

## THE NEED FOR RADICALIZATION IN EDUCATION

It's time for us to look seriously at completely redoing the education system in South Carolina. As Senator Greg Hembree, Chair of the Senate Education Committee of the South Carolina Assembly told Barnett Berry, “ It is time to stop nibbling around the edges of school reform and the teaching profession.”<sup>1</sup>

No truer words have been spoken about our present education *system*. In fact, there really is no system. In the long scheme of things, our present way of doing education is a bunch of pile-ons from the original manufacturing design of Frederick Taylor and his *scientific management*.

While Taylor was creating the assembly line process, Ford was dehumanizing it by considering people as cogs in a great machine. If you don't see any relationship between these two mammoth names in our economic history, go to your local high school and watch when the bells ring and students change classes.

More specifically, South Carolina ranks low on education state rankings that use multiple variables. They are variously ranked from 40<sup>th</sup> in the nation to 49<sup>th</sup>. Education Week gives South Carolina a C- for education quality.<sup>2</sup> While the Annie Casey Foundation grades education as 43<sup>rd</sup> in the nation.<sup>3</sup>

Each year the legislature and the administration in South Carolina claim that we have a new program that will increase test scores and general education standards. According to the numbers, that just is not so. We may introduce the newest panaceas and claim that they will create higher state, federal and NAEP scores, but that does not usually happen.

This is not a single person's opinion. In this article in the State Newspaper of August 5, 2022, it declares that “ *SC has among worst*

*school systems in US, new ranking shows. Here's why and what's being done."*

Read more at: <https://www.thestate.com/news/state/south-carolina/article264174836.html#storylink=cpy>

The problems will continue. The same people will present small ideas that will hold forth for a while. Then these ideas and programs will fade into the distance and new people with other small ideas will approach these problems and fail once more. Take a gander at the history of education in South Carolina over the past 50 or so years.

[https://www.carolana.com/SC/Education/History\\_of\\_South\\_Carolina\\_Schools\\_Virginia\\_B\\_Bartels.pdf](https://www.carolana.com/SC/Education/History_of_South_Carolina_Schools_Virginia_B_Bartels.pdf)

If what you see in our history disturbs you, then you are on the correct path to starting over again and creating a new way of teaching our children.

## **WHERE DO WE BEGIN ?**

Minnesota passed the first Charter School law in 1991. It was followed by Massachusetts in 1993. The basic tenets of the laws were that these were going to be public schools, with independent management. They were also less restricted by state law and could become examples of innovation.<sup>5</sup>

Public schools would then have a chance to look at these innovations and use them in the regular public schools. That is not what happened. Charter schools became independent entities, sometimes managed by profit making organizations. Their history of innovation is slim. Furthermore, since they were able to disregard state law in many instances, while regular public schools could not copy any of the alleged innovations.

Here was a panacea that really had no possible way of succeeding for the overwhelming majority of public school children. Once again, here was

an idea that would propel education into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and improve education for our children. It did not work that way.

As almost all of these panaceas fell by the wayside. It is evident that none of them had any chances of succeeding. The ideas that created these programs never seemed to begin with the children. They were always ideas that were promulgated to somehow enter the system and make things right. Few, if any of them, began with the needs of the children.

In any radicalization of education, students need to come first. All other things are just trimmings that come after. What is evident from all of these efforts to improve public education, is that they have no basis in children's needs. Whether you agree with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs or its revision or not, children have absolute needs when they are in school.<sup>5</sup>

Proof of these needs has been highlighted recently when mass school shootings have created social and emotional disturbances among children. These children need to feel safe.

We can list children's needs from pre-school to 12<sup>th</sup> grade. They will all be familiar to you.

Safe and Stable environment

Proper nutrition

Structure

Sense of belonging

Consistency

Health Care

Emotional Support

Education

There are many more items that could be added to the list. The author has chosen these because of consistent information about South Carolina's children that appears in public journals and media. Here are some statistics.

