

INSIDE EDUCATION
The Reading Rat Race

Part 6 Reading—Myths and Strike Outs -- School to Prison Pipeline

AN OPEN LETTER TO PRISON AND JAIL INMATES

and other interested stakeholders:

families, friends, school officials—locale and state, law enforcement personnel, politicians, ACLU leadership, prison and jail officials, judges, NAACP officials, parent and taxpayer groups, the media, faith professionals, probation officers, and various organizations wanting to end the pipeline.

Obviously a lot of people and organizations are involved, and they all need to understand how law enforcement neglect & educational malpractice enable your shameful, human tragedy to continue affecting thousands of you boys, mostly of color, who became victims of preventable crime!

I hope you don't mind that I make this a public letter because I think that you, your parents, and the public deserve to know why you are incarcerated even though to start with the only "crime" you committed was to live in the wrong school district over which you had no control, and located in an impoverished neighborhood where failing schools are located. **Then you were forced by law to attend a failing school where you were held in bondage for at least 9 years.** The only real way out was to get pushed out because that is what I believe happened to you; and, of course, when you feel like you are being pushed out, you have no real choice but to drop out.

How you ended up occupying a prison cell is what this letter is all about and it has to do with what is known as ***The School to Prison Pipeline*** (SPP) that only exists in failing public schools located in the inner cities which you were forced to attend failing schools. What it means is that if you don't read at grade level by grade 3, and don't receive effective remediation, whether you like it or not, you become unwilling candidates for the SPP and eventually drop out of school without any skills.

To put it into numbers will highlight the problem. Up to 80% of you are school dropouts or inmates with serious reading deficiencies. To say it another way, 80% of crimes are committed by school dropouts or reading failures; worse, within 5 years, 78% of you return to your prison cells because you committed more crimes. These are earth shocking statistics that should cause an earthquake of concern among school officials and law enforcement officials. However, the evidence suggests that it's not even causing a ripple; therefore, nothing registers on their radar screens; but as will be seen next week as this article continues, it has caused concerns with many organizations.

You were probably told at some point that your incarceration had to do with discrimination and racism because of your skin color, being poor, hungry, from likely a single family home, and you were probably difficult to teach. All true except for a couple of very, very, very, wrong assumptions, beliefs, and myths.

Myth #1: Your socio-economic conditions (poverty, poor housing, discrimination etc.) and lack of intelligence were the causes for your incarceration. NOT TRUE! They were contributing factors, but not causes.

This is the first myth to put into the trash. All of you, black, white, brown, boys, girls, tall or short, etc. are able to learn. Why do we know that? Because you are able to function in society and survive; yes, even as criminals. Also you learned how to function by surviving behind bars. In addition, you may have had a sister or two and you all came from the same family and neighborhood, yet your sisters learned much better than you did and did not end up in the school to prison pipeline. So obviously, teachers were skillful in teaching your sisters, but not you.

Those "brothers" of yours who were fortunate enough to attend a charter school or other alternative schools, have done much better while you were held in bondage (*servitude or subjugation to a controlling person or force—the school system*). They also did better in suburban/rural schools and in private schools; in fact, even homeschooling by parent(s) doing the teaching who probably

never went to college or even graduated from high school. Furthermore, every one of you has a talent, skill or interest that can only exist if you are a learner. So your difficulty learning has nothing to do with intelligent.

The problem is that because you are a boy you learn differently than girls and need different instructional techniques, the proper reading programs, and under the right conditions to learn. Instead public schooling expects you all to learn the same things at the same time despite that fact that research shows you develop about two years later than girls in the early stages of schooling.

Myth #2: No one cares. NOT TRUE!

It's not that no one cares or in your lingo gives a damn, the problem is that nothing seems to result in meaningful improvements. Unfortunately, just about all of the publicity about your plight is not in the public domain but buried in reports, articles, statements, etc. that enough of the public does not see. It's not seen or heard on the nightly news, morning news, or any media news to speak of. They obviously do not consider your plight newsworthy. As will be seen as this article continues next week, there are those who do care. But caring is not enough; to get results requires learning to know what the causes and issues really are; instead, they, as you will see, are all stuck in neutral because all are simply copying the same drumbeat of racial, and socio economic conditions as causes; therefore, any recommendations do not solve the problem and that's why you are still behind bars.

