

School's Out; Reactionaries Hate That

If there's been one bright spot in America's COVID-19 experience, it's the near-complete shutdown of an expensive and obsolete government education system cribbed from mid-19th century Prussia.

Across the country, "public" pre-K thru 12th-grade programs closed their doors this spring. Some districts attempted to hobble along using not yet ready for prime time online learning systems. Others just turned the kids loose to likely learn far more than they would have in the combination daycare centers and youth prisons that pass for schools these days.

It was a perfect opportunity to scrap "public education" as we know it, perhaps transitioning entirely to distance learning as a waypoint on the journey toward separation of school and state.

Naturally, the political class hates that idea. Primary and secondary education constitute an \$800 billion per year job and welfare program, with beneficiaries (read: voters and campaign contributors) up and down its extensive food chain.

Florida Education Commissioner Richard Corcoran isn't one to let a little thing like a pandemic derail that gravy train: He's ordered the state's government schools to re-open in August, operating at least five days per week and offering "the full panoply of services" — from glorified babysitting to teacher pay to big agribusiness buys for school lunch programs — to those beneficiaries.

It seems likely that most states will follow Corcoran's lead to one degree or another, naturally also seeking ways to blow even more money than usual on enhanced social distancing, increased surface disinfection work, etc.

That seems to be the consensus of the entire American mainstream political class, from "progressive left" to "conservative right."

Yes, Republicans and evangelical Christians will bellyache about the teachers' unions,.

Yes, Democrats and the unions will gripe about charter schools and voucher programs.

But they're united in their determination to resuscitate the system as it existed before the pandemic, instead of letting that rotten system die a well-deserved death and moving on to better things.

There's a word for that attitude.

The word is “reactionary.”

As time goes on, we’ll hear lots of agonized propaganda about how the pandemic has forced huge changes in “public” education. Those changes will be entirely cosmetic. The authoritarian infrastructure beneath won’t have changed at all.

By letting the political class pretend that history can be forced to run backward, we’re denying future generations the real educational opportunities that past generations denied us.

School’s out. We should keep it that way.