saw a surge in gang violence. But the 300 poor black students at Urban Prep line up daily in their blazers and red ties.

Together they shout "We believe. We are the young men of Urban Prep. We are college bound." Then it's off to classes.

In Sweden anyone who satisfies basic standards can open a school at state expense and with no bureaucrats breathing down his/her neck. Finland's education ministry has three full-time staff handling school visits by foreign politicians, officials and journalists. (We don't know of any American politicians who went there for this reason.)

And not just Finland (Economist 2/2015): "Yet it is possible to persuade the hardworking and ambitious to teach. Finland pays teachers modestly but manages them well; ten graduates apply for each training place. South Korea recruits teachers from the top 5% of school-leavers and promises them fat pay-cheques. In both countries teachers are revered --- and results are among the world's best.

 "Teach for America (TfA), accepts just one in six applicants. It looks for a stellar academic record and evidence of traits that distinguish the best teachers in tough schools, including leadership, resilience and motivation to help the poor. Recruits get five weeks training and pledge to work for two years in a disadvantaged school."

Interesting: no mention of graduates from college schools of education. We recall conditions in one of these; have none shaped up yet?

"When TfA's founder, Wendy Kopp, came up with the idea while an undergraduate, her adviser told her she was 'deranged.' She proved him wrong. After two decades of growth, ---------. ------- deadline, it has received 36,000 applicants --- twice as many as a decade ago. And thanks to its 25-year history and 40,000 alumni, Americans are no longer surprised that bright, ambitious graduates want the most demanding teaching posts.

We believe there is real potential in these non-government initiatives. Since the Gilded Age (1890s) when a few millionaires such as Rockefeller and Carnegie spread wealth thru establishing foundations there has been an incredible increase in wealth among the society. Part of the result is thousands of non-profit foundations.

A few years ago there were about 370 **billionaires** and something over 5 million millionairesin America. Inflation since the Gilded Age has increased the cost of living about 12 times.

When we think about these numbers we are astounded. There must be at least 100 people who are a hundred times as wealthy as were Carnegie or Rockefeller, even including inflation. Let’s hear it for capitalism!

Both men believed in not just writing checks; they were active in seeing that their gifts were effective. They gave generously to education. Would they today?

In 2005 US citizens gave a record $250 billion to charity. Wall St. financier Theodore J Forstmann and Eli Broad, chairman of Sun Corporation, both gave huge sums to education: scholarships, vouchers, awards, and training grants. These were intended to reform our sick education system.

And now the former head of Microsoft Corporation, Bill Gates an his wife, have donated $1 billion to education. We conclude that the opportunity to pry BIG GOVERNMENT loose from education is here today.

We are not alone in this position. Anne H. Burleigh edited a book called Education in a Free Society. Contributing writers deeply believed that government should be completely separate from education.

"Because it is assumed that the purpose of education in an unfree society will be to serve the whim of the dictator, ----- priest-king, ------. -------. The state will have no purpose of education at all.

"The authors believe that history has revealed too often how dismal are the results when corruptible men, lusting for power as all men do, use state control of education to enhance the power of the state and of themselves." We checked on this, and the track record amply supports this argument.

A citizen without children benefits from a sound education system. Because more educated people commit fewer crimes, we have a more stable society. He/she feels safer, and is less likely to get ripped off, injured, killed or find his property destroyed.

We choose to view education as a long-term loan from foundations to a child. In nearly all cases it is impractical for his/her parents to pay this huge cost.

A well-educated child eventually becomes an adult, gets a good job that pays well, pays taxes and may donate to a foundation. In this way the "loan" is repaid.

The fact that he/she is less likely to be a drag on society (see above) and much more likely to be a contributor is an additional benefit. Such an adult might make an effort to donate to the same foundation that helped him/her through school.

Among a number of surveys about vouchers, an early 2000 poll found 74 percent of Blacks and 77 percent of Hispanics approve of their use. Milwaukee, Wisconsin is ahead of the curve as the state’s governor, the city’s chamber of commerce, and its mayor all support the use of vouchers.

A year later the *Economist* (3/2001) reported on a new group of concerned parents. "----- pro-voucher Blacks have established a lobbying group to plead their cause.

"The Black Alliance for Educational Options (BAEO) was only a few months old. But it attracted a boisterous crowd of more than 700 activists from 35 states at its symposium in Milwaukee, ------." Its web site is [www.baeo.org](http://www.baeo.org). (We checked; unsure whether this site still exists.)

This sounds encouraging, but members are up against teachers’ union money. There are hundreds of thousands of teachers in two major unions and so the money is impressive, especially in Washington where dollars outvote people. See PG7.

Room for improvement in Washington’s school system, as the *Economist* reported (5/2003): “Tho they boast the third-highest level of per-pupil spending in the country, 70% ----------- in the District (of Columbia) score at or below the basic level on standardized reading tests (i.e., they can barely read) and 71% score at or below basic in maths.

Washington’s mayor then was Anthony Williams, a black man. “------- is the first DC mayor to speak out in favor of vouchers. -------------. Peggy Cooper Cafritz, the president of the Board of Education, dropped her long-standing opposition --------. ----------------------. The *Washington Post* has come on in favor ------.”

No matter how hard we may try for total equality of opportunity some folks will become more "equal" than will others. We accept this outcome because it is human nature and thus unavoidable.

For the same reason no government can force equality of results on citizens. Socialism set out to do this, but it was whipped before it started.

Nevertheless the idea is to give each child as close to an equal boost toward effective adulthood as is practical. It is important to understand the difference between equal opportunity and equal results. See our recommendation below.

**ON THE FRINGE**: For some 50 years educators have been watching Catholic schools blow public schools out of the water. A study of two schools in the South Bronx in New York City compared children of the same disadvantaged background in both types. Two of 38 children in the public school entered college; the numbers for the Catholic school were 20 out of 22.

Part of the explanation lies in the absence of bureaucracy, no tenure for teachers, and no unions. Furthermore, Catholic schools missed out on the "progressive" education movement, so teachers can and do still discipline disruptive students.

Finally, there is no multiculturalism, no dumbing down of standards, no social promotions, and no obsession with self-esteem. Put another way, no nonsense. And parents back up teachers.

The phone tape at the Hales Franciscan School in Chicago told callers "100 percent of our 1996 students were admitted to college." Those who check this out at the school would see 300 black teens in their white shirts and ties thoroly engaged in study of English and math.

