



URBAN CURRENT

Urban crisis, national challenge

In *Waiting for Superman*, “Documentary filmmaker Davis Guggenheim explores the tragic ways in which the American public education system is failing our nation’s children.” - Jason Buchanan, Rovi (www.waitingforsuperman.com)

Once again an urban crisis becomes a national challenge. Public education has been in trouble in the cities for decades and little attention has been paid. Oh, the politicians would dump money into the system but nobody was solving any of the problems.

- 89 percent of U.S. students — 50 million or so — attend public schools
 - How do U.S. students compare with students in other developed countries?
 - Fifth in spending per student (2006)
 - Twenty-first out of 30 in science (2006)
 - Twenty-fifth out of 30 in math (2006)
 - In 2009, 69 percent of eighth graders scored below proficient in reading
 - In 2009, 68 percent of eighth graders scored below proficient in math
 - Smaller classes and higher spending has not improved student performance
 - 16:1 student teacher ratio
 - 123 percent increase in per-pupil education spending
 - zero percent change in academic performance among 17-year olds from 1971-2004
- (Sources: *Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development; National Center for Education Studies*)

And then there’s this kind of stuff:

- San Diego math teacher forced to remove two posters from classroom because they included the phrases “In God We Trust,” “One Nation Under God,” and “God Bless America.”

- Virginia principal placed on administrative leave for distributing tiny plastic models of unborn children to help students learn about the development of a baby before birth.
- Recent flap in New York City over first-grade textbooks about “daddy’s roommate” and a girl who “has two mommies.” Both books were designed to accustom first-graders to the idea of homosexual parents.

One of the great thrills of my life has been becoming acquainted with the salt and light in the Chicago Public School system. Yes, the salt and light have names. My friend, Dr. Janette Wilson works in the main office downtown. She has been moved from position to position but she has always been fired by a passionate love for Jesus. She brings her degrees in theology and law to bear as she wields righteous influence.

Armitage member Haydee Alvarez served as a grade school principal. A Holy Ghost-filled prayer warrior, she prayed and fasted over her school. She battled the gay and lesbian efforts to corrupt her library. She mentored a young Timothy who replaced her when she retired. So significant were the blessings of God on her work that her school was recognized by a personal visit from President Bush in 2008 as a Blue Ribbon School. It was the only Chicago Public School to receive the award.

Elizabeth Gonzalez, another “Armitagite,” is a grade school principal over 541 students. Eighty-seven percent of them are eligible for free lunches and 89 percent are Hispanic. This faithful sister has done an amazing job by serving her school and community from a biblically informed passion and worldview.

Ellen Estrada, another member of Armitage, has served as principal of one of Chicago’s premier high schools since 2006. The school has won multiple awards and was ranked first

in the state for the academic year 2008-2009 by *The Chicago Tribune*, and as the 96th best high school in the nation by *U.S. News & World Report*. This was the school Chinese President Hu Jintao visited on his recent trip to the U.S.

I have contended for years that as bad as Chicago schools are, without believers in the system it would have completely disintegrated long ago. Such is the work of salt and light.

For years I had a vision for a school positioned to help meet this need in the name of Jesus. Six years ago our church founded Chicago International Academy. We serve families with the fewest educational options and seek opportunities to serve the public school system in whatever ways God may allow. We are not in competition with public schools neither are we driven by an isolationist philosophy. Jesus didn’t come to compete with other saviors. He didn’t come to isolate disciples from the world. He came to serve, seek, and save.

Public education in America is a tremendous mission field. More specifically, the urban public education Goliath rises up, challenging the Jesus crowd to show themselves and the power of their God. For young men and women who want to teach, urban public education presents an incredible open door for the investment and leveraging of one’s life. Likewise, urban Christian schools face difficulty finding dedicated missionary-minded people with gifts to give God, students, their families, and the community.

Anybody have five smooth stones?



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