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Getting serious about school discipline

by

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IN April 1998, a fifteen-year-old female student at Roosevelt High School in Yonkers, New York, was upset because her social-studies teacher, Dawn Jawrower, had telephoned her parents to express concern over her poor academic performance. The student packed a hammer into her bookbag, entered Jawrower's class a little after eight in the morning, and attacked Jawrower in front of the class, fracturing the teacher's skull in two places before other students in the class managed to restrain her. Such an attack on a teacher, especially by a female student, is unusual. Yet other recent examples of student violence against teachers come to mind. Andrew Wurst, a 14-year-old student at the Parker Middle School in Edinboro, Pennsylvania, mentioned to another student that he was going to make the upcoming school dance "memorable." There he shot to death science teacher John Gillette and wounded another teacher as well as two students.

These occasional lethal rampages, of course, do not stop with teachers. There has been a spate of recent massacres of fellow students in schools like the one in Springfield, Oregon, in May of this year. In a speech to the 4,000 delegates to the annual convention of the American Federation of Teachers on July 20, President Clinton specifically mentioned the Oregon shooting in the course of calls for stricter school discipline as a means of preventing such tragedies.

Explaining school violence

The public is shocked more by violence when it occurs in schools, especially rural or suburban schools, than when it occurs on the streets of American cities, where it is statistically more frequent. Following media reports of such incidents, I usually get calls from journalists asking me for an explanation. Even though I have studied school violence for 20 years, I don't have a good explanation for specific eruptions any more than a meteorologist can explain why lightning struck a particular tree. Perhaps such extraordinary episodes of school violence represent an irreducible level of psychopathology that afflicts youngsters as well as adults. On the other hand, it may be the logical extension of everyday school violence, and everyday school violence -- which typically involves mere shoving and punching between male students -- *can* be explained. For me the right question is not why lethal violence sometimes occurs on school premises but why students are more prone to misbehave in school than they used to be.

The usual explanation for the change is that school discipline has become lax. But that explanation doesn't really explain; it begs the question of what precisely "school discipline" involves. Essentially, "school discipline" implies that students know that bad behavior will be costly for them. What made it costly a generation ago was that schools were orderly; students knew that teachers cared whether they misbehaved or not and might give bad academic grades or unfavorable disciplinary reports when they observed such misbehavior. An orderly school was one in which students were wary of all teachers, not just their own but of any disapproving teacher whom they encountered in hallways, stairs, cafeterias, or schoolyards. The basis for school discipline lay at least as much in the student's awareness that teachers were vigilant and capable of invoking penalties on occasion as in such teacher characteristics as charisma or physical strength. The possibility of sanctions was threatening to students because most students considered success in school important. What requires explanation is why students stopped believing that teachers cared about their behavior and why teachers, even if they cared, stopped enforcing good behavior.

Order in schools is precarious because small numbers of adults are outnumbered by larger numbers of children who may wish, at least initially, to do things other than learn. This has always been the case. In the 1960s and 1970s, however, this chronic problem was exacerbated by social and cultural changes the cumulative effect of which was to relieve teachers of their disciplinary responsibilities. Two developments in particular stand out. One was the increasing proportion of youngsters enrolled in school who lack a stake in behavioral conformity to school rules. The second was the concomitant weakening of the authority of teachers that previously enabled them to keep the peace in school.

Unruly kids, disorderly schools

Probably the most important single reason that increasing proportions of youngsters have no interest in observing school rules is that more of them now than formerly do not want to be in school at all. Why is this? It has long been true that some children become rebellious simply because they are not there to learn; their families do not provide enough encouragement, support, and preschool training to give them a good chance at competitive success. It has also long been true that some peer groups develop goals unrelated to, or opposed to, academic achievement; children in school are exposed not only to the official curriculum but to the tutelage of their schoolmates, who are more numerous than adult teachers. What has changed is that modern societies now insist on more and more years of education for all children. In former generations, children who hated school dropped out; now they are more likely to remain enrolled regardless of whether they view education as necessary for their future lives.

Why do they stay? In part, they do so for legal reasons. All modern societies have raised the age of compulsory school attendance. But these formal legal requirements are not the whole story. Dropout prevention programs are part of the informal pressure on youngsters to remain enrolled in school at least until high school graduation. True, many enrolled youngsters are convinced, as adults are, that they need an education to get

satisfying jobs in an increasingly complex economy and to participate in the democratic political process. But some don't buy into this adult view; they feel like prisoners. Such youngsters don't respect the rules or those who enforce them as much as the students who regard education as an opportunity.