Chicago is the unproud home to some of the worst schools in the country. Catholic schools regularly outdo public schools in this city.

One teaches 580 Latino children in English only and 95 percent go on to graduate, versus 40 percent in public schools. And they do the job for about one third less money.

Forty years of evidence must be extremely difficult for unions to ignore. They are still tragic evidence of the language that money speaks in Washington. Also their impact is fading as members abandon the union.

Besides Catholic schools, we have experiments with what are called Charter schools. These are public, but are free of the stifling bureaucratic regulations and union controls that prevent rewarding good teachers and removing bad ones.

This last one is critical. But it is so obvious it hardly seems to need repeating: **The key to effectiveness in any organization lies in recruiting and keeping good people.**

Some years ago lawmakers in North Carolina passed a strong charter school bill into law. So a group of people got together to organize one.

From the start, parents were wild about the idea. But the road ahead was an educational minefield.

First, the dean of the University of North Carolina School of education said he would not cooperate. Next the local school board went on record as against the idea. Nevertheless, the group finally obtained a charter.

But that was not the end of it. They were all ready to sign a lease on a building when the owner suddenly told them he had leased it to someone else.

Then the state Department of **Public** Instruction described the tangle of procedures that must be navigated to obtain funds. By this time the group had detected the whiff of overripe bureaucracy.

Public school teachers who work at a charter school could not continue in the state pension fund. There would be no funds for buildings or start-up money, as there are for other public schools. Well f’gosh sakes already!

While this farce was being played out the 22 charter schools in Massachusetts, which teach children who are poorer than the state average and less likely to have English as a first language, were thriving.

DC Preparatory Academy exists in a seedy section of Washington DC and serves ethnic minorities. As a charter school it emphasizes discipline, phonics, and long school hours.

Over a fifth of Washington’s students attend charter schools, up from none in 1996. Mayor Anthony Williams was pushing these schools. And then there were the folks who must have kinks in their necks as they try desperately to look the other way.

George Will (*News & Observer* 2/27/11) salutes Wendy Kopp, who believed that "---- students from elite schools would volunteer to have their first experience out of college teaching in difficult-to-staff schools in areas of urban and rural poverty.

"TFA's (Teach for America) first cohort totaled 500 teachers. This year (2011) TFA will select 5,300 from 48,000 applicants. ------. Of the 20,000 TFA alumni, two-thirds are still working full-time in education.

Looks great, but Washington apparently thought it was too great. Will continued: "It has obtusely defined 'earmark' to include 'any named program,' so TFA has been declared an earmark and sentenced to death." Are congratulations in order?

**THE EDISON PROJECT**: In 1991 a concerned American citizen named Chris Whittle started an organization called the Edison Project, which intended to take the government completely out of the schools, except to collect taxes for "scholarships." He declared war on publicly run schools, claiming they can't do the job nearly as well as private organizations.

He had money, and attracted a lot more from concerned citizens who believed in what he wanted to do. This is collecting information regarding the latest in computer-assisted learning, mixing the best of these into a program of study, giving parents choice, hiring effective teachers and managers (both without tenure), involving parents, and making some money to boot. He reckoned that all this could be done with what government spends on each child.

Whittle’s approach featured achievement-based promotion, and not time-based. A student was not promoted to the next grade until he/she had mastered a defined set of skills. No social promotions for him.

Mr. Whittle was not without critics. They questioned the idea that a vital part of a democratic society should be entrusted to someone who is in it for the money.

We wonder why this complaint. If he doesn't do a better job than what we are getting now we'll simply fire him. In the private sector of the economy this can be done easily.

We think that in this event he will tuck his tail between his legs and go quietly. On the other hand, a bureaucrat in this situation would jump up and down, have kittens, call his/her lawyer, and scream for more money.

Other critics argue that Whittle's efforts divert attention away from attempts to reform the system from within. Forget this; it is too far gone.

The insiders would surely kill any inside attempt, as this is where their political power lies. See Pocket Gofer 13.

Whittle could kick back and invest his money in tried-and-true businesses. But he was concerned and wanted to try on our behalf something new, risky, and very different. Taking risks is capitalism in practice.

Surely the man deserved a chance. We could not stop him anyhow, so why the fuss?

Whenever a large and complex machine is broken some experimentation is needed to determine the best way to either fix it or scrap it and begin again. And results are filtering through.

At Dodge Edison Partnership Elementary, kids and teachers work hard and learn in new ways with new technology. Larry Vaughn, school superintendent: "Edison has delivered on every guarantee they’ve made. I’m a satisfied customer."

Edison had promised to bring up test scores, encourage interactions between students, teachers, and parents, and do so without an increase in costs. Each student is given a computer to take home. This helps to equalize educational opportunity across social classes.

At Dodge Edison tutoring is not confined to the classrooms. There are tables outside, where volunteer parents and teachers work with pairs of students on challenging projects. Different fields of learning are tied together to educate the whole person.

Teachers don’t have tenure. They earn bonuses depending on how well their students perform.

With computers assisting with instruction, teachers don’t teach. Rather, they function as coaches, answering or helping to discuss the occasional question that springs into a young mind.

Critics say every other country has publicly-run education, so why should we be so weird? That is precisely why it should be tried.

These critics are maintenance learners, whom the present system short-changed when they were students. Furthermore our system is in such bad shape that we need to be thinking about major surgery before it goes on life-support.

Chris Whittle claimed that when his system is up and running a student could complete today's high school education by age 12. As of 2004 Edison schools are teaching 132,000 students in 20 states.

Lately we have not heard of The Edison Project. A glance at the web shows him roving around much of the world while spreading word about new trends in education.

But we did see something similar go global (The *Economist* 1/2017). “At the Gatina branch of Bridge International Academies, on the outskirts of Nairobi, Nicholas Oluoch Ochieng has one eye on his class of five-year-olds and the other on his tablet. On the device is a lesson script.

Every line is written 7,000 miles away, in Cambridge, MA. There an American team analyses 250,000 test scores every ten days from Bridge’s 405 Kenyan schools, and then uses the data to tweak those parts of a lesson where pupils find themselves stumped. Teachers, if they are instructing the same grade level, give identical lessons, and timetables are standardized, too. (But keep Bastiat’s observation in mind.)

