

Schools cannot do it alone

Adapted from: *The Burden*, by Jamie Vollmer (www.jamievollmer.com)

America's public schools can be traced back to the year 1640 when the Massachusetts Puritans established schools to:

1. Teach basic *reading, writing, and arithmetic* skills, and
2. Cultivate *values* that serve a democratic society (some history and civics implied).

The creators of these first schools assumed that families and churches bore the major responsibility for raising a child. The responsibility of the school was limited and focused.

From 1900 to 1910, we added

- nutrition
- immunization, and
- health to the list of school responsibilities.

From 1920 to 1940, we added

- vocational education
- the practical arts
- business education
- speech and drama
- half day kindergarten
- Physical Education – including organized athletics, and
- school lunch programs (We take this for granted today. It was, however, a significant step to shift to the schools the job of feeding America's children 1/3 of their daily meals.

In the 1950s, we added

- safety education
- driver's education
- expanded music and art education
- foreign language requirements are strengthened, and
- sex education introduced (topics escalate through 1990s)

In the 1960s, we added

- Advanced Placement programs
- consumer education
- career education
- peace education
- leisure education, and
- recreation education

In the 1970s, the breakup of the American family accelerated, and we added

- special education (mandated by federal government)
- Title IX programs (greatly expanded athletic programs for girls)
- drug and alcohol abuse education
- Head Start
- parent education

- behavior adjustment classes
- character education
- environment education, and
- school breakfast programs appear (Now, some schools are feeding America's children 2/3 of their daily meals. Sadly, these are the only decent meals some children receive.)

In the 1980s, the floodgates open, and we add

- keyboarding and computer education
- global education
- ethnic education
- multicultural/ non-sexist education
- English-as-a-second-language, and bilingual education
- early childhood education
- Jump Start, Early Start, Even Start, and Prime Start
- full day kindergarten
- pre-school programs for children at-risk
- after school programs for children of working parents
- alternative education in all its forms
- stranger/danger education
- anti-smoking education
- sexual abuse prevention education
- health and psychological services are expanded, and
- child abuse monitoring becomes a legal requirement for all teachers

In the 1990s, we added

- HIV/AIDS education
- death education
- expanded computer and Internet education
- inclusion
- Tech Prep and School to work programs
- gang education (in urban centers)
- bus safety education
- bicycle safety education
- gun safety education

In the first years of the 21st century, we have super-imposed upon everything else

- a layer of high-stakes, standardized tests

And in most states we have not added a single minute to the school calendar in five decades!

All of the items added to the list have merit, and all have their ardent supporters. They cannot, however, all be assigned to the schools.

The people of each community must come together to answer two essential questions: What do they want their children to know and be able to do when they graduate, and how can the entire community be organized to ensure that all children reach the stated goals.

The bottom line: schools cannot do it all. Schools cannot raise America's children.