

and compartmentalized. Truth is relative, situational, and individualized. The greatest virtues are openness, tolerance, and diversity, and the worst wrong is to think you are ever right. Put differently, public schools are actively and aggressively non-Christian. They are training Christian children to be secularist—unbelieving believers. This unrelenting, soul-stunting enculturation process is far worse than any external dangers children face.

**GENA:** Joel, what about the “dumbing down” of schools everyone keeps talking about?

**JOEL:** One of the reasons why public school curricula have been dumbed down is because in many elementary schools today, even in “good” neighborhoods, the schools teach kids to read with a mostly whole-language reading instruction method (now called “balanced literacy instruction” or “language arts”). Balanced literacy instruction is mostly whole language with a little bit of phonics thrown in to assuage parents who complain that their kids are not learning to read in these schools. Whole-language instruction can literally cripple a child’s ability to read.

Because children taught to read with this method become poor readers, schools must dumb down the textbooks and tests to compensate for children’s poor reading skills. Many schools also engage in grade inflation, or give kids higher marks than their work deserves—especially today, because the No Child Left Behind Act puts pressure on schools to show good grades for their students. So if the curriculum and tests are dumbed down and there is grade inflation, so-called good grades mean nothing. Such grades do not reflect a child’s true reading and math abilities, even though the grades are up to “standards.”

**GENA:** Can you speak a little about the new math? What else is going on in public schools? Your book, Joel, has been a godsend to me; it’s been a real eye-opener as to what’s really being taught in today’s public schools. I’ve used a lot of the information you provide while I speak to homeschool groups around the country, and I can’t recommend it highly enough to parents who are interested in stealing a peek into today’s government institutionalization of children. It’s a shocking peek, but one that really must be taken, as somber as it may be.

**JOEL:** New math, which is sometimes called “fuzzy” math or “constructivist” math (the names keep changing), is the math equivalent of whole-language reading instruction.

School authorities also encourage teachers to turn math into a debating society, another way to get children to socialize and get along with the group. School authorities encourage teachers to let the children debate solutions to simple math problems among themselves. Instead of giving children simple and easy-to-understand rules for adding, say 3 + 3, teachers tell students to work the problem out on their own by agreeing or disagreeing with each other until they come to an agreement on the “correct” answer.

**GENA:** So it’s now a gray area? No right or wrong answer? But it’s MATH. You have to be accurate there. Math can never be subjective. Tell that to an engineer, a computer programmer, or a doctor. Better yet, to the bank teller on payday!

**JOEL:** Because many schools no longer require students to learn the basics, some teachers no longer require exact answers on math tests. These teaching methods hurt students’ ability to do math, but they benefit teachers, principals, and schools. When students don’t have to be concerned with right answers, teachers can grade tests arbitrarily and test scores can go up. High test scores make math teachers and their schools look good to parents, while their children become math illiterates.

**GENA:** So this is what it boils down to. I get it. Just as a company in the business world is recognized by its sales, its monthly or quarterly earnings, teachers/schools earn their “credits” or recognition by producing the grades. If they don’t produce, they, according to No Child Left Behind, lose their funding, or a portion thereof. Teachers themselves are always having to prove their ability to teach—they literally have to “make the grade.” Or should they call it “fake the grade”?

**JOEL:** Another alarming trend is that some legislators and public school authorities are now promoting “mental screening” of all school children from an early age, with or without parental consent. As a result of these screenings, if and when a school health official or child psychiatrist declares that a child has an alleged “learning disorder” or “mental disease” like ADHD, that child could be forced to take potentially dangerous, mind-altering drugs like Ritalin.

**GENA:** Without parents even knowing about it—that’s what gets Paul and me the most. What gives them the right to divide families this way, to push parents out? Oh, yes, it’s the

government, and that means laws are involved. It’s a higher order. There are mandates, official protocols. Not only is it compulsory to send your children to begin with, but it’s become the norm to assume that the school knows best about the child, even to the point of gathering diagnoses and acting as decision maker (medical professional?) on the supposed cures. Who’s raising them? To whom do kids really belong? The lowly parent is the surrogate, or the body; the state is the mind. The state is supreme.