Keeping more children in school who do not want to be there interferes with learning as well as with school order. Consequently, functional illiteracy has spread to more students, resulting not necessarily in marginal students formally withdrawing from school but, more usually, in "internal" dropouts. Such students used to be described as "lazy," and they were given poor grades for "conduct." (The public schools have had great difficulty providing satisfaction, not to mention success, to students whose aptitudes or attitudes do not permit them to function within the range of traditional standards of academic performance.) One response of schools is to "dumb down" the curriculum. But most students who are uninterested in traditional education do not get much satisfaction out of intellectually weak courses either and thus do not develop a stake in conformity to school rules.

Many small student infractions contribute to the sense of intimidation among teachers. But the main causes are found elsewhere: In a school in which students wander the halls when they are supposed to be in class, where candy wrappers and empty soft-drink cans have been discarded randomly, and where graffiti can be seen on most walls, teachers don't feel in control and students don't perceive them as being in control. This tempts youngsters to test further the limits of acceptable behavior. Among students with little interest in education, the prospect of breaking rules provides some distraction. When they succeed in littering or in writing on walls, they feel encouraged to challenge other, more sacred rules, like the prohibition against assaulting fellow students and teachers.

What happens next is this: Students, both black and white, who are committed to learning transfer out of troubled public institutions to private or parochial schools, or they find a friend or relative to live with in the catchment area of a better school. This siphoning out of the better-behaved, more industrious students creates particularly serious order problems in big-city schools where students with little stake in conformity pile up in a critical mass of difficult-to-control students. Class-cutting increases, and students wander the halls in increasing numbers. In the classrooms, teachers struggle for the attention of students. Students talk with one another; they engage in playful and not-so-playful fights; they leave repeatedly to visit the toilet or to get drinks of water. Some are inattentive because they are intoxicated, and they become defiant or abusive when the teacher tries to quiet them.

The proportion of students with little stake in conformity varies from school to school, although the proportion is probably larger, on average, in big-city schools than in rural or suburban schools. But the overall trend has been toward greater proportions of rebellious students because greater proportions of students are staying in school without being convinced that further education is worthwhile. This trend makes for disorder, but it is abetted by another trend: Teachers have lost their authority over all students.

Separation of school from family

Historically, the development of American public education increasingly separated the school from students' families and neighborhoods. Even the one-room schoolhouse of rural America represented separation of the educational process from the family. But the consolidated school districts in nonmetropolitan areas and the jumbo schools of the inner city carried separation much further. Large schools developed for reasons of economy: The lower the per capita cost of education, the more feasible it was to hire teachers who specialize in such areas as art, music, drama, or advanced mathematics. Large schools also enabled teachers and administrators to operate according to professional standards instead of in response to local sensitivities -- for example, in teaching evolution or sex-education. But the unintended consequence of large schools, which were operated according to bureaucratic and professional standards, was to make them relatively autonomous; they could ignore the local community.

The disadvantage of the separation of school from community was that students developed distinctive subcultures only tangentially related to education. Thus, in data collected during the 1950s, the sociologist James Coleman found that American high school students seemed more preoccupied with athletics and personal popularity than with intellectual achievement. Students were doing their own thing, and their thing was not what teachers and principals were mainly concerned about. Presumably, if parents had been more closely involved in the educational process, they would have strengthened the influence of teachers.

Until the 1960s and 1970s, school administrators did not sufficiently appreciate the potential for disorder when many hundreds of young people come together for congregate instruction. Principals did not like to call in police, preferring to organize their own disciplinary procedures. They did not believe in security guards, preferring to use teachers to monitor behavior in the halls and lunchrooms. They did not tell school architects about the need for what has come to be called "defensible space," and, as a result, schools were built with too many ways to gain entrance from the outside and with too many rooms and corridors where surveillance was difficult. Above all, principals did not consider that they had jeopardized control over potential student misbehavior when parents were kept away, not knowing how their children were behaving. The focus of PTAs was on the curriculum, and it was the better-educated, middle-class parents who tended to join such groups. In short, the isolation of the school from the local community always meant that, if a large enough proportion of students misbehaved, teachers and principals would have difficulty maintaining order.