Myth #3: You're told that you don't know how to read. NOT TRUE.

Of course you can read words and sentences, the problem is that you cannot understand too much of what you read—comprehension—not knowing the meaning of the words. It's important for you to remember that you were taught reading skills in the early grades, but you simply were not mastering what was being taught; the girls were, as well as, boys in non-city schools or alternative schools.

As a result, you tested below grade 3 in reading and that's the critical grade level to determine if reading instruction was successful for you. If you don't acquire grade 3 level reading skills, you will have difficulty learning in all academic subjects in the next grades. However, what typically happens is that you were passed on to the next grade without the reading skills needed to succeed--educational malpractice. So lacking grade level reading skills limited your ability to learn in other academic classes. When you are not learning like your classmates, you felt "dumb" and this leads to being embarrassed; what happens then is you got frustrated and angry. This is a normal and expected reaction by any student particularly when it happens each minute of every hour, every day, every week, month by month, year after year as you were promoted to the next grades without the reading skills required to succeed—education miseducation. You probably never asked yourself, *why you were having difficulty learning not realizing that you lacked the reading skills to do so.* **And now the punch line; it also had to do with the fact that you are a boy; you probably noticed the girls were doing better than you were with the same teachers.**

What you were never told is that there is a schooling problem with boys; in fact, it has been called *a war against boys*, and you probably never knew this until you read this letter. Here again, you had no choice in becoming a boy. I just finished writing a book, *The Boy's Academic Pandemic: Can't Read, Can't Learn.* It's all about why boys are having difficulty with learning, not just because they can't comprehend what they *read*, but because teachers do not know how to teach reading to boys who are in failing schools as you were.

Myth #4: You are all created equal. NOT TRUE.

You were not created equal and the fact that you were a boy rather than a girl is proof enough; and, unfortunately, being a boy was **strike one** against you as you took your first breath of life. This is the biggest myth of all time. Look at those around you! Are any two inmates, with the exception of color, the same? Do you have the same physical features, weigh the same, have the same height, the same eating tastes, and the same grooming? Of course not. Neither are your

fellow inmates equal in talents, skills, and intelligence. Also genetically and medically, you all are very different. Psychologically too there are huge differences in emotions, motivation, stamina, coping skills and resiliency etc. Nor have you had the same hope and opportunities in life. The only similarities are how are bodies are constructed (eyes, nose, heart, lungs, etc.)

We are all different and that is what makes each you unique and cannot be duplicated except with robots. The only equality is that you all had the option to make your own decisions no matter how limited they were; obviously, being behind bars means that you made some bad choices.

For you particularly, there was **strike two**--no equal schooling opportunities. It depended on the neighborhood you were born in, the city and state. You see, among the states there are no equal education opportunities because each state has its own school laws. And there is one in particular that affected you the most **strike three**. It is called the teacher tenure law which grants teachers after 2-5 years (depending on the state) to be granted tenure that is considered lifetime employment. Coupled with that are seniority rights of teachers granted regardless of ability or effectiveness. How does this affect you?

Because the process for firing an ineffective teachers is made tortuous, expensive and time consuming because of tenure laws allowing ineffective teachers continued employment. In other words, like it or not, you probably had some ineffective teachers in the schools you attended; teachers who were not skillful in instructing you or dealing more effective with your behavior problems.

IN OTHER WORDS, YOU WERE LITERALLY PUNISHED FOR NOT DOING ANYTHING WRONG BECAUSE YOUR WERE GIVEN POOR TEACHERS AND TEACHING. YOU THEN BECAME THE VICTIM UNABLE TO LEARN AS EXPECTED BECAUSE YOU LACKED READING SKILLS. SUCH TEACHERS CONTINUE TO BE EMPLOYED BECAUSE THEY HAVE RIGHTS, MORESO THAN YOU.

It's not as though no attempts have been made to challenge tenure laws as being unconstitutional; there have been, but not from the educational establishment. Parents are the ones who seem to bring most of the lawsuits claiming their children were denied their right to an education because tenure laws permit ineffective teachers to be employed.

