**Educating for Success**

We all know the plethora of arguments regarding education in the United States. Whether we are debating curriculum, teacher salaries, teacher quality, school safety, gun violence, school lunches, extracurricular activities, or some other issue, we all agree on one thing – our education system is broken and millions of children are being left behind.

We need to fix this broken system. But how can we fix it? I have stumbled upon one of the greatest secrets to great education. Let me explain my story. When my oldest child was 3 years, 6 months old, I took her to be tested for Preschool. This was in March. The results of the testing were that she was “ready for kindergarten”. I was a little proud of my smart little girl. So, I asked the next natural question, “When are the registration dates to get her enrolled for kindergarten this fall?” The answer floored me! I was told that she could not enroll in kindergarten until the fall of the FOLLOWING year. The reason was because she would only be 4 years old that fall and she can’t start kindergarten until she is five years old.

How stupid was that?! I was not going to let my child remain stagnant for 18 months. I got a homeschool preschool curriculum and began homeschooling my daughter. Since we were living on one income, the cost of the curriculum became too expensive when we were ready for kindergarten, so I built my own curriculum using workbooks and textbooks.

That worked fine for a couple of years, but as my oldest was racing towards third grade, I started looking for more textbooks for her grade level. That’s when I stumbled across a curriculum that completely changed the way I viewed education and the role of the teacher.

*The Curriculum*

It was from a company called A.C.E. (Accelerated Christian Education). Yes, it was a Christian-based education, but it utilized a completely different model of education, one that could be used even with a secular education. You have seven subjects: Math, English, Literature & Creative Writing, Word Building (spelling and vocabulary), Science, Social Studies, and Bible Reading. Each subject is divided up into 12 mini books, called PACEs (Packet of Accelerated Christian Education).

To understand how it works, let’s take one subject, such as Science, and one grade level, such as second grade. Those Science PACEs would be numbered 1013 – 1024. The Science 1013 would have approximately 40 pages. The student begins the PACE on page 1, which has goals listed, as well as some reference material (phonetic list, memory verse, etc.). On page 2, the student is introduced to new words. The next page will be material that the child reads, followed by questions regarding the material he or she just read. This is repeated through the PACE – read, answer questions, read, answer questions, and so on. After about eight pages, there is a “checkup” that serves as a review.

Periodically (every 1 – 5 pages), there is a reminder to “score” the pages you have completed. “Scoring” means grading the work. The child takes the PACE to the “scoring” section of the room, finds the appropriate score key and checks his or her work. The incorrect answers are marked wrong. Then the child goes back to his or her seat and reworks the incorrect questions or problems, then scores the material again. The child is not done with the assignment in that subject for that day until the assigned pages are all correct. This provides the child with the reinforcement needed on questions or problems that he or she initially found difficult.

After the last “checkup”, there is a Self-Test that covers all of the material in that particular PACE. Prior to taking the Self-Test, the student is encouraged to review the “check-ups” throughout the book (often 3 “check-ups”) before taking the Self-Test. It is NOT an open book test, but the child must get at least an 90% on the Self-Test to be able to take the TEST. The Self-Test must be corrected and studied prior to taking the TEST. The final TEST for that PACE is NOT open book and it is NOT timed. We are more concerned with doing things correctly than with racing through the task. There will be plenty of time later in life to develop speediness. During childhood, it is better to emphasize doing the task correctly.

There are two possible outcomes with the TEST. If the child does NOT score at least 80% or higher, the child will repeat that PACE (Science 1013), which is only the equivalent of two or three weeks of work. This is repeated until the child achieves at least an 80% on the TEST for that PACE. Once the child gets 80% or higher on Science 1013, the child moves on to Science 1014, and the process is repeated. However, only the passing grade is recorded. The previous attempts merely constitute as “practice”.