*One in six (or 178,710) children in South Carolina are food insecure — numbers that are growing due to the pandemic-induced unemployment.*

- *Over 12,000 students experienced homelessness in 2017-19, and another unidentified 34,000 were estimated to be without a home.*
- *Over 40 percent of South Carolinians live in childcare deserts — a term used to describe a Census tract of more than 50 children under the age of five where there are no childcare providers.*
- *In 2019, about 10 percent of the 15,000 children referred to the Department of Juvenile Justice were for status offenses (truancy, curfew violation, etc.) reflecting underlying personal, family, or community problems, not criminal ones.*

*The simple truth is that many children in our state have few of the basic needs outlined above. This is not just a problem of poor and minority communities.* <sup>6</sup>

A kindergarten assessment at the beginning of the 2020- 21 school year was modified because of the pandemic. However, the results published by the Westend Corporation, the creator of the assessment, found these numbers statewide:

*33% of the 48,000 of the kindergartners tested at the beginning of the year had an Emerging Readiness. This means that they will need significant help to reach readiness.*

*40% of the children were classified as approaching readiness and would need some kind of intervention.*

*27% of the children are actually demonstrating readiness.* <sup>7</sup>

During the early days of the pandemic there were contrary opinions about wearing masks and getting vaccinations. Even today cases of

Covid variants are spiking in a number of counties in the state, according to the DHEC. The situation is confusing. There is an elected Superintendent of Education who had differing views from those of the administration.

This confusion made life difficult for local decision makers. Who does one listen to, the Governor, the Superintendent of Education or the Department of Health and Environmental Control? Consequently, there was little consistency across the state.

Leadership at the local level became a problem when 32 of the 78 school superintendents turned over from March of 2020 to June of 2022. That is 41%.<sup>8</sup> This lack of consistency has propelled many school districts into micro-management by school boards. These kinds of happenings are never a positive event for the children.

If South Carolina has a system of education, it is not apparent. The funding mechanisms for school districts relies on many layers of bureaucratic meddling. As in most states in the union, school districts are governed by local school boards. At the upper levels of the state government, the Governor, or an appointed official, such as a Chief State School Officer actually operates the system.

South Carolina is one of 12 states that elects its chief state school officer. There are pros and cons to this system. In some cases, it can stimulate cooperative action, while in others it stimulates conflict.

In South Carolina, there are a number of bureaucratic layers to school governance. At the local level, there are school boards, superintendents of schools, county councils, and something called a legislative committee whose power is ill defined. It is composed of both state senators and state house members. There is also the Education Oversight Committee (EOC). This is the legislators' way of keeping an eye on education and how it is performing across the state.

## SO WHAT IS THE CONCLUSION ?

Underneath the edujargon and the political palaver, most folks know that education is not doing well in South Carolina. We will not delve into higher education. This is a concluding thought from many people.

Now, who do you blame? We blame everyone and no one. Many good hearted people of all political stripes have tried to fix things. They have not succeeded. The Covid-19 pandemic has pointed out that our system cannot deal with the realities of our current world. We have left our children to the devices of companies who are producing online products. We have left our teachers out there in the universe of online education with no tools at their disposal. They have tried mightily to do their job. It was mostly a futile attempt.

*staff reports / Results from end-of-year examination scores revealed that South Carolina students are struggling in U.S. history, algebra and biology. More than a third of high school students failed algebra last year and 24% got a “D.” They scored even worse in history and biology with a mean of 65% and 66%, respectively.*

*The culprit: Pandemic-related learning loss, education officials suspect.*

*State Superintendent of Education Molly Spearman said more work needed to be done to help students recover: “Preparing students to meet college and career-readiness standards must not just be an aspiration in our state,” she said, according to published reports. “It’s a responsibility that all of us must play a role in as we pursue meaningful solutions.”<sup>16</sup>*

As we get back to in-person education, the children have been besieged with social and emotional problems. Teachers are not able to handle such things by themselves. It is a gross miscalculation that all children are getting the help that they need. In fact, when they do get help, who is it that provides it ?

We are even further behind than we were in March of 2020. Yet, some school districts still seem to shine. In larger school districts, with many schools, there still seem to be those who do well. They are singularly in the minority. How can we compare a school district with a median household income of \$101,284 with one whose income is \$26,074?<sup>9</sup>

Think of the resources that wealthy parents can provide for their child, compared to a child whose parents are just getting by and have no resources for their child, except for love.

### O.K. RADICALS, WHAT DO WE DO ABOUT IT?

We begin with the children and the things that they need. We can look at the above-mentioned items as a beginning. As was said, there are many more things that children need. As they mature through the school and life experiences, their needs change. Do we know enough Piaget to list the things that the children need at particular ages. Notice, I did not say grades. As a noted educator and speaker Sam Clemens once said, “ How do you handle a kindergartner who comes into school carrying a New York Times when you also have a little one who walks in and needs to learn his alphabet?