For example, teachers who were being dismissed in New York City for being ineffective were placed into Rubber Rooms while waiting for legal decisions to be rendered. They reported daily and got paid to do nothing not for days or weeks, but for months and years [because of publicity about this sham, it was ended; instead, these waiting teachers are assigned to other buildings or locations spread out in the city; essentially, they are now mini Rubber Rooms]. Think of it as trying to crack open an iceberg, a rather impossible task. The only way to break the iceberg is with state legislation and court action to rule that tenure laws are unconstitutional.

“Effort to Overturn New York’s Teacher Tenure Laws Wins Unanimous Appeals Court Victory, (David Cantor) *The 74*, 03/28/2018: A New York Appellate Court ruled unanimously that a lawsuit brought by a group of parents claiming tenure laws and seniority protections *“harm their children’s education,* should proceed for a hearing.

“The decision dealt the state Education Department, New York City, and New York teachers unions a third defeat in their years-long attempt to have the high-profile lawsuit dismissed.

In a six-page ruling upholding a lower court decision, the four-judge panel rejected arguments that the parents lacked standing to bring the complaint, which alleges that provisions of state education law relating to teacher discipline and dismissal saddle children with ineffective teachers, depriving them of their right to a “sound, basic education” under the New York State Constitution.

The case, Wright v. New York, was originally filed in 2014 by nine parents, aided by lawyers from the advocacy group Partnership for Educational Justice. The organization has also pursued similar legal challenges in New Jersey and Minnesota.

“While the defendants have repeatedly tried to delay and dispose of this case, this decision affirms the fact that the brave parents and children who brought this suit deserve their day in court. The fight for educational justice will continue so that we can give our students the education they are guaranteed under the state constitution.”

Among the parent plaintiffs is T.G. whose daughter’s teacher at Public School 106 — dubbed the notorious “School of No” because it had no books, art, or gym classes...

Note: My efforts to find out the status of this court case has been unsuccessful, but other cases suggest that perhaps this decision may be overturned.

Other lawsuits claiming tenure laws are unconstitutional have been successful in lower courts in California (2014), but on appeal, the state supreme court upheld the tenure law (2016). In North Carolina, the state supreme court ruled that it was unconstitutional that “*phased out job protections for teachers who had already earned tenure* and the union representative stated, “*it was a win....most importantly for students* (2016). A win for students to be taught with incompetent teachers? I can go on and on, but my analysis is that that there is a lawful right for you to have had ineffective teachers, but not a lawful right for you to have effective teachers. Yet, schools are for students, not teachers.

To show how tortuous and time consuming such claims entail, there was an appeals court that heard a request from a teacher to be reinstated (getting her job back after being fired), and rendered a decision to deny her request after 10 years since the termination occurred, and 20 years after the process to terminate her was started. This is called the right to a speedy trial. This was one of the rare cases that was a win for students.

Strike four, you and girls were put in the same grade with the same learning expectations that you will learn equally; that is mission impossible; the fact is that there is no equality of education and the evidence is the academic and school outcome of boys and girls. There are a few schools just for boys only and they do much better because boys are taught according to their learning style and learning pace.

Myth #5: All teachers, even reading teachers, know how to teach reading effectively to boys. NOT TRUE!

Male and female teachers are more successful with girls. It’s not that they don’t know how to provide instruction because they all do, the issue is whether the instruction is effective for the greater majority of all students. It depends on the college in which they were trained and, in some, not trained very well; in fact, many do not know the correct reading method to use based on the science of reading. In other words, there is scientific and overwhelming research that agree on the best method to teach reading, but there is no requirement or consequence if a teachers does *their own thing*.

There is a right way to teach reading to boys, but there has been and still is a reading war where educators do not all agree on the most effective way to teach reading in spite of overwhelming research evidence. There is a saying, *It’s hard to teach smart people how to learn*. Notice though that as a group girls are more successful readers regardless of teacher or even school, and notice too that practically every one of your teachers were female. Females respond better to female students who usually are more eager to learn and are far less troubled and troublesome than you were.

Myth #6: Being a black boy, you misbehaved and were disciplined more than white boys and the statistics prove it—at least the way the statistics are reported.