Civil rights and wrongs

Then the civil-rights revolution spread to public schools. At the same time that increasing proportions of schoolchildren had less stake in behavioral conformity to adult rules, adults were becoming increasingly sensitive to the rights of children. A generation ago, it was possible for principals to run schools autocratically and to suspend or expel students without much regard for procedural niceties. Injustices occurred; children were

"pushed out" of schools because they antagonized teachers and principals. But this arbitrariness enabled school administrators to control the situation when serious misbehavior occurred. Student assaults on teachers were punished so swiftly that such attacks were almost unthinkable. Even disrespectful language was unusual. Today, as a result of greater concern for the rights of children, school officials are required to observe due process in handling student discipline. Hearings are necessary. Charges must be specified. Witnesses must confirm suspicions. Appeals are provided for. Greater due process for students accused of misbehavior gives unruly students better protection against teachers and principals; and it also gives the educational process less protection against disorder.

Another effect of the civil-rights revolution was the decreased ability of schools to get help with discipline problems from the juvenile courts. Like the schools themselves, the juvenile courts have become more attentive to children's rights. More than 30 years ago, the Supreme Court ruled that children could not be sent to juvenile prisons for "rehabilitation" unless proof existed that they had done something for which imprisonment was appropriate. The 1967 Gault decision dramatically changed juvenile-court procedures. For example, formal hearings with youngsters represented by attorneys became common practice for serious offenses that might result in incarceration.

Furthermore, a number of state legislatures restricted the discretion of juvenile-court judges. In New York and New Jersey, for example, juvenile-court judges may not commit a youngster to correctional institutions for "status offenses" -- that is, for behavior that would not be a crime if done by adults. For example, truancy or ungovernable behavior in school or at home are not grounds for incarceration in New York and New Jersey. The differentiation of juvenile delinquents from persons in need of supervision (PINS in New York nomenclature, JINS in New Jersey) may have been needed. However, one consequence of this reform is that the public schools can less easily persuade juvenile courts to help with discipline problems that threaten the order on which the educational process depends. In some cases, the juvenile-court judge cannot incarcerate because the behavior is a status offense rather than "delinquency." To a juvenile-court judge, the student who called his history teacher an obscenity is not a candidate for incarceration in a juvenile correctional institution. In other cases, the alleged behavior, such as slapping or punching a teacher, does indeed constitute delinquency. But many judges will not commit a youngster to a correctional institution for this kind of behavior because they have to deal with what they consider to be worse juvenile violence on the streets.

Increased attention to civil rights for students, including students accused of violence, was also an unintended consequence of compulsory-school-attendance laws. The Supreme Court held in *Goss v. Lopez* not only that schoolchildren were entitled to due process when accused by school authorities of misbehavior but also that greater due-process protections were required for students in danger of suspension for more than 10 days or for expulsion than for students threatened with less severe disciplinary penalties. The Court held also that the state, in enacting a compulsory-school-attendance law, incurred an obligation to educate children up until the age specified in the law, which

implied greater attention to due process for youngsters still subject to compulsory-attendance laws than for youngsters beyond their scope. Boards of education interpreted these requirements to mean that formal hearings were necessary in cases of youngsters in danger of losing the educational benefits the law entitled them to receive. Such hearings were to be conducted at a higher administrative level than the school itself, and the principals had to document all allegations and to produce witnesses who could be cross-examined.

The social changes that came with the separation of the secondary schools from effective family and neighborhood influences partially explain the reduced ability of teachers and principals to maintain order in the schools, and the legal changes further weakened the authority of principals and teachers. Social and legal changes were not the entire explanation, however. *Cultural* changes also undermined order. There was a time when the judgments of teachers were unquestioned. No more. Today, teachers and many other authority figures -- parents, police, government officials -- receive little respect or prestige. In the case of teachers, the general demythologizing was amplified by special ideological criticism. Reflecting this, books, movies, and television shows all have portrayed teachers, especially middle-class teachers, as the villains of education -- as insensitive, authoritarian, even racist.

Intimidated teachers

During the 1970s, increasing media reports of school violence aroused so much public concern that Congressional hearings were held, further alarming the public. The Ninety-third Congress mandated, in 1974, an elaborate study to determine the extent and seriousness of school violence. In January 1978, the National Institute of Education published a 350-page report to Congress, *Violent Schools--Safe Schools*, detailing the findings of the study.

