

Replace Uniformed Officers in Schools with Inspired Educators

Today, tens of thousands of uniformed officers are permanently assigned to schools across the United States. The intention behind placing them there may have originally been good. The original analysis, however, did not consider the entirety of the impact on schools. At best, even when uniformed officers achieve the stated goals for being in schools, their mere presence divides the school's purpose. Schools are institutions of learning. The test would be to simply ask the question, why are uniformed officers in schools? If the answer is to educate and something else, then they serve some other purpose and divide the school's single purpose of education.

This is not meant to say that a law enforcement officer is not educated. It is not what inside the officer's mind that is in question. It is the uniform and badge that creates a divided loyalty in the officer. On the one hand, the officer claims that they are in the school to educate. The uniform and badge oblige them to another duty.

Consider the disruption, for example, created in the leadership alone. When a potentially violent or violent incident occurs, some look to the principal others look to the uniformed officer.

What if the funding used to place uniformed officers in the classroom was used to place an inspired educator in each school. Inspired educators like Jaime Escalante, John Keating, Erin Grewell, Anne Sullivan, Neil deGrasse Tyson, Andria Zafirakou, Melvin B. Tolson, or Walter Lewin?

The task of the modern educator is not to cut down jungles,
but to irrigate deserts.

-C.S. Lewis

What if the inspired educator's job description was to order the affection of students and teachers toward curiosity and learning? What if this inspired educator's job was to teach students directly AND teach the teachers? What if students who would otherwise be disciplined worked with these inspired educators? What if students who are at risk of dropping out of school worked with these inspired educators? The job of the inspired educator would be to teach and nothing more.

An anticipated criticism is that the uniformed officer is necessary for security. There may be schools in which security is needed. The school administration should be free to hire security. This is something different than uniformed officers in the classroom. The security employee does not educate. The security employee answers to the school's administration and does not have divided loyalty. The distinction may be illustrated in an incident I remember from my high school.

After an away football game, my high school principal received a phone call from the chief of police

of the city where the game was played. One of his students, after drinking, underage, to excess had an encounter with law enforcement. The principal got in his car, drove back to the city, picked the boy up, and took him home. Once at the boy's home, he told the boy's father what had happened. There was never a repeat occurrence. That boy grew up to be a man that most people would treasure as a neighbor. A good citizen.

I cannot close out this thought without addressing fourth-grade literacy. I am convinced that most children who are not reading on grade level in fourth grade will go to prison. Enormous resources should be invested in literacy from pre-K to 4th grade. Students in that target range should be empowered as ambassadors in their homes to encourage reading. Books and reading guides should be sent home with every student as often as possible. Resources should be made available to help parents learn how to read with their children. Online resources should be open access for parents who can not or will not come to reading classes. When the societal cost of prison is compared to the cost of literacy - the resources dedicated to pre-K through fourth-grade literacy should be staggering.

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