Typically the stats use national populations matching black and white boy disciplinary statistics. Yes, the stats as used (not correctly) show a higher percentage of black boys being

disciplined and, therefore, there is a charge of discrimination.. **THE FACTS AS GIVEN ARE TRUE, BUT ARE NOT TRUTHFUL BECAUSE OF FAULTY INFORMATION.**

Let's look at the following typical quote from an internet search about this issue.

*“Research shows that African American students, and especially **African American boys**, are disciplined more often and receive more out-of-school suspensions and expulsions than White students. Perhaps more alarming is the 2010 finding that over 70% of the students involved in school-related arrests or referred to law enforcement were Hispanic or Black (Education Week, 2013). A 2009-2010 survey of 72,000 schools (kindergarten through high school) shows that while Black students made up only 18 % of those enrolled in the schools sampled, they accounted for 35% of those suspended once, 46% of those suspended more than once and 39% of all expulsions. Over all, Black students were three and a half times more likely to be suspended or expelled than their White peers (Lewin, 2012).*

Very easy to write, but far more difficult to explain and prove. Any facts or statistics need to be explained; instead, arithmetic games are used to justify prior held beliefs or expectations. The first clue is knowing the sample used to obtain the data; in this situation, the survey tipped its hand by saying that 18% of enrolled students were black indicating without any doubt that these had to be students in white suburban schools. If they had been or even included inner city schools, the percentage of minority students enrolled would have been much closer to around 80% [*“Only 20% of whites, in public school attend central-city schools... In the largest U.S. cities , Chicago, Dallas, Detroit, Houston, Los Angeles, Washington, 85% are minorities: Brookings Institute, Race Relations...Jay Greene 03/01/1998*].

What is important to know from the sample is *“who are these minority students?”* How many were boys compared to girls? How many lived in the community and how many, if any, were transported to the schools due to desegregation?

Also what must be factored into the information is knowing how these students feel (18%) being in a predominantly alien environment with practically all white students and teachers, where the white students tend to be better off financially, and dress differently from the typical black boy, and, like it or not, white students tend to behave more appropriately in a school setting and they are far less unruly.

There is another issue to understand. What too often is called discrimination is not so but rather how a teacher and student interact. **TEACHERS REACT TO STUDENT BEHAVIORS REGARDLESS OF COLOR, SIZE, LOOKS, ETC.** If a student behaves, is respectful, tries to learn, etc. why would any teacher want to treat them badly based on their race, etc.? That would simply make it more difficult for the teacher. However, when a student misbehaves, it interferes with what the teacher is trying to teach; of course, the teacher will react negatively, but it has nothing to do with race as much as reacting to the “behavior” incidents that interfere with the learning process of all.

One of the important questions is why were these students disciplined or suspended? Obviously, they must have misbehaved in some way. The next question then is why did the students misbehave? Was it out of frustration of not learning, feeling out of place, reacting to something the teacher said or did, having had a bad day at home, a fight with the girlfriend, etc.? Using general statistics or statements hide all of these issues that need answers.

Unfortunately, the question that is never asked, and must be asked of you, is what caused your unruly behavior that required disciplinary actions when you were in school? Without the ability to understand what you were being taught most likely caused your difficulty to learn that leads to frustration and then anger. This is true with anyone who is trying to learn or be taught something, and they just don't get it. Everyone will get frustrated and it has nothing to do with color, gender, family, housing, poverty, it's simply human emotion and behavior responding to any difficulty. When that happens, it's human nature that takes command and the only option you had was to try to get out of the situation--class or school.

You were smart enough to know [because you are a learner] the easy way to do that was to misbehave; when you did, the teacher sent you to the disciplinary, so what? You got out of the failing classroom and with enough behavior problems, you got suspended out of the school and that had to be a relief because you were free of the failing hammer. Then you have to go back to class and the cycle starts all over again except now the teacher is quicker to get rid of you. Let's be honest, you can't blame the teacher who is trying to teach a lesson to all students and has to stop teaching everyone else to handle your misbehavior.

