

## Supporting public schools

David Kristofferson from The Highlands · 31 Jan 2016

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I am moving my response to Katie below from the precalculus discussion to a new topic thread to try to keep the original thread clear for comments directed to the precalculus topic. The issues discussed below deserve their own conversation thread.

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Hi Katie,

Borel has unfortunately had its share of problems. I heard from one client that a year or so ago, they were short a math teacher and many students had to make do with a series of substitutes for the major part of the first semester. It surprises me that in such a well-to-do area, this kind of problem can occur.

However, it is important to point out that many students \*do\* get a good education from our local public schools. Both of my daughters went to Highlands, Borel, and Aragon, and, while I have had some serious issues with some of the school policies, my daughters turned out fine in the end. I should note though, that this result sometimes required a lot more of my time teaching them in one area in particular, phonics and grammar, than I would have preferred. Unfortunately given the number of students that public schools must teach, it is not always possible to deal with individual cases adequately, and I have gone to several parent/teacher conferences on behalf of my students to lobby for them. It appears that in your situation, private schools were the best option.

Teaching is constantly under attack in the news these days. These concerns prompted me to return to teaching in 2010 after years in the private sector. I was encouraged to find that most of the teachers that I met and worked with were very good and cared about their students. Unfortunately classroom teachers are often under the thumb of curriculum and other issues that are outside of their control, and they are sometimes reticent to speak up due to fear of repercussions from multiple sources. I am independent, and intend to address many issues frankly and openly in my notes here. I will probably end up by offending everybody at some time, but someone needs to try to address these issues truthfully, and I am in a fortunate position to be able to do so. Sometimes I will piss off teachers and administrators with my comments, but I also will have a few earfuls for parents, so please stay-tuned for equal opportunity abuse :-) !!

Another factor influencing education negatively is the fact that California is the largest textbook market in the nation. I found that some very influential educational "research" seems to be conducted by groups with a financial interest in the outcome but is presented at conferences/teacher trainings as fact with no other justification beyond the infamous words "Research says..." Whenever you hear that phrase in a parent/teacher meeting, ask for the research! As a former research scientist I will not hesitate to say that it is quite often a total crock. I will write more on this topic later.

Public education is the bedrock of our democracy. We can not afford to neglect or abandon it without serious repercussions on our society. It saddened me greatly to read in the New York Times last year that over 50% of U.S. public school students are at an income level where they qualify for subsidized lunches:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/17/us/sch...>

People are worried about inequality in our country. Abandoning the public schools is a certain path to ensure that this problem will become worse and eventually increase the number of NextDoor reports about suspicious people vandalizing our neighborhoods. It is imperative that we all do our part to support them when they do well and try to improve them when they do not.