The beauty of this is that the child advances ONLY when he or she has mastered the previous material. The child is not pushed on to the next “grade” before he or she is ready. Another beautiful aspect is that the child can advance more quickly in subjects that he or she excels in, but take extra time in the subjects he or she struggles with. So, a child may be in Science 1030, Math 1034, English 1028, Literature & Creative Writing 1027, Social Studies 1033, and so on. This allows for individualized advancement through the subjects, based on each child’s individual abilities.

By utilizing the A.C.E. education model, we can provide every student in the United States with individualized curriculum and make it virtually impossible for a child to “flunk” or “get held back”. Under this model, the student progresses at his or her own pace, rather than advancing or not advancing as a group (class).

*The Role of the Teacher*

This education method has the child studying on his or her own, learning on his or her own, and taking ownership of his or her education. The “teacher” is not really teaching, but rather a facilitator, or supervisor. The teacher is there to answer questions when the student is having difficulty finding the answer. However, the teacher still does not help the student with the answer, even when the child is struggling. Instead the teacher first asks the student if he or she read the material on that page or the previous page (whichever is relevant), asks the student if he or she read the question fully, reminds the student to look for key words or phrases from the question, and then looking for those key words in the reading material. The teacher is not helping, but rather guiding the student on how to locate the answer. This builds independence and the ability to research to find answers.

This is a skill that the student will need throughout life. We are doing our students a severe disservice when we spoon-feed information to them. The best key we can give our children is the ability to seek out answers, where to look, how to research, etc. We need to give the gift of independence. After all, the goal of raising children and teaching children is for those children to be strong, intelligent, capable adults one day.

*Goal Setting*

Another great benefit to this model of education is the “goal card”. In first grade, the child is taught how to set goals on his or her goal card. The child will assign his or her own goals, with the supervisor at first. As the child completes the Science pages for that day, the child crosses off the Science goal for that day and sets a new goal for Science for the next day. Again, this teaches the child about goal setting, planning, completing tasks, and accountability. A child on this program will have a lot more confidence in his or her ability to tackle large tasks later in life. He or she will know how to take a large task and divide it up into small, bite-size tasks, then tackle each small task until the whole job is completed.

*Religious Aspect*

Now, I did state that this particular curriculum could be used to develop a secular program based on this same model; however, I do not think that needs to be done. I have come to this conclusion for a variety of reasons. First, why reinvent the wheel when there is a perfectly fabulous program already available. Second, Christianity and The Bible played a fundamental role in United States education until the early 1900s. I know the argument of separation of church and state, and that argument can be easily refuted, which I do in my article, “[The Bible and Public School](The%20Bible%20and%20Public%20School.docx)”. Here, we are discussing this “model”, not the subject matter.

However, if a school district wants to make sure a secular option is available via the public school system, which can also be arranged. All we need to do is make a duplicate curriculum, but without the Biblical aspects of the A.C.E. Curriculum and replace the Biblical Memory Verses with Famous Quotes for the children to learn. Both the Biblical curriculum and the Secular curriculum can be taught in the same classroom since the children are working independently. The supervisors would just have to make sure that each student receives the correct curriculum type (Biblical or Secular), subject (i.e., Math), and level (i.e., 1042) when the student is ready to move on in a subject.

This allows for the parents to decide what type of education their children will receive without having to incur a higher financial cost simply because the parent made a choice that is different than his or her neighbor. This will also make it possible for families of modest means (poor and middle-class) to provide their children with a Biblical education, if they want. Under the current system, these parents do not have that option because they are limited to secular public schools only because they lack the funds to give their children a private, Biblical education. This system allows parents to decide between Biblical-based education and secular education, regardless of the class status or income of the parents.

*Skills-Based Education*

With this model, we can implement additional measures that greatly benefit the students, teachers, and parents. The students would enter the public school system whenever they are ready based on a simple skill set. Before a child can enter the public school system, the child should be potty-trained and be able to recognize 1) primary and secondary colors (red, yellow, blue, green, orange, and purple), as well as black and white, 2) basic shapes (circle, square, triangle, rectangle, star, oval, heart, and diamond), 3) all 26 letters, and 4) the numbers 0 through 9. Some children will be ready to start kindergarten at age three, others may not be ready until age 6 or 7. That’s okay. Children develop at different rates.

