Ways To Improve America’s Education System

The education system in America has come a long way from when it was normal for people to only have elementary-level education. Even with the recent improvements, the way schools teach does not help students learn how to apply certain key concepts in the future. America’s education system is heavily controlled by the government. Therefore, it has become inefficient and plagued by a means of completing the bare minimum. Government-controlled education has caused schools to focus on useless standardized tests as a means of receiving funding instead of focusing on the quality of education and has limited spending on school activities. America could greatly improve its education system by changing the standard teaching materials to practical problems and solutions, along with managing costs to improve what is most important.

In 2001, Congress passed the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, which introduced standardized testing. The law allowed states to choose what standardized tests they wanted to use. “[It] established national standards and demanded that 100 percent of children be proficient in math and reading by 2014,” (Lee, Geler, paragraph 7). Students, as well as teachers, have complained that this standard does not justify high-achieving students’ success because of factors like low scores from special needs children, which could end up leading to schools cheating their scores for funding. “Some educators believe the existing model of schools [K-12]... needs to be reformed. Propositions have included creating two tracks for students… : one for job-specific training in skills that will lead to employment at age eighteen, the other for students likely to attend college,” (Lee, Geler, paragraph 15). Learning skills and organization in school could benefit every student’s path to success by not wasting time on unnecessary material.

In 2015, the Every Child Achieves Act was passed, which gave power to academic performance and created accountability systems. “Critics argue that a multitude of accountability systems obscures the aim of improving student achievement outcomes and improve the quality of the national labor force by requiring schools to teach to high standards,” (Koh, paragraph 7). Teaching high standards does not define the quality of what is being taught or learned. “Common Core was developed out of concerns that American students were not being adequately prepared for college and the workforce, as well as by the wide variation in state standards and proficiency levels permitted by NCLB,” (Koh, paragraph 8). Forty-one states and the District of Columbia have adopted the Common Core – which is based more on the understanding of subjects instead of just memorization. Even with the common core standards, schools continue to focus on doing only what they need to do in order to keep their jobs and stay running in the system.

The NCLB Act has placed a major importance on the results of standardized tests, like the SAT or ACT, and has made it a prerequisite for receiving federal funding. “Though many agree that the testing system is flawed, some believe that the current model can be reformed, while others believe that it is impossible to create a test to accurately measure aptitude across a diverse student population,” (Issitt, McMahon, paragraph 4). There are so many factors to consider when seeing results of test scores, and it is very difficult to receive the true success, or better academic performances, of students. Finland, for example, is known for its great education

system because of its replacement of the two-tier system of grammar and civic schools to free comprehensive schools. America could find a way to change government standards to focus on comprehensive learning instead of basic standard tests.

When public schools first started in the mid-1600s, there were only enough costs for elementary-level education. Now, the average annual expense is over 11,000 dollars. Today, schools make major changes to extracurriculars and have students pay extra fees to participate. Most of the costs are hard to afford, which is why public schools make students fundraise or pay extra fees for sports and clubs. “[Some] would rather pay a fee than have their children’s favorite programs eliminated. Some advocates, however, express concern that the application of fees in public schools makes many aspects of the school experience cost-prohibitive to lower-income families,” (Auerbach, paragraph 10). Cutting down costs for all the unnecessary criteria, like some higher aspects of math, could be very cost-beneficial. Learning how to manage money for schools could make it much easier for students to successfully get through their schooling experience.

On top of the excessive school work given at such a young age, students are pushed to figure everything out without being taught. Early decision programs are where you could decide which college to go to before normal application time and have to attend once a contract is signed. “Unlike students from wealthier families who attend affluent high schools, low-income students and their families may not fully understand all the options for admission, or even know about the early decision process,” (Lee, Clapp, paragraph 8). Some people thought that early decision programs created lazy seniors in high school because of being accepted so early, but others argue that it relieves stress and helps them focus more on school. In that case, some people have argued that instead of removing early decisions, they could compromise solutions that gives students more time to make a final decision. At least with more time deciding their future, students could find any help they can to make that decision -- since it is not a priority in their everyday lives, as it should be.

Another aspect of the education system are vouchers for private schools. “Some people view current problems in the school system as relics of past inequities… Some parents favor vouchers as an escape route from failing schools,” (Farrell, Vance, paragraph 10). Vouchers are meant to help lower-income families attend “better” schools. In reality, vouchers only cover a max of $3000 out of a $16000 tuition. Private schools don't necessarily have to share their scores of standardized tests – which could cause them to cheat or lie, even though in recent years they did worse than public schools. If a low-income student is given a voucher and still can not afford or is not accepted into a private school, that money could go to a richer person and end up doing nothing helpful. Maybe instead of vouchers, the government could create programs to just help low-income people with joining schools of their choice.

“University of Arizona researcher Etta Kravolec… explains that most teachers intentionally assign little to no homework the night before a standardized test to ensure that students are well-rested for optimal performance,” (DiLascio-Martinek, paragraph 5). Homework can sometimes take hours for students to finish, and it is only to help them learn what is on the test. This country has come to such a standardized system, that hardly any people try to learn anything else that may be beneficial to their future, like how to manage money.

There are many ways to improve America’s education system, but if the government would focus on the content of their teachings and find ways to help anyone in need financially, a great

change would occur. Changing the standards of the education system could lead America onto a better path. The NCLB Act may have shown results of progress, but only because students are taught what is needed to know to pass a test. Learning how to do the Pythagorean theorem is not going to teach anyone how to live in the real world. Young adults should not be expected to survive on their own if no one has taught them. It would be a wonderful thing if the government would do what is best for every growing person and start making the guidance of future generations a priority.