Maybe you didn't notice, but I kept saying "she" because in elementary grades where you are taught reading skills, the vast majority of teachers were female. **Strike five:** There is research that indicates that some are biased against boys especially unruly, difficult to teach, pains in the neck that you probably were.

This would be a good time to take a little break and say it in terms of a fairytale that I wrote to describe your troubles. For some of you, who are still poor readers, it may be difficult to read and understand. I would suggest that if you are doing any rehap classes to have one of your teachers read it to the class and have a discussion about it. If you're not in a rehap class, I am sure you can find one of your inmates who may be a decent reader to read it aloud and then in small groups to discuss its meaning.

THE DELUDER SATAN MASTERS **Deluder: Deceive--Speaks with forked tongue!**

AN URBAN FAIRY TALE

Once upon a time many, many years ago in a nation called HOPE there roamed a really bad dud called Satan who was constantly on the prowl to capture the souls of all those who were willing to join his kingdom of moral decadence. However, in order to protect the white children of HOPE from being tempted by His promises of eternal happiness, a "ye olde deluder Satan" law [this is really why the first school was started—to know the Bible and keep you free of the Devil] was passed requiring the establishment of public schools to have the children become literate by teaching them reading and writing so that illiteracy could not be used by Satan's forked spear, in hand and ready to use, to pierce their moral being.

*Alas, denying Satan from capturing the souls of literate children did not deny his Satanic quest to expand his kingdom of greed and power for soon there would be children of color who would be enslaved by witches disguised as "Plantation Masters" so that they could enhance their own mansions with riches and power. Out of necessity they would provide for their basic welfare but would keep them illiterate; **illiteracy is the weapon of choice to control, coerce, and maintain bondage—chains are not needed to reel in the victims and manage their moral and physical beings.***

However, years' later laws were passed to allow children of color to read and write by attending public schools and eventually they were even allowed to mingle with the white children. But it was more fairy tale than reality because to this day half of them do not graduate and instead are pushed out (P) and then dropout out (D) of school—PD children. Even those who graduate, many have limited literacy skills referred to as the achievement gap with the white children.

Among these children was R.V. Winkle Wish—a dreamer-- who was constantly wishing for all children to have success. One day, he was in such deep thought that he fell asleep. When he awoke, he rubbed his eyes, stretched his arms, and he saw that he had a long white beard. Only then did he realize that he slept for 200 years. As he looked around him, he was astonished at what he saw—horseless carriages, phones with no wires, a strange looking machine with a keyboard and a screen that navigated the world. Such wonders he thought would mean that schools would be different and so he visited his old school. However, he was bewildered to see that it was exactly the same—a very tired old building. The classrooms were also the same, but he did notice one change that the blackboards were now green and some were even white.

He had hoped that with all the changes he did see that the plight of children of color would be resolved. He soon realized that the "plantation privateers" had changed to a gentry of new urban

“deluder (say one thing and mean another) masters” of educators, politicians and policymakers clothed in Satan’s fiery red cap used to blind their followers that Satan had stolen their souls. Winkle Wish found that their deluder rhetoric to help children of color become literate adorned the halls of the Capitol of HOPE, the Capitol domes of the states of HOPE, the blackboards of classrooms, and the pages of policymakers’ policies that govern the fate of children, were all written with “forked tongue.”

It was obvious that these “new deluders” did not see the children of color contributing to the future of “HOPE” even though they claimed—with generations of titanic rhetoric—to provide them with opportunity to do so. In reality, these vulnerable children are viewed as pawns to be used in their Satanic kingdom of greed and power. Unfortunately, the knights in shining armor and ready swords needed to fight for the cause of these children by slaying the deluders are rarely found. The few who have tried have had their swords broken and armor tarnished and shattered from so many battles of hopelessness because the inhabitants of HOPE remain silent spectators as the games are played out in the Coliseum of Hopelessness.