One company recently contracted to run several schools in the low-income area of a large city. Managers invested more than a $million up front in refurbishing trashed buildings, buying good equipment, etc.

After only one year the company started showing a profit under the same budgets that controlled the old, failed operation. Students' grades showed dramatic improvement.

But isn't this approach just like the one in Kansas City (see previous)? Yes, and no. Yes, in that buildings were redone. No, in that this outfit **entered the system from outside it**, they had some different ideas, and they were given a chance to try them.

**ADDITIONAL HI-TECH**: Another company has developed educational computer programs, including an encyclopedia for children aged 3-12. This thing has got all kinds of bells and whistles: text, pictures, dialog, music, and color video. And it costs just 49 bucks.

Managers forecasted that they would sell 500 of them during the first three months. So, what did they know? The company **sold 5,000 the first day!**

How can we explain this? The secret lies in what is called discovery learning, or "Ah, ha!"

We have known for some years that this is a powerful way for kids of all ages to learn. They figure it out for themselves instead of being given it predigested by someone else. That's baby food.

When learned in this way it stays with them, because it is their own discovery. Marketeers know about this even if the schools have yet to pick up on it. "Discover the beauty -----." "Discover the softness -----" "Discover the freshness -----" etc, until we have all we need and then some.

Betsy Wagner in *US News* 12/2/96: "High-tech businesses will rake in some $4 billion this year from ------ schools on instructional technology, ------.

"So where's the payoff? Few teachers are trained to use computers or to navigate the Internet. School boards don't know what to look for.

Many middle-aged and older folks are baffled by gimmicks such as Google, iPods, cell phones, blackberries, iPhones, Instagram, text messaging, wikipedia, blogs, G4, etc. Some experts believe these innovations reduce the need to think and make sound decisions.

They surely do challenge teachers, whose students may occasionally teach them. But an environment of continuing learning would not exclude good teachers.

“Good software is rare. And nobody seems to have enough time to think up the best ways to harness the undeniable potential ------.

Wagner went on to explain that computers could enable kids to learn at their own pace while teachers are essentially coaches. E-mail can be used to generate learning interactions with other schools located anywhere in the world (such as debates). And computers are infinitely patient with "special" children: those with learning handicaps.

The latest education software can only be described as awesome. It is finally catching up with marketeers' hype. Parents should watch their young ones **create something original** (at least to them) as they learn, and hear the squeals of delight that accompany these discoveries.

Looks like programmers have finally locked onto the kid mentality. Great leaps forward in technology have also helped tremendously. Sounds to us a lot like educational Nintendo, Play Station and other variations.

This means some of us have acquired a capability for innovative learning in spite of the system. Friends, there is hope among the hype.

Traditional classroom teaching fits well into a collectivist society, where life and hence learning is in lockstep. On the other hand, computer-assisted learning fits into an individualist society, and this is characteristic of democracy.

In January 2000 Gilster pointed out some interesting work on educational software being done by SAS Institute. "The company has mounted a full-scale attempt to understand how computers can improve education." Like Bill Gates and others mentioned above, the company’s president is a billionaire who is keenly interested in education.

The technique seems to apply discovery, or innovative, learning. "The SAS models demand that the student develop his powers of investigation; they’re essentially self-contained research projects. When the student has answered the questions as prompted on the screen, the pieces of the collage can be drawn together to reveal a complete image." (We need journalists like that. See PG5.)

Many dinosaurs in the education field criticize state-run end-of-grade tests. If a student fails these twice in a particular year he is held back for another year in grade.

Hui (3/2000 column) commented. "In the world of high-stakes testing, preparation for the state’s end-of-grade tests never stops. Lots of schools are looking for an edge." Looks like competition, which we like.

No need to call this process high-stakes. Give it a couple of years and no one will. Furthermore, frequent testing provides continuing feedback to teachers, students, and principals as well as to parents.

Good students look forward to being tested, and so do good teachers. It is human nature to enjoy earning and receiving attaboys/girls.

Some experts argue that testing puts such pressure on teachers that they leave after only one to two years of experience. But we saw this one coming a quarter-mile away. Bureaucrats are masters at deflecting blame.

The whole idea here is to make learning fun. When this takes hold rates of absences, dropouts, disruptions, vandalism, drugs, and crime will go into free-fall. And adults who have benefited from this type of learning environment will want to continue their learning forever. And beget kids with similar propensities.

Bennis in his book refers to the "learning organization" as the answer to problems posed by the new info-tech society into which our culture is rapidly moving. Innovative learning actively seeks change, and thrives on it.

It not only seeks change. It anticipates it. It creates it.

For obvious reasons all this scares the hudyacallit out of most teachers. Therefore they are fighting the new system tooth and nail. However, the good ones will not fight it, as they see a greater opportunity for them in the new order.

In general, educated people perceive a major social or technical change affecting them as an opportunity, not a threat. We want our children taught by this type of adult, so that mentality will rub off on them.

**WHAT WE MUST LEARN IN SPITE OF GOVERNMENT**: Rhetoric notwithstanding, what we peasants want does not matter to BIG GOVERNMENT. This has been so for the last 60-70 years.

Therefore we have lost what our 18th-century ancestors fought and died for: democracy. Bonner in his book Empire of Debt called us morons. He is right, and that smarts.

Bonner is not alone. Paul Kennedy’s Book The Rise and Fall of Empires makes similar arguments.

We have allowed our government to become an imperial empire. History tells us that every empire eventually comes to an end. Just like us, world improvers don’t get what they expect; they get what they deserve.

We must learn the history of our nation, so we can appreciate what we have lost and organize to take **peaceable** action to bring an end to the government’s empire. We must learn to stop spending and borrowing like there is no tomorrow, even as the government does this.

Bonner: “Since 1990, income for the average American household has risen only 11 percent while average household spending has jumped 30 percent.” How could this be?

Bonner continued: “Outstanding household debt doubled to more than $10 trillion between 1992 and 2004, even adjusted for inflation.” We must fully realize that we must pay our own debts in addition to those of the government.

Democracy is free choice, but Bonner declared: “------ to the polling stations in 2004 and believed they were selecting the government they wanted, when the choice had already been reduced to two men of the same class, same age, same schooling, same wealth, same secret club, same society, with more or less the same ideas about how things should be run.” Bastiat’s ghost is hovering.

