

## PODCAST #3—POSSIBLE VISION OF AN INNOVATIVE HIGH SCHOOL

WELCOME TO VIEWS AND VOICE: ABOVE THE NOISE, A PODCAST HOSTED BY MASA, MINNESOTA ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS. I AM JANE SIGFORD, YOUR CONVENER.

THIS IS THE SECOND PODCAST IN A SERIES WHICH EVOLVED FROM A DISCUSSION AT THE MASA SPRING CONFERENCE IN MARCH 2018 ABOUT A LEGISLATIVE PLATFORM ITEM, "PROVIDE PUBLIC SCHOOL BOARDS THE FLEXIBILITY TO DETERMINE THE COURSE WORK AND EXPERIENCES NECESSARY TO MEET GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS." OUR FIRST BROADCAST TALKED ABOUT THE CURRENT PERCEPTION OF PUBLIC EDUCATION. THIS ONE CONTINUES THE DISCUSSION BY FOCUSING ON HIGH SCHOOLS TO PERHAPS SUGGEST WAYS TO FLESH OUT THE LEGISLATIVE PLATFORM.

THERE ARE SEVERAL SECTIONS TO THIS PODCAST:

- 1) WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF CURRENT HIGH SCHOOLS?
- 2) HOW DOES ONE EARN A DIPLOMA AND WHAT DOES HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION MEAN?
- 3) IS A HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA RELEVANT TO TODAY'S WORLD OF WORK?
- 4) WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF A CONTEMPORARY AND FUTURISTIC HIGH SCHOOL?

### WHAT IS THE CURRENT PURPOSE OF HIGH SCHOOLS

WHEN I ASKED MYSELF THIS QUESTION, I ACTUALLY HAD TO THINK ABOUT IT. I'VE NEVER REALLY DEFINED THE PURPOSE OF HIGH SCHOOL; I'VE ATTENDED ONE, TAUGHT IN SEVERAL, BEEN AN ASSISTANT AND PRINCIPAL OF ONE, BUT NEVER REALLY THOUGHT OF THE PURPOSE. GOING TO HIGH SCHOOL IS JUST SOMETHING WE HAVE TO DO AND ACCEPTED AS A RITE OF PASSAGE IN OUR SOCIETY. HOWEVER, WHEN I GOOGLED THE QUESTION, I WAS DISMAYED TO FIND THE LACK OF AN ADEQUATE DEFINITION ANYWHERE. THE MOST COMMON ONE WAS THAT THE PURPOSE OF HIGH SCHOOL WAS TO PREPARE STUDENTS FOR COLLEGE. OUCH!

IF ONE SURVEYED THE THREE MILLION EDUCATORS IN THIS COUNTRY AS TO THEIR DEFINITION OF THE PURPOSE OF PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL, I SUGGEST ONE WOULD HAVE THREE MILLION DIFFERENT RESPONSES AS TO THE PURPOSE OF PUBLIC EDUCATION, IN GENERAL, AND

HIGH SCHOOLS, SPECIFICALLY. IN ADDITION, HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS, PARENTS, AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS WOULD ALSO ALL HAVE DIFFERING DEFINITIONS. WHEN WE SAY THAT HIGH SCHOOLS ARE FAILING, WE ARE NOT EVEN CLEAR ABOUT WHAT THEY ARE FAILING AT !!!

ONE DISCOURAGING INDICATOR WHICH HINTS AT THE ISSUE IS DISENGAGEMENT BY HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS. EVEN THOSE WHO GRADUATE WOULD SAY THERE IS NO PURPOSE OF HIGH SCHOOL EXCEPT TO BE WITH THEIR FRIENDS AND, PERHAPS TAKE PART IN ACTIVITIES OR SPORTS, OR TO GET INTO COLLEGE, BUT THEY SEE A DISCONNECT BETWEEN WHAT THEY LEARN AND WHAT IS MEANINGFUL TO THEM.

ONE OF OUR TASKS IN THIS PROCESS OF LOOKING AT A HIGH SCHOOL OF THE FUTURE WILL BE TO BE CLEAR ABOUT DEFINING OUR PURPOSE. SETTING A DESTINATION DEFINES THE PATHS ONE TAKES TO GET THERE.

#### WHAT ARE THE REQUIREMENTS FOR GRADUATION?

STUDENTS HAVE TO COMPLETE A CERTAIN NUMBER OF CREDITS IN VARIOUS DISCIPLINES. HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATES ARE ONE ITEM OF PUBLIC DATA BY WHICH DISTRICTS ARE JUDGED. HOWEVER, THIS IS ANOTHER EXAMPLE WHERE ONE MUST BE AN INFORMED CONSUMER OF HOW DATA IS COLLECTED AND REPORTED.