Thanks, guys, for all your help. As Paul and I speak to homeschooling parents, both of us consistently bring up all three of your names and resources. We’ve learned so much as a result of reading your books. I sure appreciate your talking with us as often as you do. Keep up the good work in what you are doing; it’s not going unnoticed. May the Lord use it to open parents’ eyes.

Parents, keep them home where they belong.

*Bruce Shortt attended public schools through twelfth grade, his mother was a public school nurse, and both of his grandmothers were public school teachers. He is a graduate of Harvard Law School, has a Ph.D. from Stanford University, was a Fulbright Scholar, and serves on the board of directors of Exodus Mandate. He practices law in Houston, Texas, where he resides with his wife and homeschools their sons. Bruce’s blog can be found at [harshtruth.blogspot.com](http://harshtruth.blogspot.com).*

*Joel Turtel holds a degree in psychology. He owned and managed a small, successful consulting company in New York City for fifteen years. For the last ten years he has done extensive research as an education policy analyst, studying the alarming state of today’s public schools and documenting these schools’ disastrous effects on children and parents. Mr. Turtel is also a syndicated columnist.*

*Brad Heath holds an aeronautical engineering degree from Purdue University. He is an impassioned advocate for the recovery of substantive Christian education and has served the evangelical church as an elder, teacher, and Christian school administrator. Brad and his wife, Tari, have been married for twenty-six years and have home educated their three children during the past fifteen years.*

# What About Public School?

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# What About Public School?

By Gena Suarez

The more we read and listen, the more Paul and I feel convicted that public schools are simply not an option for Christian kids. Parents must take a look at the risks of sending their children off for eight hours a day to be trained by a godless system: one that not only fails to acknowledge or honor the Lord Jesus Christ, but one that hates the Lord Jesus Christ. God is not welcome there; in fact, He is despised.

But what about single parents? How about those who desperately want to homeschool but cannot? Pastors, where are you?

I've spoken with three writers whom I greatly admire because of the research they have conducted and their dedication to sharing the truth about the school system. These authors, Brad Heath, author of *Millstones and Stumbling Blocks: Understanding Education in Post-Christian America*; Dr. Bruce Shortt, author of *The Harsh Truth About Public Schools*; and Joel Turtel, author of *Public Schools, Public Menace: How Public Schools Lie to Parents and Betray Our Children*, expose public education as an unacceptable choice for Christian children today. You can find all three of these books in The Schoolhouse Store, and Paul and I recommend them highly. Below is a "roundtable" discussion that has been pieced together as a result of various conversations I've had with all three authors over the last six months or so. I hope this discussion helps tell a story of what's really going on in today's public schools—and where compulsory education even came from to begin with.

**GENA:** Gentlemen, welcome. Let's start at the beginning. Can you tell our readers a little about the history of the public school system in this country? Where did it come from? Whose idea was it?

**BRUCE:** America's original educational tradition was predominantly Christian and lasted from the initial settlement of America until after the end of the War Between the States. Our current government school system got its start in the 1830s, most notably in Massachusetts, and was then known as the "Common School" system.

The Common School movement was initially mainly a project of utopian socialists and Unitarians. The socialists, as always, saw a government school system that they would control as an instrument for remaking society in their image. The Unitarians, who were concentrated in the New England area, and especially Boston, wanted to use such a school system to make Unitarianism the de facto established religion of the United States, along with using it as a tool for promoting their notions of social improvement.

Nevertheless, both of these groups were marginal players in American society and would not have been able to get the Common School program widely adopted had it not been for the large-scale Irish Catholic immigration to the northeast United States that began in the 1830s. The mainstream was ultimately sold on the Common School program, coupled with compulsory school attendance laws, as a means of coercively "Protestantizing" children from Catholic families. The Catholics, of course, understood this, which is why a system of Catholic schools was ultimately created.

**JOEL:** John Dewey is considered the founder of public education in the United States. He was a socialist and sought to use the public school system to mold our children's minds, for generations to come, into becoming obedient little socialist citizens. Dewey was quoted as saying, "You can't make socialists out of individualists. Children who know how to think for themselves spoil the harmony of the collective society which is coming, where everyone is interdependent." (See [www.proliberty.com/observer/20010816.htm](http://www.proliberty.com/observer/20010816.htm).)