We need to think about this, so we can see thru the smoke and mirrors. If we understood how democracy works we would know that “how things should be run” would be determined by us, and we would then give orders to our public servants in Washington. See PGs 20 and 21.

The imperial elites in Washington know what is best for everyone throughout the world. This is why they don’t permit us to choose what we want and enforce their will abroad thru waging wars.

Between 1945 and 2005 the government engaged soldiers in 111 military actions. Bonner: “No one wants to carp and criticize (government) when soldiers take the field. It is unpatriotic. So, keep the soldiers in the field all the time!” Simple, eh?

We should appreciate that imperial Washington has run up a total debt of around $44 trillion, which is far more than the $23 trillion that’s on the books. This equals about $150,000 for every citizen, including babies.

In the 24 months following 9/11, the Bush administration added more debt than had been built up during the first 200 years of our nation’s existence. We need to learn that this is what empires do. And this is why they eventually fall (as Bonner predicted).

Over the past 50-60 years BIG GOVERNMENT spent mountains **of our money, today’s and tomorrow’s**, to make us happy. And we morons let it do this to us and our children.

Bonner: “But *not* spending money is another matter. ------- less bread and fewer circuses, and fewer clowns on the public payroll. -------- explaining to voters that they wouldn’t get that new road or new medical service that had been promised.”

This takes guts, which due to our demands and the career politicians’ desperate need to get re-elected again and again has fallen into short supply in Washington. For us and our children and grandchildren we must learn to do for ourselves.

This policy is far less expensive, and it also squares with the Constitution. See Pocket Gofer 20.

We should understand the paradox: Self-discipline leads to freedom. When we understand ourselves we can discipline ourselves, and this comes to us thru a good educational system. Then there would be fewer laws that restrain our freedom.

We could do worse than to begin with the Ten Commandments. To these we might add don’t expect to get something for nothing, and don’t spend too much.

We may think it is, but the reality is that our society is not superior to others as they perceive them. We need to understand why most of the rest of the world hates us. PG11 capably elaborates.

In 1951 Senator Flanders understood the nature of empire: “Fear is spread by the department of defense in the Pentagon. ----------.” See PGs 11 and 18 where we argue that ever since Eisenhower the pentagon has been running foreign policy. (We should also examine deeply what President Trump is doing. As we write this is being done.)

“The real dependences of the state department are in arms, armies, and allies. There is no confidence left in anything except force.” Those of us who were around and thinking in that year would recognize this philosophy as that of Adolf Hitler. Friends, we must learn history.

Some parents need to learn more than others (*Economist* 6/2009): "------ led grassroots protests against attempts to extend the school year -------, or to increase the amount of homework their little darlings have to do.

"They still find it hard to believe that all those Chinese students, beavering away at their books, will steal their children's jobs." And Finnish, Swedish, South Korean and Hong Kong students, we could add.

DETAILS OF OUR RECOMMENDATION

**SCHOOL CHOICE**: What is the new system? It begins with a voucher issued by a foundation to parents for each child.

This means we stop financing public institutions that are making a bad job of it, and start financing students. Important difference here, especially in view of the fact that democracy is freedom of choice.

It does not stop here. Economists tell us that in a free market resources (in this case, money) will survey the economic landscape and find their most efficient uses. If we keep dumping good money after bad into a monopolistic educational system, efficiency will continue to suffer.

If the amount of a voucher is set accurately a school that delivers a good quality product with reasonable efficiency will be profitable. Those who upgrade either their quality or efficiency or both will be more profitable.

Some dinosaurs complain that competing with one another for students would damage schools. This is balderdash.

We have proved again and again that there is nothing like competition for shaping up any organization. Public schools operated as monopolies are a reason why they are so weak today.

America is the land of opportunity; equal opportunity for all. Or, it was once.

With vouchers the poorest families would benefit most. They know this, and so in 1997 several thousand poor Black parents in Denver sued the school board to force them to issue vouchers.

Richard Davison in a 5/1999 column sets forth the toughest arguments we have seen. He pointed out that over the past 30 years in the nation spending adjusted for inflation has tripled, while average SAT scores fell from about 980 to 905.

Affordable, quality private schools exist. They should be made available to families of every race, color, creed or economic class.

These families would finally have the clout to cause a revolution in education. Private schools are not only cheaper, they are also safer.

Research shows that folks running public school systems have their children enrolled in private schools. If public schools are so good, how do they explain this?

Davison: "No more forced busing, no more forced anything. You will not have to deal with school boards, or administration officials accountable to no one. -------. ----- a school will treat you like a customer with money.

"If you are a taxpayer, ------. ------ you will save somewhere between $2,000 and $4,000 ----- per child per year. Second, we no longer need any public school buildings. We can sell the ones we have (to the private schools that will need them to accommodate all their new students) and we will not need to build any more, ever."

Word is apparently getting out. An annual poll by a professional association of educators showed that support for vouchers went from 45 percent in 1994 to 51 percent in 1999. Among public school parents support during the same period increased from 51 to 60 percent.

Learning the three Rs gives a child the ability to learn other things. Reading and writing are channels used for knowledge to enter and leave young minds. Math enables them to think analytically, for solving problems.

Television sends forth little knowledge because it is an entertainment medium. Prominent author Norman Mailer: “Each of the four major (TV) networks now offers 52 minutes of commercials in the three hours from 8 pm to 11 pm every day.”

Combine this with “teaser” messages and there goes over 30 percent of that three hours. If there is any knowledge available, how does someone concentrate on learning it when every 3-5 minutes or so here comes another string of commercials?

We read an obit on famous TV news anchor Walter Cronkite. Coming from such an icon we get the following quotation.

"He regretted that Americans were so dependent on television, and on him, to explain the world. TV couldn't do it. All the words uttered in his evening newscast would not fill even the front page of the *NY Times*.

"He offered, in the end, just a headline service. Print alone gave the necessary depth of understanding." We grieve for the daily newspaper.

Admittedly, reading requires more effort than that expended by the typical couch potato. But a citizen can read a bit, then **think** about what it means to him/her and his family.

He can **learn** something useful, not just in daily life but also about what government is doing **to** him while the rhetoric hammers on about what it is doing **for** him. Yes, newspapers and news mags have commercials, but they need not interfere with his thinking.

Mark Twain: "The man who does not read good books has no advantage over the man who cannot read them."

Lapham’s book Gag Rule: “The habits of mind associated with the rule of images destroy the civilization dependent on the meaning of words.”