Although the study is two decades old, it is worth revisiting, for it remains the most comprehensive national study of school crime and disorder ever done. Principals in 4,014 schools in large cities, smaller cities, suburban areas, and rural areas filled out questionnaires. Then 31,373 students and 23,895 teachers in 642 junior and senior high schools throughout the country were questioned about their experiences with school crime -- in particular, whether they themselves were victimized and, if so, how. Unfortunately, the study could not definitively answer some basic questions, like whether school violence was really increasing, because no previous surveys existed with data comparable to the 1976 data from the Safe Schools study. Nevertheless, the authors of the report concluded, on the basis of fragmentary evidence, that disruption was "considerably more serious than it was 15 years ago, and about the same as it was five years ago."

The study also explored what was responsible for this increase in crime and disruption. Here the Safe Schools study waffled, but later studies, being less comprehensive, could say even less about causes. Thus, in March 1998, the Bureau of justice Statistics and the National Center for Education Statistics jointly published data comparing student victimizations in 1989 and 1995; 3.4 percent of students aged 12 to 19

had reported violent victimizations in 1989, and 4.2 per cent reported them in 1995. But the 1998 study had nothing to say about why the increase occurred. If changes in school discipline were involved, for instance, the study couldn't tell because it had no data from teachers on their disciplinary practices. Furthermore, unlike the Safe Schools study, which collected victimization data from many schools, and which was therefore able to distinguish safe and academically excellent schools from schools where violence had reached levels high enough to threaten the educational process, the sampling procedure used in the 1998 report precluded inter-school comparisons. Without reports of teacher disciplinary practices linked to schools with different levels of disorder, the 1998 report was unable to investigate a possible connection between less effective discipline and the increase in school violence.

In contrast, the *Safe School* study included data that enabled readers to infer that teachers were being intimidated in some but not all schools. The study mentioned that substantial proportions of American junior-high-school and senior-high-school teachers reported being sworn at by their students or being the target of obscene gestures during the month preceding the survey. Crimes against teachers while they were at school were most serious in the central cities. Robberies of teachers were three times as common in inner-city schools as in rural schools, and assaults were nine times as common, although rare compared with the victimizations of students. Even in big-city secondary schools, less than 2 percent of the teachers surveyed reported assaults by students within the past month, but threats were more frequent. Some 36 percent of inner-city junior-high-school teachers reported that students threatened to hurt them, as did 24 percent of inner-city high school teachers. Understandably, many teachers said they were afraid of their students, especially in inner-city schools. Even a small incidence of violence against teachers symbolized a new reality: Teachers were not in control of some schools. A December 1997 survey of 1,500 teachers and school staff in the Boston school system, conducted by the Teachers Union, showed that the intimidation of big-city high-school teachers is continuing. Some 43 percent affirmed that they "felt their personal safety was in jeopardy in the past two years."

The public thinks of teachers primarily as educators, not its agents of control. Teachers themselves tend to downplay their disciplinary role. Some object to hall or cafeteria duty on the grounds that they are not policemen. If pressed, however, teachers will agree that control of the class is a prerequisite for education. Teachers who abdicate control cannot teach effectively. The *Safe Schools* study asked teachers, "In May how many times did you hesitate to confront misbehaving students for fear of your own safety?" The response categories were, "Never," "Once or twice," "A few times," and "Many times." For those who can remember the days when teachers were on a pedestal, the results of the survey were surprising: 28 percent of teachers in cities of half a million or more said that they hesitated to confront misbehaving students at least once in the month before the survey. Smaller percentages of teachers were afraid to confront misbehaving students in other locations: 18 percent in schools in smaller cities, 11 percent in suburban schools, and 7 percent in rural schools. Given that violence against teachers was found to be greatest in the big-city schools and least in the rural schools, teachers' fears would seem to have realistically reflected the actual threat.

Informal controls

Whatever the reasons for the reluctance of individual teachers to admonish misbehaving students, including the desire to be popular, this reluctance implies at least partial abandonment of their disciplinary role. When teachers see student misbehavior and turn away to avoid the necessity of a confrontation, students perceive that teachers are intimidated. This lesson encourages student misbehavior that might otherwise not occur. In short, teachers' reluctance to show disapproval of misbehaving students may be partly the cause of the high level of disorder in some schools as well as its effect. The formal controls that have developed in big-city schools -- uniformed security guards, for example -- are a partial result of the breakdown of *informal* social controls over students, such as the expression of teacher approval or disapproval. Informal controls still work in most of the smaller schools of smaller communities.

