

The Passy Press

Letter to the Editor

From: william.sargent@undisclosed.com
To: Nick Gardiner enpg@thepassypress.com
Date: September 27, 2014 1:05PM EST
Subject: Comments on John MacMurray's Essay on US Education

Dear Sir,

The MacMurray essay focuses on the following items for improving education in the United States:

1. The usefulness of non-mandatory Common Core Standards,
2. The importance of charter schools that introduce choice and competition,
3. The need to revisit teacher contract negotiations to improve teacher performance,
4. The need for new ways to involve students from environments where current education means very little, and
5. The potential program of two years of public service for all high school graduates as a means of achieving some of the same goals expected from an ideal educational system.

MacMurray's points seem well taken, but I would add a few comments.

1. The PISA test results compare averages which are not favorable to the relative U.S. position. While I have no proof I am inclined to believe that in most respects the top half of US students are probably unsurpassed by the top half of most other countries. That means that the serious education problem we face is in meeting the needs of the lower half, which is the object of the fourth of MacMurray's key points.

2. It's long been the hopes of many that computers would become an important means for helping students learn basic concepts of math, language, reasoning, etc. Hopefully we are at the dawn of an age in which tablets, application programs and the internet become effective aids to learning, allowing teachers to provide more one-on-one assistance to students who need extra help.

3. Technology now allows students to watch brilliant lectures and explanations on an increasingly broad range of subjects, also allowing their teachers to focus more on students that need supplemental help.

4. We strive to make college an available and affordable objective for high school graduates, but since so many students are not college bound we need to expand community and industrial programs that teach skills, particularly those that are in short supply.

Thanks for the opportunity to read and comment on such an important topic.

Bill Sargent

Bill Sargent is a former defense analyst, corporate manager, and software entrepreneur and now serves as a Commissioner of Rehoboth Beach, Delaware.