

Neighborhood Control of Public Elementary Schools By Roger Copple

We need to encourage and provide incentives for neighborhood control of public elementary schools, which is something that has never been tried yet. It would create a sense of neighborhood togetherness and enhance local self-determination. Instead of having a top-down federal, state, and township control of our public elementary schools, we can implement a decentralized, non-hierarchical, or grassroots approach: The neighbors who live within the boundaries of each public elementary school will be encouraged to democratically select their own school board, who could then establish and implement a school philosophy and curriculum for the neighborhood school, using public funds. They could even hire their own teachers and tutors and determine salaries or wages. This policy should reduce social problems such as crime, as neighborhood school districts ideally become like tribal or intentional communities.

One of our national problems is that our public schools are not instilling in students an insatiable desire to make the world better. We can't expect teachers, especially at the elementary level, to personally share their own radical political and spiritual beliefs with students when teachers play the role of being extensions of the government. If teachers express the sentiment "support the troops, bring them all home" when a soldier speaks at their school after returning from the battlefield, or if teachers say they are an atheist, Buddhist, Muslim, communist, or homosexual--they can expect either the administration or parents to complain, which can put their jobs and retirement plans in jeopardy.

The major world religions could be taught in public schools from a scientific perspective; otherwise, students may only have the devotional orientation that they learn from their parents and place of worship. Instead of teaching history in a neutral, sterile, and amoral way, teachers should have the freedom to be passionate about their own personal beliefs, provided they objectively share opposite viewpoints. Howard Zinn's book *Peoples History of the United States* could be part of the high school curriculum.

Of course, with neighborhood control of public elementary schools, not every neighborhood would be progressive in the way many people would prefer. In fact, some neighborhoods might want to incorporate creationism and religious fundamentalism into the school curriculum. On the other hand, other neighborhoods might promote a worldview that is far to the left of what the current public schools express.

Whenever possible, we can promote local self-determination at the grassroots level. If the neighborhood does something that harms the larger community like pollutes

a river, for example, then higher levels of government could intervene to prevent it. In the age of the internet, encouraging local diversity would be good for society, instead of promoting a mass monoculture. Scott Peck, author of *The Road Less Traveled*, discusses the group process of community building in this [article](#).

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