FIRST, HOW SCHOOLS REPORT SUCCESSFUL GRADUATION RATES IS NOT STANDARDIZED. DIFFERENT DISTRICTS DETERMINE THEIR OWN CREDIT REQUIREMENTS AND DEFINE THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THOSE CREDITS DIFFERENTLY. SOME DISTRICTS REQUIRE A FULL SCHEDULE OF CLASSES EVERY DAY AND OTHERS ALLOW FOR STUDY HALLS. THERE CAN BE AS MUCH AS A SEMESTER OR EVEN A YEAR'S DIFFERENCE IN THE TOTAL NUMBER OF CREDITS REQUIRED EVEN IN NEIGHBORING SCHOOLS. THEREFORE, THE DIPLOMA FROM ONE HIGH SCHOOL MAY BE MORE OR LESS RIGOROUS BY SHEER NUMBER OF COURSES REQUIRED.

TWO, STUDENTS ARE REQUIRED TO TAKE STANDARDIZED STATE MANDATED TESTS. EACH MUST TAKE A READING, MATH, AND SCIENCE TEST ONCE DURING HIGH SCHOOL.

THREE, STUDENTS MUST HAVE COMPLETED THE STANDARDS ASSIGNED TO HIGH SCHOOL. IT IS INFERRED THAT THESE STANDARDS ARE EMBEDDED IN CLASSES AND WHEN THE CLASS IS COMPLETED

SUCCESSFULLY, THE STANDARDS HAVE BEEN ACHIEVED. HOWEVER, WE DOUBLY ASSESS BY INSISTING ON STANDARDIZED TESTS IN MATH, READING, AND SCIENCE. WHY?

FOUR, IF STUDENTS DROP OUT OF HIGH SCHOOL AT SOME POINT, THEY CAN STILL GRADUATE. STUDENTS COULD GRADUATE BY PASSING A GRADUATION EQUIVALENCY EXAM AND EARNING A GED, A GRADUATION EQUIVALENCY DIPLOMA. THIS CAN BE DONE ONCE THEIR AGE COHORT HAS COMPLETED HIGH SCHOOL.

FIVE, GRADUATION FROM ALTERNATIVE LEARNING CENTERS VARIES. IT IS OFTEN REPORTED SEPARATELY, AND NOT INCLUDED IN THE MAINSTREAM HIGH SCHOOL DATA. BUT STUDENTS EARN A HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA UPON SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION OF COURSES.

HOWEVER, DISTRICTS CALCULATE AND REPORT THE SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION OF THESE CRITERIA IN A SELF-DETERMINED WAY. SOME SCHOOLS DO NOT ALLOW STUDENTS TO "WALK ACROSS THE STAGE" UNTIL THE STUDENTS HAVE COMPLETED ALL REQUIREMENTS, COURSES, TESTS, AND ALL FEES PAID. OTHER DISTRICTS CLAIM STUDENTS HAVE GRADUATED IF THEY CAN COMPLETE COURSE WORK BY THE END OF SUMMER. OTHERS CLAIM COMPLETION IF THE STUDENTS CAN COMPLETE BY END OF THE FOLLOWING FALL SEMESTER AS A "SUPER SENIOR". THEREFORE, COMPARING GRADUATION RATES AMONG DISTRICTS MAY BE MISLEADING.

THE PUBLIC MESSAGE AND IMAGE OF HIGH SCHOOLS ARE ALSO DETERMINED BY NEWS REPORTS FROM COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES WHO AVOW THAT STUDENTS ARE NOT PREPARED WELL FOR HIGHER LEARNING BECAUSE OF THE SCORES ACHIEVED ON PLACEMENT EXAMS. THESE EXAMS ARE ADMINISTERED AT THE INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING TO DETERMINE THE PROPER PLACEMENT FOR STUDENTS IN MATH, PARTICULARLY. HOWEVER, NEWS ITEMS ARE VERY MISLEADING BECAUSE EACH INSTITUTION OF HIGHER LEARNING GETS TO SET THEIR OWN "CUT" SCORE. BELOW THE CUT SCORE, STUDENTS, MUST TAKE A REMEDIAL COURSE AT THEIR OWN EXPENSE THAT DOES NOT FULFILL THE GRADUATION REQUIREMENT. HIGHER EDUCATION IS CRITICIZED AS USING THIS AS A MONEY-MAKING PROPOSITION.

WHY DOESN'T EVERYONE GRADUATE? LOOKING AT THE VARIOUS REASONS HELPS US GAIN INSIGHT INTO WHAT IS NOT WORKING. IN LEAVING TO LEARN. THE AUTHORS FOUND THAT STUDENTS LEAVE HIGH

SCHOOL FOR FOUR MAJOR REASONS: ACADEMIC FAILURE, BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS, LIFE EVENTS, AND DISINTEREST. WASHOR AND MAJKOWSKI, P. XXIV PLUS THE DEEPER REASONS FOR LEAVING ARE "NOT FITTING IN; NOT MATTERING; OVERLOOKED TALENTS AND INTERESTS; AND RESTRICTIONS." WASHOR AND MAJKOWSKI, P. XXIV.