Critics will point out that opportunity under a voucher system will not be equal. Well, not perfectly equal, as wealthy parents may choose to toss extra money into a particular school. We will argue below that this factor will weigh little in the result.

The big plus in using vouchers is parental choice and hence competition among schools for students. This will force them to improve their operations lest lack of customers

cause them to shut down. We believe deeply in competition, so we repeat here a favorite quote that we first shared in Pocket Gofer 1:

A TRIBUTE TO MY COMPETITORS

 My competitors do more for me than my friends. My friends are too polite to point out my weaknesses, but my competitors go to great lengths to advertise them. My competitors are efficient, diligent, attentive, and would take my business away from me if they could. They keep me alert and make me search for ways to improve my products and services. If I had no competitors I would be lazy, incompetent, inattentive. I need the discipline they enforce upon me. I salute my competitors. They have been good to me. God bless them all!

Competition will help parents to decide which school is best. They will involve their child in the decision if he/she is old enough. Published exam results and truancy rates will also be available to help in this decision.

We live in a competitive society. Outdoing the next person in academics and on the athletic field are integral parts of the lives of young people. Testing fits right into this scene, and for the underclass as well as the middle class.

The underclass might just test itself right out of existence. Hard data would be there to prove that a young person had escaped. This may be the very incentive that he/she needs.

Some authorities argue that vouchers will only give children money to go to private schools. This will increase demand without any improvement.

But why would demand for private schooling increase in a freely competitive marketplace? Public, private, charter and parochial schools would all have the same resources available.

"Education President" HW Bush and his education secretary Lamar Alexander set out to install a limited voucher program back in 1991. Funny; months later we heard nothing about this boondoggle, ------ er, experiment. Guess we missed it.

We complete our discussion of school choice with a comment on affirmative action. This program differs from vouchers in a significant way.

Advocates have a point when they argue that education has a vital role in fulfilling the Founding Fathers’ desire for equal opportunity for all. This applies especially in a society where information technology is replacing factories.

But to admit a student to a high-quality college who is less qualified than one denied also denies equal opportunity. This person can often qualify unassisted for admission to a second-tier college, where his/her lower level of preparation will not be a drag on the rest of the students. (And he will probably feel better about it.)

Now, it could be argued that once college is completed the graduate is less qualified for a choice job. This makes another point.

However, over the course of a career many other factors may affect his /her future. These include drive, people skills, leadership potential, additional education, and just plain luck. Any combination of these could propel that person above his counterpart who graduated from a prime college. This is Constitution-based individualism.

When we get right down to it, the way to help minority students into the best colleges is to do something about broken schools and families. Well, we are doing it. See Pocket Gofer 9 for the family part.

**MEETING STUDENTS’ NEEDS**: We have a student with some money and a desire to learn (inherent inside us, remember). Therefore the logical next step is to build an institution that is suited to the needs of the student.

It must be flexible, as everyone learns differently. No more of this lumping 20 or more of them into a classroom and giving all roughly the same treatment. That would be one-size-fits-all, and we torpedoed that one in Pocket Gofer 4.

The Edison project focuses on achievement-based learning instead of time-based learning. This means that every student who is promoted to a higher grade has the same learning skills no matter how long he/she took to acquire them.

This approach does about as much as possible to provide equal opportunity for all in the land of opportunity. It means that whatever a young adult finishing school can accomplish in the future lies as much in his/her heart as in his head.

In today's culture money and power seem to be the objectives of most human endeavor. This suggests that we teach our children how to make lots of money and how to psych out others.

On the other hand we could teach our young to be fully functioning adult citizens. An insight is available in Pocket Gofer 9, where we talked about a citizen who knows him/herself and uses continuing learning to keep current with his changing personality.

Bennis on "----- the four lessons of self-knowledge:

"One: You are your own best teacher.

"Two: Accept responsibility. Blame no one.

"Three: You can learn anything you want to learn.

"Four: True understanding comes from reflecting on your experience."

We note the emphasis here on the student as a free-thinking individual. He/she can and should seize the initiative for discovery in learning.

The way we put it above suggests that making money is vulgar and greedy. Yet money invested wisely promotes economic growth and higher living standards for almost all in a capitalistic democracy. We need to keep this in mind.

Here is another good thought. An education that emphasizes practical disciplines such as science, engineering, and business prepares good **managers**. These are the ones who can work with others toward how to do a job better.

A broad, general education will show how a student can integrate different disciplines. This rare skill often enables a student to eventually become a **leader**.

These are the ones who can visualize doing a totally different job in the future. See Pocket Gofer 17.

Some children are cut out to be workers, others managers, still others leaders. We have no way of knowing at age six which one a child may be at age 40.

In practice each community will discuss and debate the relative merits of educational objectives. The result will probably be some kind of compromise.

Today our more complex work environment requires that schools set higher standards of achievement. That is, all schools should set standards similar to those of only the best schools today.

This action will increase students’ ability to learn. Therefore it will also increase the level of job skills and flexibility, so workers can adjust to a computerized high-tech environment that is changing rapidly.

We need this. One recent survey indicated that workers’ anxiety about jobs is three times higher than in 1981.

Critics say this will only increase the dropout rate. We beg to differ. Evidence that a loving concern plus discipline can work wonders even with disadvantaged children is piling up.

An example? We found one in Academy Prep, a middle school in St. Petersburg, FL (*Parade* magazine 8/15/1999): "----- in an area where rusted cars and peeling paint -----. --------.

“Academy Prep has made an offer to boys in the fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth grades that you might think they would be glad to refuse: the chance to spend 9.5 hours a day in school, 11 months a year. And for nine of those months, they attend a two-hour study hall each evening -----.

"They say ‘yes, sir’ or ‘yes ma’am’ to their elders ------. In everything they do ----- they are taught discipline and civility.

"Jeff Fortune was a wealthy hotel developer; his wife, Joan, an attorney. They retired in their early 50s and devoted themselves to giving back to the area that made them successful. ------.

“A local bank, Jeff Fortune’s old hotel company, and other businesses made donations. Community volunteers planted trees and landscaped.

"----- 27 teachers to work as the core staff. Many are retired and work for free, -----. Academy Prep’s income comes from a $1.4 million endowment raised by donations and a $10 monthly activities fee for each student."