Not only do many school systems employ security guards, but some also have metal detectors to screen for knives and guns. The District of Columbia school system employs 250 security officers -- along with metal detectors in 31 schools. New York City employs 3,200 security officers, as well as metal detectors. Security guards and metal detectors are useful for inner-city schools that need protection against invading predators from surrounding violent neighborhoods and to break up fights that teachers are afraid to tackle. But security programs cannot be the main instrument for preventing student misbehavior in public secondary schools because security guards are not ordinarily in classrooms where teachers are alone with their students. Furthermore, there are never enough security guards to maintain order in hallways or gyms or cafeterias or to prevent assaults or robberies by their mere presence. Thus, in January 1992, while Mayor Dinkins was at Thomas Jefferson High School in Brooklyn, New York, to deliver a speech, accompanied by bodyguards and security guards, two students were fatally shot by an angry fifteen-year-old classmate. Security guards constitute a second line of defense, but they cannot by themselves provide a disciplined environment within which the educational process can proceed effectively.

The primary peace keepers in schools have to be the teachers, as the Japanese experience demonstrates. Japanese high schools do not have security guards or metal detectors, yet all Japanese high schools are safe. How do they do it? Japanese educational requirements make it unnecessary for Japanese high-school teachers to have charismatic personalities to control a class. Run-of-the-mill high-school teachers have a great deal of influence over Japanese students because all of their students want to be students; compulsory education ends in Japan at graduation from junior high school (the ninth grade). Convinced as they are that their futures depend on getting a good education, Japanese high-school students regard their teachers as mentors, not oppressors, and therefore crave the favorable opinions of their teachers. As a result, more than 90 percent of them graduate from high school, a larger proportion than American youths, even though the United States uses high ages of compulsory attendance to attempt to stuff education into the heads of students, willing or not.

Make high school voluntary

If teachers are to maintain control of classrooms, students must care about their approval or disapproval, while not necessarily fearing them. Yet if students care about what the teacher thinks of them, an element of fear will nevertheless be present -- fear of doing something that will jeopardize the teacher's approval. Two institutional changes can reinforce student sensitivity to teachers' reactions. First, make high schools voluntary and require students to justify by studious behavior the public expense of providing them with an education. If students have to prove that they are learning something in order to take advantage of a free education, they will attend class more regularly, pay more attention in class, and do more homework. They will also be more respectful of their teachers and more concerned with earning good grades. The small minority of high-school students who lack the slightest interest in learning anything except how to drive their teachers into another profession would have to choose between getting an education and leaving school, until they are ready to take learning seriously.

The national trend toward raising the age of compulsory attendance from 16 to 18 worsens rather than improves high school education and inevitably contributes to discipline problems. A half dozen years ago, the District of Columbia raised the age from 16 to 18, after which its schools went downhill faster. Even if such legal requirements could guarantee the physical presence of alienated students in school, they cannot force students to learn. Unlike imprisonment, which can be imposed on the unwilling, education requires cooperation between teachers and learners.

What states should do to reawaken students' desire to earn the good opinion of their teachers, thereby improving their leverage over students, is to enact laws making attendance at public high schools voluntary, as it is in Japan, and then do everything possible to motivate students to attend in their own self-interest. This done, teachers will have more enthusiasm for teaching and will not be afraid to confront misbehaving students, thereby nipping everyday school violence in the bud.

What about junior high schools and intermediate schools? The higher academic and behavioral standards that voluntary enrollment will make possible in high schools will eventually have a beneficial effect on lower secondary schools. Once all high schools have become voluntary -- and are thereby able to raise their academic and behavioral standards -- junior-high-school students will face the problem of getting accepted at the high school of their choice (as they face it now in Japan). Teachers will be able to say to junior- high-school students, "If you do not learn what you are supposed to learn in junior high school, you will cut yourself off from later educational opportunities." This will decrease, although not eliminate, disciplinary problems from junior high schools. The Japanese experience is instructive. Although Japanese junior high schools are more violent than Japanese senior high schools, most Japanese junior-high-school students are too busy preparing for the examinations for high school admission to engage in disciplinary infractions.

Of Big Macs and big brothers

If high-school attendance became voluntary in the United States, academic achievement would increase and discipline problems would decrease overall in American society, but the improvement would be most marked in inner-city high schools. The argument against making high-school attendance voluntary in the United States is essentially that, until American society devises transitional institutions for moving uneducated dropouts into work roles, education is the only game in town. But this is not the case: Formal education is not the only path to responsible adulthood.

