

Terrible Trends in Public Education

(adapted from Jamie Vollmer's 2010 book *Schools Cannot Do It Alone*)

- Changing Demographics – people live longer and have different priorities as they age. Only 27% of adults have kids in school.
- Media Spin – negative stories are easy to report on and they sell
- Perception of Increased School Violence – this pushes the public away, but the data show that schools are the safest place for kids to be. There were more deaths on school campuses in years prior to Columbine and they have been declining ever since.
- Culture War – constant battle between those who see kids/schools as inherently good and those who see kids as inherently bad and believe schools need to be strict and non-tolerant
- The Clanning of America – the melting pot is gone. Parents don't want their children with "those" kids. We are reverting to associations with only those who are like us.
- Sense of Entitlement – the bond of trust, collaboration, and respect between parents and schools has been replaced by confrontation and mistrust. Parents point to their rights in a litigious society and push for customization. Public schools do not have the funds (or support) to truly customize to every student.
- Rise of Special Interests – With liberty and justice for us! The number of advocacy groups has tripled in the past 30 years draining resources and goodwill from schools.
- Plague of Regulations – Flexibility, judgment, and compromise have been replaced by red tape. Schools have to follow voluminous regulations that often don't make common sense for fear of being sued or penalized.
- Fear of Government – schools are the most accessible form of government for community members and thus a good way for frustration and ill will to be displaced.
- Private is Better Than Public – The belief that Governments/Public Schools cannot do as well as private businesses or schools is spreading. This broad brush approach is not true and undermines support for public schools.
- Antitax Movement – The new "patriots" want smaller governments and fewer taxes. In public schools they get the chance to vote no on school taxes.
- Schools as Scapegoats – all of society's ills can be blamed on failing schools and lazy educators.
- Union Bashing - tenure, contract benefits, all serve as a wedge in public support of schools
- International Comparisons – the data "prove" that American public schools are failing. Of course, there will be contrasting data to contrast that. Look at the immigration rate. Look at the poverty rate. Look at which countries actually offer a public education to every student. Very tough to compare one country to another.

- Standardized Testing – have their pros and cons, but increasing the number of tests and changing cut scores does nothing to improve support for public schools.
- Changing Job Market – the correlation between level of education and income is still true, but jobs are harder to come by. Blaming schools for this is an easy target.
- Ever-expanding Expectations – schools attempt to do everything that the community thinks it should be doing (teach the basics, create responsible citizens, provide job training, meet physical, social, and emotional needs) while people intellectually understand that schools cannot do everything. Instead of applauding and assisting with the attempt, community members blame and cite failure.
- Biloski Dilemma – (named after a typical working mom in Pennsylvania): parents are supportive of schools but too busy with jobs, kids, and other commitments to be that involved with the school. They want the schools to take care of it all.

Schools Employees Often Make the Terrible Trends Worse (feeds the “us versus them” mentality):

- Badmouthing the district or public education as a whole
- Unions that do not work with management and the community
- Low Expectations – they resent having to raise your kid
- Spinning the perception that school resources are spent on the wrong things
- Constantly resorting to defensive responses or non-communication

Failing to communicate the facts, truths, and attempts will lead to hype, rumor, and negativity.