

# The American Conservative

## **Pour the Public Education Kool-Aid Down the Drain**

*Government meddling in education restricts creativity and innovation.*

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April 5, 2017

The Obama administration was fond of proclaiming that high-school graduation rates hit record highs during its tenure. A new report shows that those numbers don't mean much.

“However legitimate the surge in graduation rates—and almost no one contends that they are wholly fictive—the relative value of a high school diploma, as measured by income, college preparedness, jobless rates, and employer confidence, has never been lower,” the 74million.org, an education news site, [reports](#). “American schools may have taken praiseworthy strides in helping their students to the K–12 finish line, but there is little reason to believe that they have prepared them any more meaningfully for the challenges ahead.”

The Obama administration, like many of its predecessors, spent billions propping up failing public schools, and what did we get for all our hard-earned tax dollars? High-school graduates are worse off.

But many in the general public, having drunk the pro-public-schools Kool-Aid, mixed mainly by the nation's corrupt and powerful teachers' unions, are largely under the delusion that public education is a great and sacred institution worthy of preservation—no matter what.

As the late Andrew Coulson of the Cato Institute said in [testimony](#) before the U.S. House of Representatives' Committee on Education and the Workforce in 2011, “we have little to show for the \$2 trillion in federal education spending of the past half century.” Math, science, and reading scores, Coulson noted, remained stagnant or declined while the federal government poured trillions of dollars into trying to raise overall achievement. And the federal government's efforts to realize its other goal of narrowing achievement gaps—between minorities and whites, and between higher- and lower-income students—produced no change either.

“The fact that outcomes have remained flat or declined while spending skyrocketed is a disaster unparalleled in any other field,” Coulson said. “The only thing it appears to have accomplished is to apply the brakes to the nation's economic growth, by taxing trillions of dollars out of the productive sector of the economy and spending it on ineffective programs.”

It's been six years since Coulson's testimony, and federal funding on education remains astronomical. The U.S. Department of Education admitted in January 2017 that the School Improvements Grant program, into which the Obama administration funneled \$500 million annually starting in 2009, had "no impact on achievement."

Meanwhile, American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten declared during a press conference earlier in March that President Donald Trump's proposed cuts to the U.S. Department of Education would take "a meat cleaver to public education."

"Only someone who doesn't know what public schools do and what kids need would contemplate or countenance these kinds of cuts," Weingarten said. "These cuts, if enacted, will turn into real-life effects on kids. They do what we feared would happen when Education Secretary Betsy DeVos was nominated: defund public schools with the aim of destabilizing and destroying them."

Weingarten would have us believe "what public schools do" is a great service to our children and our country. Yet the facts—as evidenced by Coulson, the74million.org, and many others—suggest otherwise.

Michael Mulgrew, president of New York City's United Federation of Teachers, told the *New York Daily News* recently that he and his cronies "are not going to stand by and let anyone perpetrate the [federal Education Secretary Betsy] DeVos agenda on our public schools."

"Teachers, parents, and community activists will stand against any attempt to hurt our students and our schools," Mulgrew said.

Again, why do so many people naively believe "hurting" government schools will concurrently hurt our students?

A report released one week ago shows how the Obama administration's edicts on discipline reform made New York City public schools more violent. And it's not just federal intervention that hurts schools. Government meddling in education at the state and local levels restricts creativity and innovation everywhere, and children are suffering because of it.

Connecticut's governor, for instance, just announced that the state's school-desegregation efforts have kept minority students from enrolling in better schools because local schools have to reach racial-integration quotas.

If at first you don't succeed, and if for 50 years you don't succeed, perhaps you should try, try something different. Something like reducing government involvement in education and giving control back to parents.