Since 1852, men like John Dewey and Horace Mann have pushed to impose compulsory public school education on every child in this country. They have succeeded beyond their wildest imaginations.

**GENA:** So with the ideologies coming from Dewey and Mann and the desire to convert Catholics (for the wrong reasons), we have a recipe for a messed up foundation to begin with. What's even more amazing to me is what you said about other countries at the time marveling about the high literacy rates in the U.S. At one time, the United States provided a model of exceptional education. However, society continues to acclaim the public school system, even while watching it crumble. It's the proverbial "elephant in the room," but big money and control aren't allowing anyone to remove it.

Brad, are public schools worse today than they were in the 1950s?

**BRAD:** All of the bad fruit we are reaping from public schools today was present in seed form in the 1950s. The foundational principles and presuppositions of public schooling have always been non-Christian, but it has taken decades for it to germinate and for the roots to spread throughout the cultural soil. Public schooling is like kudzu. It was introduced with good intentions, but it is now choking the life out of everything it touches.

**GENA:** Should Christian kids have been pulled from the public schools even then?

**BRAD:** Absolutely. Public schools have never been the right place to disciple Christian kids. Even in the 1950s, wise parents were rightly concerned about the revolution being fomented by emerging cultural icons that now seem relatively harmless. Unfortunately, many Christians judge by externals instead of grappling with the underlying principles and worldview issues. So the clean-cut rockers of the 1950s look acceptable to Christians compared to their pathetic progeny (KISS, AC/DC, Alice Cooper, etc.). Likewise, the outwardly conservative public schools of the 1950s once looked good to Christians, but the secular kudzu was sprouting even then.

**GENA:** So, is there any hope for the public school system? Doesn't really sound like it.

**JOEL:** So long as government controls the education of our children with compulsory public schools, there is no hope whatsoever. Public schools are beyond repair, precisely because they are a government controlled, near monopoly.

**GENA:** Why all the buzz lately about public schools and Christian children? A number of leaders are urging parents to keep their children home where they belong. Was it a series of events or certain leaders or both that sparked this recent furor?

**BRAD:** One reason for the buzz is reactionary. I think that high-profile crime (shootings, rapes, assaults, and drugs) and controversial curricula (diversity, tolerance, and openness, i.e., moral relativism) rightfully scare many parents and leaders. The more promising reason for the buzz is that parents and leaders are starting to understand that public schooling is not neutral; indeed, they are beginning to see that public schooling is a frontal assault on Christian faith and culture.

As I stated in *Millstones and Stumbling Blocks*, "some parents are worried about the public school environment, but concern over the somewhat unlikely chance of our children being physically assaulted should pale in comparison to the absolute certainty of assault on their Christian faith and beliefs. It is not the improbable violence to their body but the assured violence to their mind and spirit that constitutes the clear and present danger of public schooling. Few Christian parents have lost their children to public school violence, but multitudes have lost their kids spiritually, intellectually, and philosophically by ignoring the real threats these schools pose."

**GENA:** What's wrong with public school for a Christian kid? I get letters from parents asking me this. They say, "Can't they be salt and light?" To me, that's a crazy question. My answer is that it's not their time yet. Right now is a time for discipleship. Right now a child is to be trained up in the fear and admonition of the Lord (preferably by the parent!). Right now is a time for family ministry—serve together, not separately. Is it a sin, Bruce, for a Christian to send their kids to public school, or is it merely unwise?

**BRUCE:** While there is a great deal that could be said about Biblical standards for education, let's stick to the basics. First, Christ tells us that we can't claim to be neutral with respect to Him: we are either for Him or against Him [see Matthew 12:30]. Education is no exception.

When we give our children over to a K-12 educational system that is Constitutionally prohibited from being for Christ, we have made an anti-Christian institution our child's teacher. That is missing the mark—in other words, that is sin. But it is not merely a personal sin; it is also a sin that is likely to cause children to sin as well. All of us who are parents would do well to contemplate both Psalm 127:3 and Matthew 18:6 from time to time.

