

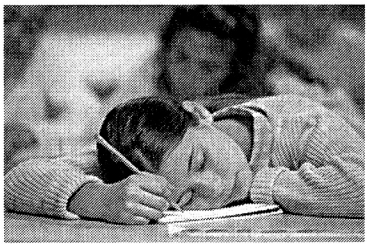
THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

If Schools Are 'Worse Than We Think,' Let's Get Busy on Repairs

Your Oct. 24 editorial "Worse Than You Think," based on a study by the Pacific Research Institute, rightly laments declining California public school performances in math and English, if not outright school failure in even some of the state's "toniest zip codes." And at current taxation and spending levels, the fact that at least half or more of the students in a state noted for education are "not proficient" suggests that a "failing" designation is not out of line.



Remedially and practically, given that colleges and universities are standing in line to enroll serious-minded and morally tuned-in home-school graduates, and especially given that two of the major nationwide academic deficiencies, math and English, are hardly rocket science, then another choice, home-schooling, by concerned and committed parents everywhere ought to be sweeping the country. And it is. Though demanding and challenging, independent research shows it outperforms by far any of the "yes, but this way the federal government's nose of incompetence and control is still under the tent" faux choices of charter schools, tuition tax credits and school vouchers.

RICHARD A. JONES
Livonia, Mich.

It is not a matter of inner-city or suburban schools, it is a matter of demanding excellence for what you pay for. The push for "educational choice" is not a legitimate alternative to repairing the damage inflicted on our public-school system through years of neglect by parents, government and communities. This is not a matter of how much money the institution has to spend, but on the time we are willing to invest ensuring it is doing its job right.

Our system, often letting schools stand on their own apart from, rather than part of, local govern-

ment has allowed them to resist change and the need to respond to the community's concerns. That does not mean we toss the baby out with the bath water, it means that we provide the tools for parents and community leaders to take back the reigns of governance to work with the schools to make them perform up to par, urban or suburban.

Moving children around to "schools of choice" still brings the parents with them, parents who are not investing the time in their children or their community. If we want an education system that works, then we need to change our priorities and put family and community first. If we want success at school, we have to have families eat dinner together, we need to turn off television and electronic games and spend real time with real people. Parents have to be parents first, not their child's "friend." Schools cannot be centers for social work, behavioral modification and educate our children all at the same time, especially when none of it is reinforced in the home.

Schools are a reflection of the society; they don't operate in a vacuum. When we ignore our schools, our children and the towns and cities where we live, because we are all too busy, "educational choice" is not going to change a thing, not in the cities and not in the suburbs.

ROBERT KESTEN
Executive Director
Center for SCREEN-TIME Awareness
Washington

The results of standardized testing have given secondary school educators and administrators information about student performance but have provided little incentive to make substantive changes. I agree that the availability of real school choices for parents and their children would provide public schools a greater incentive for improvement.

A larger problem, I believe, is a lack of feedback to the secondary schools about other consequences of poor student performance. Many public university systems have been accomplices with secondary schools in perpetuating student underachievement. These universities have expanded over the past two decades through generous publicly and privately funded subsidies, and now there is a need to get and

keep bodies in classroom seats so that tuition revenue continues to flow.

The problem has been made worse in recent years as state legislatures have shifted spending priorities away from higher education and toward other needs. Admission standards at too many universities have fallen to a point where 40% to 60% of the incoming class must take one or more remedial courses in composition or mathematics. A student can graduate from a university with a low demonstrated proficiency in basic intellectual skills and a large amount of debt.

Perhaps if universities had returned "unprepared" applicants to the secondary schools from which they came instead of taking them in and providing remedial courses, public school educators and administrators would have gotten the message. I am afraid employers already know.

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