

WHERE DO STUDENT PROBLEMS BEGIN

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Five semesters have now come and gone since I retired from being a teacher and school principal in inner city Middle, High and Alternative schools. Currently, I job-share a position as a guidance counselor to keep my hand in the arena. Over the decades I have noticed considerable changes in students. Students reflect societal changes. What scares me is the changing values, or lack of values I perceive in so many of our students. Things that were not OK when you and I went through school now seem to be tolerated. A lower academic achievement is deemed acceptable to many.

When President Bush introduced 'No Child Left Behind' it was an attempt to redeem some of the sinking educational standards. We struggle as a nation to get into the top 20 amongst the developed countries, yet Principals keep telling children that we have the best education system in the world. Why are schools struggling to raise student achievement levels? I would like to propose just a handful of answers to the dilemma gleaned from my experience and reading.

Children's attitudes have changed. Academic achievement doesn't seem to have the same appeal as it once did. So many kids are easily distracted and tired in class and are prepared to tell their teachers they are bored to death. Excessive use of computer and video games, too much time surfing the Web, and a disproportionate time watching TV leads to mass over-stimulation. There isn't the money or the time to train all teachers to keep up with the rapid development of technology, even though they use it wherever possible. Education delivery has to adapt, but it cannot compete.

Attitudes towards authority have changed dramatically over the years. I experienced an interesting phenomenon in the education district in which I worked the day after they abolished corporal punishment. The very next week there was a flood of disrespect that hadn't been there before. Whether you believe in corporal punishment or not, when the deterrent is missing the floodgates open. I guess it is similar to what would happen if the USA declared that it would destroy its arsenal of nuclear-armed weapons!

Today's kids just don't seem to buy in to the entire adult-led institution that we call public education. Many experienced and excellent baby-boomer teachers are questioning whether to remain or retire. The job has become so much harder. If you were to ask them you would probably get the same answer as me. "I don't get enough time to teach. There's so much paper work and too many interruptions. Kids attitudes have changed dramatically, and by the time I do attendance and deal with their social problems 10 -15 minutes have gone by."

Student problems begin in the home. Unfortunately, deficits in parenting skills flood over into the school. Adult relationship problems lead to dysfunction

and divorce. Unhappy homes produce unhappy children. Unhappy children find it very difficult to concentrate on academic achievement.

There are many wonderful students who come from stimulating homes with caring parents. It is the home that makes the difference. The students who aren't bored, who set out academically to do their best, who are respectful and honorable are the ones who keep teachers from retiring early. Thank you to the parents who teach values to their children and model them, who train their kids to be well-mannered, who talk with their children regularly and devote time to help make their progeny awesome young people. Most teachers will go way beyond their call of duty to assist your child to achieve their best, but they are not mind readers. Talk to them.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.