A visit to the academy’s web site revealed the following: “Academy Prep Centers is the main charitable beneficiary of the Chrysler Championship. Last year, the Centers received over $200,000 in funds and products.” We expected stats, but this quote shows that the organization must be doing well.

**TOLERANCE**: We believe that children should be taught tolerance. As we look at the world around us and see so many bloody and tragic conflicts between peoples of different ethnic backgrounds this concern takes on urgency.

Today Palestine-Israel leaps to mind. Tomorrow -----? People everywhere need to realize that revenge is God’s privilege and not ours. And if some folks cannot completely accept God’s urging to "love thy neighbor," they can at least learn to tolerate his/her goofy looks, clothing, habits, and beliefs.

Ethnic tensions in the Balkan area of the world go back to at least the 13th century. We think it is about time to rethink what citizens over there are doing. This is easy for us to say; we don’t live there.

Also easy for us to say: How about a dose of democracy? Install this regime, and tolerance is suddenly a much easier sell.

Teaching should include tolerance of political dissent. It has been said that a society that does not tolerate dissent has a limited life.

The weight of history surely agrees. We need citizens who think differently on relevant issues, as these people are sources of new ideas.

Pocket Gofers 6 and 20 demonstrate how democracy in action can teach and encourage tolerance among participating adults. In time this is sure to rub off on our young ones.

A word about mistakes is in order. We freely admit we have made many in our time. One neat thing about a good education is that we can learn more from our mistakes than can someone without.

Another someone said, "Those who cannot learn from history are doomed to repeat it." We think this applies to mistakes as well.

**EDUCATION COMPANIES**: Contractors who operate the schools will be motivated by competitive pressures to see that parents get involved. We all know that learning in the home is as important as in school.

Theodore Roosevelt would recommend parental involvement: “To educate a man in mind and not in morals is to educate a menace to society.” Kids look up to their parents.

An independent organization will put the job of compilation and giving of exams out to public bidding. Businesses managing schools will naturally be excluded from this competition.

The best-qualified and low bidder gets the job for three years, after which there will be another round of bidding. If the previous contractor cannot bid again in a district this will make it very difficult for teachers to teach to the exams.

The better schools will attract more and better students. As a company's reputation spreads it will be able to take over management of additional schools. The resulting economies of scale will enable the firm to pay higher salaries for top teaching talent.

That is, with increasing size the extra cost of adding a school is less than it was with a smaller number of schools. Fixed costs are spread over more facilities. But the voucher amount does not change, and thus the outlook for higher profits.

Additional profits can also be invested in improving the system. Competition will goad management to do the job still better.

Friends, we aren't preaching anything terribly radical here. Excellence is what built this country, starting before July 4, 1776. All we're doing is applying the principles of excellence to education.

Parental choice would mix children of different races and ethnic backgrounds in the same facility when they are young. At that age they have not yet acquired the prejudices that inhibit some of us old folks.

On May 25, 2020 the murder of a black man in Minneapolis by a white cop while cameras rolled generated a nation-wide deep concern about race relations. Today (June 8) the mostly nonviolent action persists, and there is no sign of slowing.

We have believed for several years that the only permanent solution to the race problem in America lies in education. To elaborate, with a good K-12 system a child could learn about him/herself. In doing so, he could learn to like himself and, later, to love himself (self-esteem). The resulting satisfaction and comfort with the self enables a student to reach out to others of different color, age and belief in friendship and mutual respect.

As a black former superstar basketball player Michael Jordan enjoys very high public prestige. This has been enhanced by his humanitarian activities since his playing days.

We quote him from last Sunday’s issue of the *News & Observer*: “We’ve got to understand at an early age (that can’t be tolerated). Education is such an important part ‘ of societal change.” Jordan plans to donate $100 million over the next ten years toward racial equality, social justice and access to education.

“Jordan said that element --- access to education --- is crucial to upward mobility and changing cultural norms regarding race and poverty. **Q: Describe your emphasis on education.** “’It’s education 110%. My parents always stressed that education is how you best bond with other people. Education is the best route for black people to better themselves. To compete to be the best you can be, you have got to be educated. If you look at this country, that helping hand (to get a college education) is the best chance to stand up on your own.’”

Thus they will be likely to carry this tolerance of others who are different into adulthood. Some of us don't appreciate how important this is to the future of the United States of America. Historically we are a nation of immigrants. Today’s challenges with immigrants reflects bad government policies along with poor education. We still need them.

We have a thought about geezers. With the new system our nation could be blessed by tapping into a significant resource base: educated seniors.

The educated senior lives from day to day by avoiding the fast lane. He/she has been there and done that. Due to a slower lifestyle he could take time to reflect, and with education comes the self-discipline to set a regular block of time aside for reflection and make this a habit. He would know that the time and place should be selected such that there are no distractions --- turn off TV, cell, I-phone, twitter, etc. --- and complete any mundane tasks that might otherwise distract.

Then he should be free to allow his thoughts to range far and wide (nothing is unthinkable). He should persist even if the first several periods yield nothing of value. Keep the faith. Sooner or later they will, and habit-forming will begin. When a "keeper" enters his head he should record the essence, for possible later elaboration and sharing with others. Stick it into a file kept handy: paper or computer.

Centuries ago men like Jefferson and Paine maintained this habit, and it powerfully shows up in their writings. Paine stated that wisdom pops up at random times in nearly everyone, regardless of education. If no one is there to jump on it, the thought "------- will descend unused into the grave (paraphrased)." He argued that in participatory govt (democracy) citizens would seek out and identify wisdom wherever and whenever it pops up. It can then be discussed and criticized; perhaps it might make a contribution (PG6) to better government.

Sandra Carey said: “Never confuse knowledge with wisdom. The first enables one to make a living; the second enables one to make a life.”

Minds are like parachutes. They function well only when open. We think the same reasoning applies to hearts.

We hear critics arguing that under this system a poor or uncompetitive school would lose revenues, then more students, thus creating a vicious, downhill cycle. Those few students who remain would receive an inferior education. The end result would be like it is today: areas with poor schools and poor students.

This could happen, and it is just what we want. Managers of successful schools would be hypersensitive to just this situation. Each will want to be quicker than the next one to spot this opportunity and jump on it.

The first to discover (discovery learning?) it will buy out the operation and install a good school. In fact, there may be several competitive bidders for this opportunity.