It all begins at birth, or maybe even before. Without proper health care for expectant moms, the chances of a child having a normal entrance into this world is diminished. South Carolina’s infant mortality rate of 6.5% per 1000 live births is higher than the national average of 5.4% per 1000 live births. Pre-natal medical care is most lacking in rural areas of the state.

How does one prevent this kind of statistic? There are a number of ways, if the state is of a mind. One way is a massive public campaign aimed at

areas with few physicians and few clinics. The need for medical facilities in these places should become a state priority.

A second, and more accelerated way is for consortia of school districts, local municipalities and hospitals to purchase medical vans. These vans have been in use in many rural and urban areas in the United States. The van could be under the jurisdiction of one of these entities for financial responsibility. The driver would be a staff member of one of these entities.

Medical personnel could be secured with volunteers, dentists, school psychologists, doctors, nurses, PAs and others. The vans could advertise when they would be in a certain area. Pre-natal exams could be a major function, while children from 0-4 could also be seen by some of these specialists.

A third method of securing health care for pre and post-natal care is an outreach program that is run by a local school district. The Appleton, Wisconsin School District has created a birth through five program that focuses on entire community resources to help parents in the community.

*85% of the foundation for a child's intellect, personality and skills is formed by age 5. Appleton Area School District's Birth-Five Outreach offers an inclusive network of family care services, school information, and community support.*

*Birth-Five Outreach builds positive relationships with families by offering connections to many school and community resources early on.<sup>11</sup>*

A fourth possible method is to establish a 0-5 school building, or community building that will have all of the services needed by families with children from 0-5 and pre-natal care. In the early 1980's such a school was created by the Titusville School District in Northwestern Pennsylvania.

All of these suggestions are now in effect in the United States of America, but not in South Carolina. These programs are not only helpful



to the individual parent and child, but to the community and to the schools that these children will go to.

## SO NOW THEY WALK INTO SCHOOL, OR DO THEY?

If we are going to deal with children where they are at, can we still use the old fashioned age requirement for kindergarten. Not only don't we want to do that, but maybe we don't even call the first year of school by that old name. There are things attached to the word, that it may be necessary to use some other word or some other description.

So many of the children that walk through those school doors are at variance with what we consider "ready to learn." The differences between the children is immense. So what do we do? Here are some programs that could exist in a public school, a vocational school or a technical college.

- A. Pre and postnatal care
- B. Teenage pregnancy
- C. Day Care for community members or school staff
- D. Day Care to programming 0-5
- E. On site medical care
- F. Training for students to learn day care skills
- G. Special education programs for children with disabilities
- H. Eldercare
- I. Job Placement
- J. Home for state reps and congress people
- K. Psychological services

There are many definitions of what a school or series of schools might be. The origin of the term, "Community School" comes from Stewart Mott's vision of the Flint community in Michigan in the mid 1930's. As the head of General Motors, he was able to fund these programs through his Mott Foundation, which still exists today.

A simple definition of the term Community School comes from the NEA.

*Community Schools are built with the understanding that students often come to the classroom with challenges that impact their ability to learn, explore, and develop to their greatest potential.*

*Because learning never happens in isolation, community schools focus on what students in the community truly need to succeed—whether it's free healthy meals, health care, tutoring, mental health counseling, or other tailored services before, during, and after school.*<sup>13</sup>

In recent times, here in South Carolina, Professor Barnett Berry has coined the term “Whole Child,” education.<sup>14</sup> His thesis is that unless we take care of the complete needs of children, they will not achieve their maximum capabilities. He also believes that “Whole Child” education begins at birth. Although teaching, “The Whole Child” was concept from the 1950's, Berry's description of the process of “Whole Child Education” is much wider and includes so much more than just teachers in a classroom.

One form of “Community School” has been a building that was open 24 hours a day and accommodated an entire community's needs. The current administration in Washington has increased funding for these kinds of “community schools.” That is not to say that they do not exist already. Here is an example of a school district that has recognized the problems their children bring with them to school and has taken action.

<https://inthepublicinterest.org/biden-proposes-increasing-funding-for-community-schools-by-15-times-the-current-level/><sup>12</sup>

The federal government has recently sent out a request for proposals with the intent of distributing the funding to school districts across the country to promulgate or expand community schools. The total of 468 million dollars in the federal budget proposal for 2023 expands the program. It will be distributed to schools that provide medical assistance, nutritional assistance, mental health, tutoring, enrichment and

violence prevention services. The schools will have to be those who have been involved in these programs for a decade.