*Satan, of course, reigns proudly and smugly over these new found plantation “deluder masters” now called “unions” and supported by politicians and misguided bureaucrats who have tattered minds and soiled hands **to keep as many children of color in illiterate bondage because they derive many benefits from doing so**—it adds to their riches of power and greed; otherwise these children could not have been held in such bondage for generations. Oh, it is not as though there have not been many attempts to reform the system of failure for these children; it’s just that none have succeeded. The newest school reform--Race to the Top-- has a serious flaw because there is no top to achieve since no schools have succeeded in achieving literacy for all by closing the achievement gap between white children and children of color; this must be accomplished to provide hope and opportunity. The reality is that the only top to reach is the growing heap of failed reforms on top of which this newest reform will be added.*

The primary obstacle to effective and meaningful reforms to provide literacy for all is not only the “deluder unions,” but also their allies--the deluder educators, politicians and policymakers who have the power to end the bondage but are lacking their moral souls to do so. Is it that difficult to have these children become literate by teaching them to read and write after at least 9 years of schooling by trained teachers? Perhaps they need a bonus incentive, but more likely the “deluders” need a soul. The problem is that Satan does not give back the souls once provided so willingly by so many deluders.

Of course, stealing souls is not new to Satan. He even tempted the first inhabitants of nation HOPE—one was called “Honor” and the other “Truth”-- by telling them that if they would eat a forbidden fruit “they should be as Gods” (supreme beings) --a lie to be sure—but such lies are meant “to decoy and befool” willing converts on Satan’s horns to the depths of hell (a really bad and fiery place) their eventual place of residence from which they cannot escape. Satan’s horns are their bondage! Since the new “deluder masters” want to be as Gods, and believe too often that they are Gods, they succumb to the lie. Unfortunately, they often find that the happiness they were promised (riches and power) with Satan’s forked tongue cannot be found in the Satanic tentacles of greed and power; yet, few seem to learn from the tragic and painful experiences of others who became willing victims.

The lesson to be learned from this fairy tale is that literacy--ability to read and write--is the only passport for children of color to develop the wisdom needed to achieve emancipation from illiterate bondage; and it never appears so brightly as when it is used to oppose Satan’s very subtle will perpetrated by the new “deluder Satan masters.” Since the politicians and policymakers are emboldened to the “deluder unions” for their votes, money and influence, they become willing perpetrators who in their sinister and subtle ways **ensure that children of color remain in the plague of perpetual bondage and in the brutality of false hopes.**

Sorrowfully, there is no happy ending to this fairy tale for these fragile and disposable children who are condemned and destined to failure and forbidden to taste the fruits of opportunity and hope. Why? The new “deluder masters” refuse to understand that the future of HOPE can only be realized if all children have hope, opportunity and literacy. Instead, they help to drive these

children into the culture of drugs and crimes and then herd them onto the road leading to prison pens because the deluders have no conscience, no moral fiber, and no sense of responsibility—the consequences of soulless beings.

Fairy tales usually end with a prince from among the knights to awaken the multitude from their sleep of complacency and ignorance, but no prince has yet arrived to unshackle these children from illiterate bondage so that they can experience the hope and opportunity they have been promised for so long. Perhaps the prince is on his way and that he has mounted his white horse with magic potion in hand to awaken the sleeping giant from complacency and denial. Hopefully his sturdy stallion called “Emancipator” will not stumble on the way.

*Dream on! Then Read On! The fairy tale turns into naked, disgusting, unconscionable, and unbelievable reality that shames the nation of HOPE--where there are too many schools unable to provide literacy success for all children and where too many are dropout factories. **The horror that takes place in these schools in the name of “education” should identify them more appropriately as “Zombie Schools.”** These Zombie schools exist because the deluders are alive and well and multiply willingly to fill their pockets with riches, their positions with power, and their mouths with deluder rhetoric using the children of color as bait to “become as Gods;” they also exist because there are not enough strong voices advocating for these hopeless and helpless children and demanding real change—a very sad commentary on the nation of HOPE.*

In their lust to obtain riches and power, the “deluders” neglect to remember that they too will eventually be herded onto the pathway leading to the gates of Satan’s fiery kingdom of hell. When they arrive the promise of “becoming gods” will turn into ashes of dust, and they will arrive with empty pockets, no positions of power, and face eternal pain and punishment so well earned and so well deserved—a fitting tribute to the disposable children who were so easily condemned to failure and prison pens when all that was required was to ensure that they achieved literacy. As the eternal pain and punishment endures a question that the “deluders” need to ponder is: Was it worth it?

