

Let's face America's biggest challenge!!

The 2006 elections are over, and not one successful or unsuccessful candidate for local, state, or national office addressed AMERICA'S BIGGEST CHALLENGE. The reason is that we are blind to the challenges that have taken a long time to develop and will take a long time to solve. We are a country of people who want instant gratification, or at least to have our leaders tell us that they can do great things in one, two or four years.

America's biggest challenge is that we are not unleashing the full potential of our children. Experts have concluded that our 1950's Vintage U.S. K-12 System is obsolete, awful, embarrassing, outdated, a disaster, a broken system, non-competitive worldwide, and faltering badly.

Our children and grandchildren are our responsibility, and each year they are becoming less competitive with children in other countries around the world. In 2005, China and India combined graduated 13X as many scientists and engineers as the U.S. did. They aren't catching up; they are way ahead! Employers state that 58% of all U.S. high school graduates do not have the skills needed in the work place. And, 30% of all U.S. high school students don't graduate from high school. We are not adequately developing our human assets, our precious children and grandchildren.

How did this happen? How did we get to the point where our high school students are a year or two years behind children of the same age in 25 other countries? Were we all asleep while the schools decided to stop teaching phonics for twenty years? Were we all asleep when the memorization of the multiplication table was replaced by approximation and the use of a calculator? We all permitted our children's brain development to not be challenged, and our children did not complain. In fact, they complained when they were expected to do some homework.

Of course, many parents and many schools are doing an excellent job! However, on average, our children are not unleashing their full potential.

There is no silver bullet to solve the K-12 problem. Our studies have concluded that it will likely take three generations to fully recover from the ditch we have dug for our children and grandchildren. There is hope if we get to work.

We started our comprehensive systems analysis by asking several key questions:

1. What are the fundamentals of human learning?
2. How can we involve all parents extensively in their children's learning process starting at birth?
3. How can we unleash the enthusiasm and skills of the creative K-12 teachers, the core competency of every school?

4. How do we overcome the barriers which are now in existence to unleashing children's full potential?

Here are some hints, and we all need the courage to pursue them.

- Role modeling and parenting is absolutely essential. Children are copycats, and they learn good or bad behavior patterns from their parents. From birth to age five is the most critical learning time for children. We need to train parents of infants that their three greatest gifts to their children are Time, Unconditional Love, and the Love of Lifelong Learning.
- Teachers are the core competency of schools and we need to excite them to operate creatively in an environment of Connect and Collaborate instead of Command and Control. The teachers and the parents must work together daily as a team. Teachers will visit each child's home at least once each year. Parents will sign annual commitments. Students will wear uniforms. Parents will sign all homework daily. Parents will take full responsibility for their child's behavior and academic achievement through high school graduation.
- The school year is 180 days in the U.S. and 240 days in Asian schools. We must move to 210 days ASAP in the U.S. and 240 days within the next ten years. Volunteers will enable the schools to be open from 8am to 6pm. Courses for lifelong learning will be available in schools in the evenings and on weekends for adults. English as a second language will be available in all schools. Language skills in several foreign languages will be encouraged in the early years of elementary school when the students' brains are most ready to learn languages. Students will be able to advance based on their skills, and many will be able to obtain two years of college credit by the time they graduate from high school. Teachers' salaries will be increased significantly as they teach more days per year. Teachers will be expected to be fully qualified in college for the courses that they will teach in K-12. Special attention will be given to computer, math and science skills for teachers.
- Financial and technology management processes will be critical to make the schools very cost effective. Overhead expenses will be dramatically reduced in order to focus the needed attention on classroom instruction.
- The good news: the World-Class Lifelong Learning Center approach requires no new local, state or federal funding.

When we put proud and joyous smiles on the faces of the parents, teachers and children, we will be on the path for unleashing children's full potential. We will have successfully faced America's biggest challenge!! We can, and must, succeed; we owe it to our children's futures.

Prepared by: Bill Peter, Consultant/Futurist
www.2020and2035.com

billpeter@billpeter.net
6650 Vernon Hills Rd.

952.933.6850
Edina, MN 55436