This would happen because managers of any successful operation naturally want to expand. Here is an opportunity to do more good. We can bet our bippy they are not about to pass it up.

It is possible that one company would acquire control over all schools in a neighborhood. Parents might become concerned with this development.

They need not be. As soon as exam scores start to slip some parents would begin sending their children elsewhere.

Just a few are all it would take, and that manager would cringe at the prospect of the vicious cycle that we described above. He/she would shape up his operation right now or be replaced by someone who could.

Friends, we are indirectly referring here to principles of good management: planning, organization, staffing, coordination, and control. Easy for us to say, and difficult to do well. This is why there is always a demand for people who are good managers (and leaders).

The subject of school discipline is sure to come forth. Today this is a serious problem, especially in low-income areas where parents, teachers, and students don't work together.

Under the new system managers, teachers, and parents would meet with each child and discuss the subject (along with others). Then all adults would arrange to present a united front whenever the occasion demands. The student will know this, and so the occasion will not demand very often.

Parents would grant teachers authority to discipline students, with parental backup in the event of controversy. For a good school this would be a condition of admission.

Should a teacher consistently abuse this authority, his/her boss would soon know about it and take action. Any manager would know that if he/she didn't act quickly in this matter the word would get around, the school would lose students, and his job would be in jeopardy.

Teacher training in this area would act to minimize the frequency of these situations. Delegated authority may include paddling students, as a few will respond only to this approach. Parents who disapprove of this practice will send their children where it is not permitted. In some instances professional counseling may work best at the start.

**PARENTS’ CONCERNS**: This brings up another current controversy. Should schools teach the melting pot culture on which young America cut its teeth, or should schools teach to preserve cultural heritages of their students? The new system favors the first.

Ethnic computer learning software is available to concerned parents for use in the home. And it's cheap.

Today there is great worry that our society is no longer a melting pot; rather it is more like a salad, where the ingredients don't mix well. Multicultural education is likely to make us even more fragmented.

Politicians like it, tho. If they can keep us divided and squabbling among ourselves we would be preoccupied with this and probably would not notice any shenanigans that they are up to. Other pocket gofers elaborate.

We cannot prove it, but we suspect this kind of thinking lay behind the bilingual education movement. The hype had foreign-born children learning at the lower grade levels in their native language. Seemed like a good idea; who would complain about making it easier for kids to learn?

Well, Latino parents didn’t like it at all. A poll showed 81 percent of them wanted their kids to learn in the English language. They believed that because their children will need English as adults. They further believed that bilingual education is a poverty trap.

Polarization also makes it more difficult to mount an organized campaign aimed at good government in our country. This is what the pocket gofers are doing: getting masses of us organized.

Each one is designed to tap into our natural desire to unite around the banner of good government. We should keep one in a hip pocket or purse constantly, and break it out for discussion and debate at the slightest provocation. Even better: break one out and **start** a discussion. Initiators are likely to become leaders. See PG13.

In this way we can do this vital job ourselves. We have already learned that the government is not about to do it for us. (Much more likely they will do it **to** us.)

But in view of the condition of our education system we face a towering challenge in getting this job done. Neil Postman was a concerned citizen.

"To engage the written word means to follow a line of thought, which requires considerable powers of classifying, inference-making and reasoning ….. In a culture dominated by print, public discourse tends to be characterized by a coherent, orderly arrangement of facts and ideas."

This observation refers to the Age of Reason, which we argue is just around the corner (see Pocket Gofers 11 and 18). The kicker lies in the question whether, with our poor educational backgrounds, we are ready to reach out and grab hold.

Postman in this quote referred to our present culture: "------ noncognitive manipulation of images and passions, motion and sensations, entertainment and fantasy." (Noncognitive means without thinking.)

When the Constitution was compiled there was no radio, no TV, no cars, not even telephones. The stalwart men who did the work therefore assumed that citizens would be or become through education familiar with and utilize messages in print.

It may go back much further than this. In the sixth century BC Confucius: “I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand.”

Friends, we do face a challenge. But we believe we’re up for it. One thing we can do right now is keep these gofers in mind. We should read them, think about what they say, criticize the ideas and, most important of all, get others involved.

Spread the word. So long as everybody keeps to him/herself, real and lasting improvement will escape us. Speak out, but do some serious thinking first.

Some people think attaining the desired goal of equal opportunity will be undermined by rich parents who will "top up" the amounts of money contained in vouchers. In this way they can preserve the present advantage over less privileged children.

Some of the best students will come from disadvantaged backgrounds. Nevertheless they will be sought after by school managers, some of them in wealthy neighborhoods.

Therefore rich parents who top up vouchers will provide extra quality for poor students along with their children, especially if the schools adopt the achievement-based approach to education. (This suggests that money buys quality, which we showed above that it did not. Maybe in this context it would.)

As we write this our TV has been and is providing news of massive demonstrations (nearly all peaceful) thruout the nation in memory of George Floyd, who was murdered on video by a white cop with knee on Mr. Floyd’s neck for around eight minutes.

Before this ends we may find a change analogous to Martin Luther King’s movement. We dare to believe that this one and other pocket gofers will combine to initiate something real and permanent. Like King’s, this must be a bottom-up event. See PG4.

America has and will have a continuing need for competent and dedicated leaders of any color. Today that need is not being filled, and lack of good education could be part of the root cause of the problem. See also PG17.

Not only parents will be interested in exam results. While they will be looking at **aggregate** school results, school managers will be looking closely at **individual** student scores. An educational foundation will hire teams of auditors, who will visit schools at random and unannounced intervals. Their reports will be published and brought to parents’ attentions.

Managers will want better students, as their superior test scores will increase a school's aggregate results in years to come. This will attract more top students, thus generating still higher scores, etc. This is the way to pursue excellence: it’s called a virtuous cycle.

While parent choice and competition will increase quality in the better schools, the increase in today's poor schools will be much greater. This will narrow the quality gap in education. Furthermore, this will move society toward uniform opportunity and add muscle to the famous American slogan “Land of Opportunity.”

Once those children in poor neighborhoods get the idea that learning is fun we had better stand clear lest we choke on their smoke and dust. Instead of guns, drugs, and crime in the streets we'll be seeing a different type of action. There is today evidence of just this phenomenon.

School hours will be more flexible. This means more efficient use of facilities and closer coordination with parents' working hours.