**GENA:** Where is the church in all of this, or where should it be? Paul is very concerned about pastors today, which is why he's out speaking so much lately on the subject. He hopes to convince pastors and elders that (A) they should be supporting homeschool parents rather than (in many cases) giving them a hard time about not putting their kids in public school, and (B), they should open their eyes to what's actually going on in schools and preach against them.

**BRUCE:** The church is "missing in action," and most pastors are deserters in this most critical battle of the culture war. Today, churches ought to be working out plans to provide Christian education alternatives for all children.

**GENA:** How do we respond to those who say, "If we pull out all the Christians, are we not abandoning 'the system' and all of those left behind?"

**BRUCE:** I want to make it clear that I don't advocate "pulling all the Christians out." We need to rescue our children and send in those adults who are truly called to a ministry in the dark and decaying government school system. Those adults who are truly called will witness, regardless of Pharaoh's rules, and not merely collect a paycheck.

To those who worry about "abandoning" the system, I would suggest that they have confused means with ends. Any system of education is simply a means, not an end. In the case of the government school system, it was never an appropriate means for educating Christian children, and frankly, when I speak to non-Christians, I tell them also that their children are being immeasurably harmed and that they should spare no effort in getting their children out.

**GENA:** Bruce, what if a family can't afford to homeschool or private school? What if public school education is the only option? My heart grieves when I hear of single mothers, especially, whose heart's cry is to keep their children home where they belong—but they have no support.

**BRUCE:** Apart from working out our own salvation, we, as Christian parents, have no more important task on this earth than raising our children as the Bible commands us. If we are giving our children over to an anti-Christian institution for their education, we are failing to be faithful and we are harming our children spiritually, morally, and intellectually—perhaps even physically. Thus, the question for us cannot be "Can we afford a Christian education?" Instead, it must be "How are we going to do it?"

**GENA:** If a parent decided to pull his or her child out of school, what next? What's a realistic game plan if he or she chooses homeschooling?

**BRUCE:** I would urge those parents to contact a local Christian homeschooling group, attend a homeschool convention, visit the HSLDA website and, most important, have a serious discussion with the experienced homeschoolers they may know. Families that connect with experienced homeschoolers early have a much better chance of staying the course.

**GENA:** Brad, what is your personal mission where this is concerned?

**BRAD:** My personal mission is reflected in the name of our website: [www.RescueYourKids.com](http://www.RescueYourKids.com). That title captures my passion to rescue children from the public schooling pandemic. The strategy for doing this involves educating parents, pastors, and opinion leaders about the true nature of public schooling. We are working hard to help Christians understand that education is enculturation; it is first and foremost the transfer of a way of life. We are reaching one family, one pastor, one church at a time, yet the cumulative effect of Christians choosing substantive Christian education (instead of government schooling) has the potential to transform our culture.

This is how I say it in *Millstones and Stumbling Blocks*: "Enculturation is central to education. Our children are shaped—heart, soul, and mind—by their schooling experience. As Ken Myers wisely observed, 'Schools and the structure of schooling orient the affections of our children' [*Mars Hill Audio Journal*, Volume 68 (May/June 2004)]. Therefore, Christian parents are morally obligated to orient the affections of their children toward beauty, truth, and goodness, which requires biblically consistent content embodied in the context of an affirming faith community. This godly orientation is what Christian day schools and home education provide—enculturation via Christian content and context. Public schools also provide enculturation (via secular content and worldly context), but the resulting orientation and affections are completely different. Consequently, the schools we choose will inevitably shape our children and eventually shape our world."

**GENA:** Can you give a few examples of "problems" within the public school system today? Are things really getting worse? The central problem with the government school system is that it is the single most powerful channel for influencing the worldviews of children, and it is almost wholly under the control of people and organizations with an anti-Christian worldview.

**BRAD:** External dangers grab the headlines and may be seen on the evening news. I'd like to tell you what is happening in public schools that you won't see on the news. In other words, I want readers to understand what kind of life public schools are transferring to Christian children, for education is first and foremost the transfer of a way of life.

Here's what public schools do daily. All public schools teach the irrelevance of God as a fundamental doctrine. Every day for twelve years the content and context of public schooling says there is no God, and even if there is, He does not matter. Ultimately, children learn these lessons from their public school teachers: Faith is private, subjective,