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## What Our Students Need

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# Academic Leadership Journal

## [What Our Students Need](#)

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### What Our Students Need

I have been an educator for over twenty years; this is long enough to know what works in the school system and what does not work. I have mentored rookies and peers, and I have mentored students in and out of school (I was a mentor for Big Brother Big Sister). Today's students need a lot more than reading, writing and arithmetic. They need educators who are willing to go the extra mile and by educators I mean all those who purport to be working for our students like politicians, school board members, administrators, teachers, staff and anyone else who is in the mix.

Unfortunately, our politicians and some (not all), of our administrators have forgotten what it was like to be a student or a teacher. They've become immune to the realities of the classroom. They have decided to tackle some issues and disregard others. If students come to school hungry, we feed them; if they come to school improperly dressed, we clothe them; if they come to school to learn a variety of subjects, we teach them. However, if they come to school troubled, abused, homeless, angry, suicidal, and lost; we ignore them. "Wait!" you may say, "That's not true. We have counselors, nurses and social workers." That may be correct, but do we have enough of these professionals to effectively help our students?

The majority of Americans want our schools to be educationally sound, but we need to approach the whole child, not just the brain, but the heart and soul as well. Here are some very troubling facts about our world.

Eating Disorders – According to ANRED, Anorexia Nervosa and Related Eating Disorders, Inc. "One percent (1%) of female adolescents have anorexia. That means that about one out of every one hundred young women between ten and twenty are starving themselves, sometimes to death." (par. 1)

Runaways – "Each year in the United States, 1.3 million children run away from home and about 5,000 runaway and homeless children die from assault, illness and suicide." ("Description of Community..." par. 31)

Gangs – studies show that interaction between parent and child is crucial – children join gangs to gain a family. ("Guilford Sheriff's..." par. 10)

Addiction- the United States Department of Health and Human Services reported that nearly ten percent of teens between the ages of twelve and seventeen use illegal drugs.

STD's – "One out of every six American teenagers contracts a sexually transmitted disease." ("STDs" par. 1)

Sexual Abuse – According to RAINN – Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network,

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Every two and a half minutes, somewhere in America, someone is sexually assaulted.

One in six American women are victims of sexual assault, and one in 33 men.

In 2004-2005, there were an average annual 200,780 victims of rape, attempted rape or sexual assault.

About 44% of rape victims are under age 18, and 80% are under age 30. (par.1)

American education is failing because we are not attending to the complexities of today's student. We are still teaching as though we live in the 1950s, we don't. We need to wake up and realize that these are tumultuous times and our children are dealing with divorced parents, absentee fathers, empty homes, microwaveable foods, lonely dinner tables. Five foremost authors in the social sciences conclude:

- o Parental divorce reduces the likelihood that children will graduate from college, and achieve high-status jobs.
  - o Children who live with their own two married parents enjoy better physical health, on average, than children in other family forms. The health advantages of married homes remain even after taking into account socioeconomic status.
  - o Parental divorce approximately doubles the odds that adult children will end up divorced. (Wilcox, Bradford W., et al)

Think back to the innocence of the 1950s and 1960s, the days of "Leave it to Beaver" or "Father Knows Best." Today's students are not as isolated or protected from the harsh realities of our current world; instead, they're exposed to MTV and Reality TV. Educators must change old philosophies for new ones. I propose a new type of school, one that approaches our children as complex individuals with a myriad of individual needs.

Let us continue to teach them, feed them and clothe them, but now let's offer them the emotional support they so desperately need. We can make money the issue, or we can make our children the issue. Let's use some of our capital funds on more counselors or social workers to advise our students not only on their classes, but also on their social, familial concerns. Several schools around the country have adopted peer counseling groups for their students that are facilitated by a faculty member and a school counselor. These students meet once a week in a safe and comfortable setting. Students sign confidentiality contracts, work out specific rules and regulations, and address preliminary concerns before they begin their first "session." High schools in Beverly Hills, California and White Plains, New York have begun this program and have found it to be very successful.

I recently had a book published,

Destined for Greatness, and in it an English teacher introduces the concept of peer counseling groups. When I began writing the story, over six years ago, I had no idea that this concept was materializing around the nation. I too am an English teacher, and I was inspired by troubled students who would wait for me in the early morning hours, so they could talk to me about various problems. Many times the student and I would approach a counselor or social worker, so the student could work out his/her problems. One cannot teach a student who is emotionally or psychologically troubled. When a student is being abused they could care less about Shakespeare or comma splices. A young girl who has been raped will not be concerned about her Spanish quiz or Algebra problem, or that quiet young boy who has just been bullied is only worried about the next time he will be bullied or how he will one day get even. These are our students; we need to be there for them, and if we're not, we will all suffer for it.

Destined for Greatness has a happy ending. Students all over the nation are being helped by caring adults. Educators, counselors and parents are there to guide young adults through many difficult periods. This work of fiction can become a reality; all we need are concerned educators from every level to reach out.

I propose that every school adopt peer counseling groups. I implore our politicians, school board members, teachers, and school administrators to research the benefit of these groups. Everyone talks about school retention, but little is understood about what it takes to retain students in our schools. Let me put it this way, if it takes a town to raise a child then it will take an entire nation to educate a child and educate him/her well. Let us approach the whole child and then maybe, just maybe we will become the most educated nation and not just a literate one.

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