Was it worth it for you to be a difficult student to teach, then get pushed out of school? In order to survive on the streets, you became part of the street culture where crime and drugs flourish. Then to either use or sell drugs, you need money and the fast way to get it is to rob someone who has money but who will not give it to you willingly which means you will have to take it—that becomes a crime; then you are most likely arrested and end up occupying a prison cell.

The real reason you dropped out of school was not because you committed any crime; the crime was the end result of miseducation and educational malpractice. In fact, it was your schooling that committed the crime (*something reprehensible, foolish, or disgraceful*) by its inability to teach you reading skills at or around your grade level after 9 years of trying. Your failure to learn resulted in being pushed out of schools because your schooling was unable to do one simple, but absolutely essential teaching task—help you read at or near grade level. You know better than anyone else that your inability to read adequately [you may not have known this at the time] caused you to feel stupid and to look dumb in the eyes of your classmates. Psychologically and emotionally, this is devastating to one’s self-image.

Please do not misunderstand me. **I am not trying to excuse what you did but offer mitigating circumstances.** Nor is it to ignore the fact that all of you were probably very difficult to teach and misbehaved (I am being polite); but I am sure you learned that misbehaving got you out of the failing classroom by going to see the principal. It gave you some reprieve from the failing academic hammer; even suspension was not bad because you probably joined a gang, earned some money in the drug trade, and had a feeling of success even though it led to eventual prison.

Failure to teach you functional reading skills after nine years of schooling, not education, prompted me to write a book, ***School Outshouts: A Plague of Hopelessness Perpetrated by Zombie Schools***—schools or districts that had you for nine years before you could dropout to teach your necessary reading skills.

It’s easy knowing these facts to blame the teachers, but it’s not really all their fault. As an example, *National Teacher Quality Council* did not rank 71% of 17 CT teacher prep programs

because they did not receive national rankings since they fell in the bottom half with no programs meeting elementary content standards, and only 16% of high school standards were met. If teachers are not properly trained, they cannot be as effective as they should be. Shame on our colleges of education; instead, you became the shame.

Another factor to consider is that there has been and continues to be a reading war among educators and reading researchers--how best to teach reading. The Wall Street Journal had a headline article, *Schools Falling Short in Teaching Reading*, 12/26/2018. *Teachers not taught reading science...college faculty either don't know or dismiss it.* (American Public Media, 1/21/2019). It's not like teaching math where all agree 2+2 equals 4. Whether you realize it or not, you tend to do better with math because there is far less reading to do.

Is it so difficult to teach reading? NO! ABSOLUTELY NOT! Bethlehem, PA a 16 school district with half low income recognized it had a reading problem. The teachers were then trained in *The Science of Reading*. The results were rather remarkable. As just two examples, a school with 28% low income started at 47% in 2015 and improved to 95% by 2018. A school with 97% low income started at 30% and improved to 69%. Again, poverty is not an obstacle when effective teaching takes place. Yes, it can be that easy and does not require more money to do.

Perhaps the reason is found with a statement made by Margaret Spellings, former U.S. Secretary of Education, "*The achievement gap is absolutely solvable...But we are not really serious about solving this problem. If we were, we could do it.*" If she couldn't do it with the power (money) of her office, it's no surprise that it has not happened nationally. Of course, it can be done, it has been done and my book on *School Pushouts* provide many examples

You may not have known it at the time, but there were other possible choices you could have made such as applying to get into a magnet school, or charter school, being homeschooled, and attending a private or parochial school, but these are all very limited choices because of limited spaces available, cost factors, or not being available where you lived. For example, vouchers are a choice in some states; you take a voucher worth a certain number of dollars, around the per pupil cost, and use it to go to a non-Zombie school public or private. **Strike Six: Did anyone even inform you that these choices existed?**

It actually would be easy to help you now to learn the necessary reading skills since you are incarcerated. You are there full time and many prisons have programs to help you get a GED (high school diploma); obviously they haven't been effective enough since the vast majority of you return to the prison cells with 5 years. I can only assume you still lacked reading skills to function successfully in a meaningful job to keep you out of jailhouse. The reality is that you must survive on the outside and you either get gainful employment, or you become self employed by dealing with drugs and resorting to other criminal activities.