The new institution ties in closely with our Constitution, which is concerned with equal opportunity. WE HAVE HAD IT WITH HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES WHO CAN’T READ!!

We talked with a factory manager. "It’s ridiculous! First I got to **educate** the people I hire. Only then can I begin to train them."

**TEACHERS**: There has been talk about removing tenure from teachers and requiring each to be re-certified every five years. This would not be necessary under the new system.

Poor teachers would not last six months. They know this. Therefore today we will be watching a knocker-downer-dragger-outer as they fight the new system.

Merit pay or higher salaries for better teachers would be necessary. Managers would make a point of knowing who their best people are, lest they lose them to a competitor who offers a better opportunity.

If a teacher knew he/she was good and due to politics within an organization others not so good were being given favored treatment, he would simply quit and go where his talents are appreciated. In any organization a good manager is always keen to keep the best people.

Therefore he/she is jolly well advised to keep politics to a minimum. He does this through effective leadership (Pocket Gofer 17).

A school will lose but few in this manner before quality suffers. This loss will quickly show up in exam scores.

The school will become less competitive and unable to attract good students. The poor manager will be fired. But, that’s show bizz in the private sector.

**ORGANIZATION**: This brings up another subject. Experience has shown that small schools in cohesive neighborhoods do best, with other things being equal. This suggests that each of several schools in a particular community be K-12th grade.

If school is near home this will facilitate parental involvement. Also, parents of two or more children are likely to acquire an attachment and commitment to a favored school, as each child might spend up to 12-13 years there. And in many instances he/she will be able to walk to and from school along safe streets.

We imagine that older students may feel an incentive to set a good example for younger kids in a school. This might act to reduce peer pressure to do something really dumb or dangerous.

All this should increase neighborhood solidarity. Therefore it will mesh with the bottom-up approach to good government. See Pocket Gofers 4 and 15.

New physical games would be invented that cater to groups of small children. These would be flexible so they could adjust as children grow older.

Is learning at home compatible with this system? It is. If a parent is at home the student might benefit nearly as well as being in school.

The family laptop could go on-line with the school if appropriate. This has been done. With PCs becoming obsolete adults concerned about children will deal with today’s threat due to improper use of mobile phones.

We have some numbers. A Gallup poll in 1985 had 73 percent saying home schooling was not a good idea and only 16 percent favoring learning at home. But when the same question was asked in 1997, only 57 percent objected and supporters were up to 36 percent. Today? Due to Covid-19 there is far more home schooling than before, but the kicker may be a negative outcome. Several factors bear on this one.

Compared with those of other rich countries our children do very little homework. Results of many studies point out the importance of homework, both for self-discipline and parental involvement. This applies especially to graded homework.

The new system addresses this issue as follows. Kids will enjoy learning.

Parents may find it hard to tear them away from their phones to do family chores and get some exercise. There will be much less interest in smut and violence on the web, so there will be far fewer such sites in cyberspace.

Also, school managers will necessarily involve parents in the education process. It may take a while with some, but eventually all parents will see the value in active participation.

A child will not lose his/her homework on the way to school. It will be delivered to the teacher over a phone line or thru cyberspace.

CONCLUSION

An ancient sage said, "The pleasures of the senses are temporary. The pleasures of the heart may turn to sorrow. But the pleasures of the mind are with you till the end of your journey."

Another unknown: "Great nations of the past have created outstanding civilizations and then rested upon their laurels. The ensuing stagnant period has bred vice, corrupt politics, discontentment, and soft living. In this fashion, these nations died.” America seems to be following this pattern.

"Let us take heed of this lesson. Let our individual lives be like the swift-running stream: let our lives be fed from the eternal springs of learning. Create new ideas, new dreams, new hopes. Turn these ideas into actions and keep them moving into our every activity and every phase of our lives." Democracy is always a work in progress.

People who are comfortably entrenched inside the present education system are going to raise hell. So, what's new? There are a lot of insiders in other systems who will do the same.

We can handle it. Truth and reality swing a lot of weight. We are getting these two weapons organized to do just that. Wimps to the rear, please.

We need only constantly bear in mind that our weapons won't include the physical variety. We will bring this one off without violence.

We conclude that the system described above looks doable, and it could hardly be worse than we are getting now out of our educational system. If it saves money like the experiment in contract management of several schools appears to make possible, an additional benefit would be getting better education for our children for less.

Near the beginning of this gofer we suggested that others besides the government could take over the vital task of educating our children and do a better job. We think we have proved our point.

Finally, we conclude that our recommendation deserves a trial. In this era of sound bites and instant results we must bear in mind that the new system will not deliver its potential overnight. Therefore we must keep the faith, install the system, and work toward improvement over a period of years, perhaps a generation.

Have we the staying power? Do we love our children?

------- PUBLIUS II

With this one let’s “gofer” educated and thinking citizens.

TITLES OF OTHER POCKET GOFERS WHICH WE CAN DIG INTO, DISCUSS,

CRITICIZE AND ACT ON:

PG 1 - ON HEALTH AND FITNESS IN THE USA

PG 2 - ON VOLUNTEERISM

PG 3 - ON THE CAREER POLITICIAN IN A DEMOCRACY

PG 4 - ON THE BOTTOM-UP APPROACH TO GETTING THINGS DONE

PG 5 - ON THE COMING OPEN SOCIETY

PG 6 - ON MAKING A CONTRIBUTION

PG 7 - ON CORRUPTION AND ACCOUNTABILITY

PG 8 - ON GOVERNMENT REGULATION OF BUSINESS AND THE PHANTOM

PG 9 - IT'S ALL IN THE FAMILY

PG 11 - ON THE U.S. AS A WORLD CITIZEN

PG 12 - ON THE U.N. AND POTENTIAL CONFLICTS

PG 13 - ON PERSONAL POWER AND IDEAS

PG 14 - ON RESPECT FOR TAXPAYERS' MONEY

PG 15 - ON BIG, SMALL, AND GOOD GOVERNMENT

PG 16 - ON DEMOCRACY AND OUR CENTRAL GOVERNMENT

PG 17 - ON LEADERSHIP IN A DEMOCRACY

PG 18 - ON WAR, WEAPONS, AND PEACE

PG 19 - ON THE GRAND DECEPTION

PG 20 - ON LIFE IN A DEMOCRATIC COMMUNITY

PG 21 – PRELIMINARY DRAFT OF A CONSTITUTION