The much-maligned fast-food industry is a major trainer of the poorly educated, including minorities and recent immigrants, providing them with jobs that can lead eventually into the middle class. More than 20,000,000 members of the current American labor force have worked at one of McDonald's 8,000 restaurants, mostly at only slightly better than minimum-wage entry-level jobs. McDonald's does not think of itself as a training ground where egocentric teenagers, including dropouts, can learn the sorts of skills and values that will enable them to move on to better jobs; but it is more successful at doing so than most governmentally sponsored training programs. Unfortunately, Americans wax nostalgic over disappearing work experiences for children -- e.g., paper routes and family farms -- while they ignore the large fast-food chains that provide training in crucial work skills, like getting to work on time, being well groomed, working hard and fast.

We ought to rewrite our child labor laws, making it easier for dropouts to get a taste of the world of work in service industries while keeping open the door for a return to school. Sometimes this can be done through work-study programs. Aviation High School in Queens, New York, gives its students opportunities for high-paid technical jobs at New York City airports. But more than half of its students ultimately go to college, often for engineering degrees.

The second reform involves finding creative ways to introduce adults into high-school classrooms to bolster the authority of classroom teachers. For example, Chicago's DuSable High School, an all-black school close to a notorious public-housing project, demonstrated the practicality of offering repentant dropouts from the neighborhood the chance to enroll as regular students. A 39-year-old father of six children, a 29-year-old mother of a 14-year-old freshman at DuSable, a 39-year-old mother of five children hungered for a second chance at a high school education. They accepted the school district's invitation to return to DuSable High School because they had come to believe that dropping out a decade or two earlier had been a terrible mistake. Some of these adult students were embarrassed to meet their children in the hallways; some of their children were embarrassed that their parents were schoolmates; some of the teachers at the high school were initially skeptical about mixing teenagers and adults in classes. But everyone agreed that the adult students took education seriously, worked harder than the teenage students, and set a good example.

These adult students are not in school to bolster the authority of teachers; that is just a byproduct of their presence. Apparently, it is harder to cut classes or to skip school

altogether when your mother is a fellow student. Most school systems shunt adult students into special adult school programs or G.E.D. classes, partly because work or child-care responsibilities make it difficult for adults who have awakened late to the value of education to come during the normal school day. But, especially in inner-city high schools, much can be gained by encouraging even a handful of adult dropouts to return to regular high-school classes. Teachers who have a serious adult student or two in their classes are not alone with a horde of teenagers. The additional adults in the classroom provide moral support to teachers who need all the moral support they can get.

Making the tradeoff

Would such changes substantially improve school discipline in public high schools? Not quickly. Nothing that is worth doing can be done overnight. The peace-keeper role of teachers gradually eroded in many public secondary schools because, even in schools where most students take education seriously, a small number of misbehaving students sabotage classroom order and intimidate teachers. Furthermore, in large school systems, the saboteurs are not evenly distributed among schools; they pile up in the schools with the worst reputations and make them educational wastelands -- as well as dangerous. It will take years to reestablish the expectation among public secondary school teachers that students will routinely heed them; only this confidence enables them to be peacekeepers. Catholic high-school teachers in the big cities have this confidence now, as do Japanese high-school teachers. (Catholic high schools manage to be academically successful and orderly even though many of them enroll a majority of black and Hispanic kids from economically disadvantaged homes.)

What about a crime wave from dropouts who don't take entry-level jobs in the service industries and, instead, hang out on the streets? The crime-wave theory rests on two assumptions: that there will be substantially more dropouts once high-school attendance becomes voluntary and that dropping out in itself causes youth criminality. Neither assumption is sound. Higher educational standards will not increase the dropout rate much, if at all, because the majority of students stay enrolled in school, not because of compulsory-attendance laws but because they believe that education will eventually prove useful to them. What about those who do not believe this and drop out because they are unwilling to increase the little academic effort they expend in class or at home? Longitudinal studies have found that, although dropouts have a higher crime rate than high-school graduates, their criminality was high before they dropped out and does not increase after their leaving school. The tradeoff may be more crime outside of schools and less crime inside of schools.

Order, though difficult to regain, is not irretrievable in public secondary schools. Regaining it requires recognition that schools should not be recreation centers for teenagers; they should be places where teachers demand that serious learning take place, whether the learners are 13 or 43. No, American students are not scared of their teachers, but some teachers are scared of their students. Which is worse?