But there was and is another choice worth exploring. Some states are providing free community college attendance to learn new skills or even obtain an Associate Degree. Since there is nothing to lose by trying to learn new trade skills that some require less than 2 years of education, it can make a tremendous difference in your future prospects.

I consider myself an education research investigator. Every day, I browse dozens of educational websites, reports, etc. to keep abreast of what is happening in education because I believe in using research, as long as it is reliable and valid, to support what I believe would be helpful to know. However, regretfully, I must take a real plunge off of the research mountain and dive into an opinion not supported by research, but there is logic to what I am about to suggest as the reason why more organization and groups have not responded effectively—if they did, you would not be behind bars.

What would happen if the dropout rate was cut in half at a minimum? It would not be that difficult to do! Logic would suggest that crime would be reduced by a half or more as long as you are provided with the required reading skills to gain useful and productive employment and to keep you from feeling and looking like a failure for 9 years. With such a reduction in crime, there would, or should, be a reduction in the various prison staff, less judges would be needed, less police would be required, less lawyers could practice their trade, less related positions such as probation officers

needed, less equipment purchases of various kinds, along with less supplies, etc. The fact that you are incarcerated creates a lot of different jobs and business for numerous vendors. What would happen to those who would no longer be employed? It would be tragic for some, a nightmare for others.

Is money the problem? The increase in the money for schools has grown dramatically from 1970-2010, but reading, math and science scores of the National Assessment of Educational Progress have remained flat for over 40 years; in other words, no improvement in achievement despite significant increases in the amount of money provided. SAT scores are no better with a 25 point drop while the number of "A's grow steadily upward—known as grade inflation.

There is an even better example that has gotten no real publicity, but it has been a very dramatic one that money is not the problem. Kansas City schools were taken over by a judge because of vast discrimination in the system. He ruled for ten years and gave the educators anything and everything they said would be needed to improve the system; money was no problem even taking it away from other districts in the state. At the end of ten years, he evaluated the results and resigned because things were worse than when he started. You can see why educators do not want this story told.

You will all find this next story even more interesting because it deals with school corruption. I wrote a book about it, *School Corruption: Betrayal of Children and the Public Trust*. It seems that it is much easier to rob from money meant for students than peddling drugs on the streets. One example will highlight the kind of corruption that takes place not just in the urban districts that are known for corruption but well to do districts found on L.I.

Roslyn, NY had the highest paid superintendent on L.I., but apparently it was not enough. He and several other top school officials embezzled \$11.2 million over a period of perhaps 8 years. It was done under the very noses of the board of education. How was it done? \$6,000,000 was taken out with credit cards (the superintendent had 24 credit cards), and \$5,000,000 from phony (false) vendors that did not exist except on paper. It is a long and interesting story particularly when there is no need for any credit cards in a school system; they have an equivalent system called purchase orders that any business or vendor accepts. Those that don't, a personal credit card can be used and then a request for payment can be submitted for reimbursement usually within 2-4 weeks. Interestingly a movie has recently been made about this story called *Bad Teachers*.

But it always seems to get worse as you dig deeper. The state auditor decided to audit all 70 districts on L.I. Lo and behold, what did he find? Corruption in every single district. Yes, it is far more common than taxpayers and parents realize; but practically none of them are incarcerated for stealing and mismanaging the education dollars taxpayers provided for your education (that you did not receive).

Yes, you have a right to get angry about all of these strikes against you, but that will simply keep you in the cycle of crime and prison. What you must understand, like it or not, is that education has some very serious problems and you are just one of many; shamefully, you are also at the bottom of the priority list. It should be abundantly clear that most schooling problems have existed for a long time. Past and current efforts to reform the schools have not resulted in any real improvements; in fact, things are worse because there is a downward achievement slop that is being traveled particularly by schools in urban settings.

Nevertheless, you have choices to make while you are in prison and when you are released. You are free to make good choices or bad choices. If you want to see a more successful future, it's up to you to make the best choices. Only you can change your destiny; it may not be easy to do, but it will be worth it.

Part 6 School to Prison Pipeline continues with those who do care.