The teacher to student ratio would be very low at this stage as it requires much more hands on learning and individual teaching. But by the time the student finishes First Grade, the child is ready for independent study, with the “teacher” acting only as a facilitator or supervisor.

Most children can complete their PACE goals for the day in about 2 – 4 hours. This leaves plenty of time left in the school day for Physical Education, Music, Art, Lunch, Snacks, Recess, Life Skills, and even extracurricular activities.

*Extracurricular Activities*

Instead of softball practice occurring after school, it can be incorporated into the school day. This alleviates the pressures on the student and parents to rush the kids from school to practice. The family unit will have their late afternoons and evenings back. This provides families with more time to spend together, creating those strong familial bonds that we need. It also allows the children the time they need in the late afternoon and evening to play, relax, and enjoy their childhoods.

We often discount play time as a luxury. In the development of a child, it is so much more than that. A child that is spending that play time engrossed in dolls, Barbie’s, playing house, playing doctor, playing with cars and trucks, or simply reading are engaging a part of their brain that activates creativity. We want our children to be creative and grow into creative adults. Advancements in technology and science can only happen when someone dares to dream of something that has not been accomplished, and then follows through with making that dream solution into a reality. To grow as a society, we need creative adults inventing new technologies and making new discoveries in all fields (science, engineering, technology, medicine, philosophy, mathematics, etc.).

When we load up our children’s days with school and extracurricular activities, we limit the time they have to develop their creative minds. In turn, this stunts their growth. We need to give our children their childhood back. Allow for them to have the time and space to use their imaginations. Simply put, let the kids have time to play!

*Life Skills*

 This model also allows for “Life Skills” training to prepare the children for independent life. This could be teaching housekeeping skills (washing dishes, doing laundry, sweeping floors, mopping floors, washing windows, cooking, etc.), financial skills (banking, loans, mortgage, insurance, budgeting, planning, retirement, comparing prices, saving, charitable giving, etc.), interpersonal relationship skills (identifying healthy and unhealthy relationships, dating, marriage, parenting skills, conflict resolution, the art of compromising, the art of effective communication, etc.), woodshop, auto shop, and so on. Of course all of these Life Skills would be offered at age-appropriate levels. Children at the lower “grades” would learn more about housekeeping. But as they get to ages 12 – 14, they start learning about child rearing, dating, retirement, mortgages, woodshop, auto shop, etc.

 Wouldn’t it be great if our children graduated from 12th grade with all the skills needed to be independent? Wouldn’t it be great if our children all entered adulthood with the confidence that they can support themselves and take care of themselves? They should know how to set a budget, sew a button back on an item of clothing, make a meal for themselves or a group, keep their homes clean, have healthy relationships, create a resume and cover letter, be professional at work, and have a sense of civic duty to their community. Remember, we are not merely tending to children, but rather raising the adults of tomorrow. We cannot shelter them for 18 – 25 years then release them into the world unprepared. We need to start preparing them at young ages and gradually introduce age-appropriate life skills so they can succeed as adults.

 Even at the lower grade levels, the children can learn life skills and how to contribute to the community by starting with the school community. Each classroom can have a couple students assist in the school’s kitchen with minor tasks, including assisting with gathering the dishes needed for their classroom for the “meal”. When the food is ready, the students assist with transporting the food to their classroom via carts. Older students can assist younger students, all with adult supervision. Then after the meal time, a couple other students take the garbage, dishes, and leftover food back to the school’s kitchen. The older students may even be able to help prepare the dishes to be washed or assist with the disposal of the garbage.