## SO WHAT DOES ALL THIS HAVE TO DO WITH SOUTH CAROLINA EDUCATION ?

For the most part, South Carolina's education system does not work for most of its children. The state has tried a number of changes, but to no avail. There is a feeling among educators and those who view the system, that caring for the students is not the priority that it should be.

A good example of this kind of attitude is the recent return of one billion dollars in taxes, rather than using these funds to upgrade education. The needs are so great in many districts.

The establishment of public education in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was challenged by churches and by religious organizations across the burgeoning country. In some states, religious leaders imposed their religious beliefs upon these new schools. As one example, in a number states, there were no events in schools on Wednesdays afternoons and evenings. Those times were set aside for religious experiences.

In other states, there were established times when students could be released early to go to religious studies in their churches. Certainly, no sporting events were to be held on Sunday. Bibles were distributed to 6<sup>th</sup> grade students in many schools across the nation.

These were but a few instances of church actions in public schools. Sometime at the end of the 1960's, groups of right wing religionists and their acolytes met to try and undo public education in its entirety. Now, some 50 years later, that they are succeeding in their efforts.

There can be no doubt that elite billionaires with a religious bent are moving to destroy public education. The issue of the separation of church and state is dissolving amidst a cacophony of yelps from these

right wing religionists, or faux religionists, that they are being discriminated against.

It is apparent that these plans are not only to create a side by side educational system, but to allow students, who they feel are not up to par, to remain in public schools.

In the prior administration, billions of dollars were distributed to charter school privateers, religious schools, private schools and others. This Paycheck Protection Plan was to be used for businesses that had not been doing well during the Covid 19 pandemic. Interestingly enough, none of these dollars could go to public schools.<sup>15</sup>

The history of public education both here and in all parts of our land is the history of our success as a country. The forces that continue to try and dissolve public education have no idea what will come next. Here in an essay by Anya Kamenetz, reporter from NPR, explains the history and a possible future of public education.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/01/opinion/us-school-history.html>

In my own words, here are my thoughts about public education. They were penned 42 years ago.

## Who Am I?



I am all of you. You needed me and I was created.

When you were new and growing, you saw in me a way to keep you free. I was born to serve democracy in its times of triumph and its times of despair.

When all others refused a task, you asked for my help. I never refused. I worked with the refugees and the outcasts of the world to make them knowing and free.

I am midwife to genius and the ne'er-do-well. When the first stone is cast, I stand between you and the real targets.

I am sometimes demanding and always enlightening. I am wrong for some and right for many. I am America at its zenith and in its turmoil. I am president and prisoner, millionaire and pauper. I am buildings and I am people. I am democracy but never a dictatorship.

I am public education. I am good and I work.

By Arnold Hillman

## END NOTES

<sup>1</sup> "A Whole Child Policy Analysis," Barnett Berry, University of South Carolina, SC4Ed P. 4 2022

<sup>2</sup> Annie Casey Foundation 2022 Kids Count data book

<sup>3</sup> "Map A-F Grades Rating States of School Quality", Education Week Research 2021

<sup>4</sup> “Minnesota is the Birthplace of Charter Public Schools” Minnesota Association of Charter Schools

<sup>5</sup> “Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs” Simply Psychology April 2022

<sup>6</sup> 1 “ A Whole Child Policy Analysis,” Barnett Berry, University of South Carolina, SC4Ed P. 6 2022

<sup>7</sup> Results of Modified Kindergarten Readiness Assessment 2020-21 Westend Corporation 2021

<sup>8</sup> “Superintendent Turnover March 2020 to June 2022,” SCORS research Arnold Hillman 2022

<sup>9</sup> Median Household Income South Carolina School Districts, U.S. Census 2020

<sup>10</sup> “Infant Mortality and selected birth Characteristics” South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control 2021

<sup>11</sup> [https://www.aasd.k12.wi.us/families/birth-five\\_outreach](https://www.aasd.k12.wi.us/families/birth-five_outreach)

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.mott.org/about/history/>

<sup>13</sup> NEA statement on Community Schools- <https://www.nea.org/student-success/great-public-schools/community-schools>

<sup>14</sup> “ A Whole Child Policy Analysis,” Barnett Berry, University of South Carolina, SC4Ed P. 4 2022

<sup>15</sup> <https://wlvr.org/2020/07/some-local-schools-get-paycheck-protection-funding-from-the-federal-government-while-others-dont/#.Yx6FtHbMKM8>

<sup>16</sup> Staff, StateHouse Report, September 23, 2022