 At the end of the day, the students can assist with sweeping the classroom floor, cleaning their desks and chairs, wiping windows, or helping the supervisor inventory the supplies to see what supplies need to be ordered. All of these tasks give the children a sense of community and a sense of pride in helping each other.

*Early Diagnosis of Problems*

My suggestion is that the students stay with the same supervisor/facilitator throughout grades 2 – 12, unless a change is warranted. This gives the supervisor more time with his or her students, allowing them to get to know the students much better. This allows the supervisor to be able to pick up on changes in behavior and performance a lot more quickly and be able to get the child the resources that the child may need.

Imagine a child who is usually very focused and is usually the first one done with his work and is suddenly being the last one done. The supervisor can sit down with the child and see what is going on. Since the student has been with the same supervisor for the past two or three years, the student has come to trust the supervisor and will be much more willing to open up. Whether the problems stems from troubles at home, with peers, abuse, or a physical problem (such as poor eyesight), it can be identified much more quickly and the child could be referred to the proper school, medical, or community resources long before the issue becomes a big problem.

The goal of the supervisor is to guide the student in his or her learning process and to watch out for signs that the child is struggling. This allows the supervisor to refer the student to special services that the child may need. The end goal is that every child is supported and encouraged in the journey of learning. Weaknesses are identified rapidly and resolved before they escalate into big problems.

*School Violence & Safety*

One thing that is plaguing our schools in the 21st Century is school violence. This model of education aids in solving that problem in a number of ways. We can identify children with problems earlier (mentioned above) and we can prepare the classroom of tomorrow so that the children are always safe from an active shooter.

Since the children will be studying all of their subjects in one classroom, there would be less movement of the children from one classroom to another. This cuts down the traffic in the hallways. The classrooms can also the locked during the time that the students are working on their PACES. With the classroom doors locked, an active shooter would be limited in the number of students he or she could access during a shooting spree.

Although I do support teachers being armed, I do believe that it should be limited. With this model of education, we can easily have 3 supervisors in a large classroom of 50 – 60 students. Only one of the supervisors would be need to be licensed for a firearm. However, the other 2 would not need to be licensed. The supervisor with firearms training would not even need to have a firearm on him or her, especially with the classroom door locked. There would be a biometric safe in the classroom, with a firearm and ammo in it. That supervisor’s handprint would be required to open the biometric safe. He or she would be the only one in that classroom that could access the firearm.

If there is an active shooter situation, the firearms licensed supervisor accesses the firearm, loads it, and positions him or herself between the door and the rest of the class. The other two supervisors would corral the students to one side of the classroom and keep the students calm. If the shooter does breach the classroom door, the supervisor with the gun shoots to disarm the shooter, or kill, if needed. Either way, that teacher has the means, training, and will to protect the students.

The reason I think it should be only one supervisor per classroom that is trained is simple. In the heat of the moment, we need a clear distinction who is to guard the door and who corrals and calms the students. We do not need chaos to ensue. This gives an orderly process to the situation.

This helps with the argument that is currently raging about whether teachers should be armed. This allows for the teachers to be unarmed, yet have the access needed if, and when, a situation was to arise. The students would not even be aware which teacher is trained in firearms, nor would they be aware of the location of the biometric safe. All of this, coupled with the locked classroom, allows for the children to safely get an individualized education, have their individual issues identified early and dealt with before they become problems that hinder the child’s education, and provides for the protection of the children in an active shooter situation.

*Year Around Education and Attendance*

 One of the best benefits of this program is that the children do not miss anything when they are sick and unable to attend school. If a child gets the flu and is out of school for a week, that child just picks up where he or she left off in his or her PACEs. The child does not miss lectures or lessons. He or she does not fall behind just because he or she was not at school.

 With this program, we can have school all year, with a full week off for holidays like Christmas, Thanksgiving, Easter, Independence Day, Labor Day, Memorial Day and New Year’s. However, the children would be able to have 20 – 25 personal days per calendar year. This allows the families to be able to take vacations whenever they want, not just during the summer months. It does not matter when the child takes time off school; he or she will not miss anything (other than extracurricular activities).

 When children have a large break, like three months for summer vacation, they tend to regress a little when they return to school in the fall. Most teachers spend the first month of the new school year reviewing and repeating what had been taught at the end of the previous year. By having school all year, with shorter breaks throughout the year, the students will not regress as much and they will not have to waste a month repeating old material.

 This will provide a better school / life / family balance for the students and also better prepare them for the type of schedule they can expect in the workplace later in life. This provides continuity throughout the year, where every child keeps moving forward.

*Expanded School Hours*

 School districts would have to see what works best in their own district, but in general, most schools would be open from 6:00am to 8:00pm. Now, this does not mean the students will be there that whole time. That would be the availability of the school. This means that the parents can have some control over when their children will attend school.

 Each classroom would have approximately 50 – 60 students, with 3 supervisors. One supervisor may work 6:00am to 2:00pm. A second supervisor may work 9:00am to 5:00pm. A third supervisor may work noon to 8:00pm. Obviously during the majority of the day (9am – 5pm), there would be at least two supervisors in the room, with all three there during the busiest time of day (noon -2pm). Since the students are working independently, with minimal direction from a supervisor, the student can attend at a time that is best suited for that student and his or her family.

 This works out great for working parents who have work schedules that conflict with traditional school hours. Plus, it answers the questions “what do I do with my kids during the summer months?”, “Who can I get to pick up my kids from school at 3pm and babysit until I get home at 5pm?”, and so many more. However, this wouldn’t be a “drop-in” system. The parents and supervisors must have a set schedule for the student.

 As an example, let’s take a single mom who works as a waitress. She does not have a set schedule, but she often knows her schedule in advance. So, as soon as she gets her schedule, she informs her child’s supervisor of the upcoming schedule. If the school is 15 minutes from her job, she would want to drop her kid off 30 minutes before. So, her kid’s schedule may be Monday 10am – 5pm, Tuesday 10am – 4pm, Wednesday noon – 8pm, Thursday 9am – 5pm, and Friday 11am – 7pm. That child would spend a total of 37 hours at school and no time with a babysitter. The child will be getting the individualized education he or she needs and the parent gets the flexibility she needs.

 This also provides greater flexibility for the teachers/supervisors. The teachers who are early birds can supervise children earlier in the day, yet have their afternoons and evenings to themselves. The “normal business hours” teachers/supervisors get to have their “normal” schedule. The teachers/supervisors get to have their relaxed mornings and work during their prime cognitive hours. And the best part for the teachers/supervisors is that they do not have to create or write lesson plans or grade homework after they leave the school for the day. They won’t have much, if any, outside work to do. It relieves a lot of pressure from the teachers and parents.

*Graduation*

So, when will the children complete high school and graduate? That depends on the child. Some children may complete high school around age 13 or 14, others may not graduate until age 18 or 20. Regardless of when the child graduates, the child will be prepared for college or for entering the workforce, with the necessary skills to succeed at either. More advanced children could even take college preparatory classes that could be transferred to college, allowing the students to gain college credits while still in school with their peers.

*Summation*

 We have the ability to provide an individualized education for each and every American child. We can advance the children based on their abilities, strengths, and weaknesses. We can let our children race through “easy” subjects, while taking extra time on the subjects more challenging for that child. We can provide a system where no child “flunks” or is a “failure”, but where every child succeeds (just at different rates of success).

 We can ease the burdens on teachers and parents, while giving children their childhood back, allowing them to sprout wings of creativity. We can provide them with real life skills, giving them the confidence to enter the “real” world with all the tools for success.

 With this model, we will be shaping our children into the strong, independent, intelligent, loving, compassionate, creative, and courageous leaders of tomorrow. Isn’t that the future we all want for our children?