WHAT DOES A HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA ACTUALLY SIGNIFY? NOT LONG AGO HIGH SCHOOL WAS THE TERMINAL FORMAL EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE FOR MOST STUDENTS BECAUSE THE DIPLOMA WAS SEEN AS A TICKET TO THE NEXT STAGE OF LIFE, CERTIFYING THAT STUDENTS HAD SKILLS WHICH ALLOWED THEM TO CHOOSE WHAT THEY WOULD DO AS ADULTS.

THAT'S NOT TRUE ANYMORE. A DIPLOMA IS NOT A TICKET TO THE ENTIRE MOVIE—IT IS MERELY AN ENTRE INTO THE PREVIEWS OF WHAT IS TO COME.

IF ONE LOOKS AT A DIPLOMA TO SEE IF IT IS RELEVANT TO TODAY'S WORLD OF WORK, IT IS USEFUL TO VISIT THOMAS FRIEDMAN IN HIS BOOK THANKS FOR BEING LATE. FRIEDMAN DESCRIBED THE WORLD OF WORK AS HAVING JOBS THAT ARE BEING PULLED UP, APART, OUT AND DOWN.

MIDDLE-CLASS JOBS ARE BEING *PULLED UP* FASTER, MEANING THEY REQUIRE MORE KNOWLEDGE AND EDUCATION TO PERFORM SUCCESSFULLY. TO COMPETE YOU NEED MORE OF THE THREE RS—READING, WRITING, AND ARITHMETIC—AND MORE OF THE FOUR CS—CREATIVITY, COLLABORATION, COMMUNICATION, AND CODING. P.225

SOME JOBS ARE BEING *PULLED APART* WHERE THE SKILLED PART OF A JOB IS BEING PULLED UP AND AT THE SAME TIME THE LESS SKILLED PART IS BEING PULLED DOWN TO BE DONE BY SOMEONE WITH LESS SKILL OR BY A ROBOT.

SOME JOBS ARE BEING *PULLED OUT* WHERE MACHINES, ROBOTS, AND WORKERS IN INDIA AND CHINA CAN COMPETE FOR ALL OR A BIGGER PART OF A JOB WHICH MEANS THAT WORKERS HAVE TO HAVE "MOTIVATION, PERSISTENCE, AND GRIT TO LEARN NEW TECHNOLOGICAL OR SOCIO-EMOTIONAL SKILLS" TO KEEP UP. P. 226

"SOME JOBS ARE BEING *PULLED DOWN* FASTER—BEING OUTSOURCED TO HISTORY IN ITS PRESENT FORM AND BEING MADE OBSOLETE FASTER

THAN EVER. THIS DEMANDS MORE ENTREPRENEURIAL THINKING IN CONSTANT SEARCHING FOR NEW NICHEs, AND NEW OPPORTUNITIES TO START SOMETHING." P. 226.

WE LIVE IN AN "AGE OF ACCELERATIONS" AS DESCRIBED BY FRIEDMAN WHERE THERE ARE THREE FORCES—GLOBALIZATION, CLIMATE CHANGE, AND TECHNOLOGY, THAT ARE ALL THREE CHANGING RAPIDLY, NOT ONE AT A TIME, BUT CONCURRENTLY, CREATING A SENSE OF "DISLOCATION". THERE ARE PARTS OF JOBS, "DISCRETE SUBCOMPONENTS", THAT CAN BE PERFORMED ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD BY THE LOWEST COST PROVIDER.

IN ADDITION, THE IDEA OF 'WORK [HAS] GOT[TEN] UNBUNDLED FROM JOBS.' THE PRODUCTION OF WORK IS NO LONGER NECESSARILY TIED TO THE CONTAINER OF A JOB—IT COULD BE DONE ANYWERE." AND JOBS AND WORK GOT UNBUNDLED FROM A SINGLE COMPANY. THEY COULD BE DONE BY ANYONE, ANYWHERE. BUSINESS STRATEGIST HEATHER MCGOWAN IS QUOTED SAYING THAT "UBER IS AN EXAMPLE. THEY NO LONGER HAVE TO OWN A FLEET OF CARS, NOR DO THEY HAVE TO MAINTAIN A WORKPLACE FOR EMPLOYEES. BUT THEY HAVE ACCESS TO ONE OF THE LARGEST FLEETS IN THE WORLD.

THE WORLD OF WORK HAS CHANGED BUT SO HAS THE IDEA OF CAREERS AND TRAINING HOWEVER, HIGH SCHOOL IS NO LONGER THE ONLY TRAINING OR EDUCATION A PERSON NEEDS TO HAVE A LIFELONG CAREER. PLUS, SCHOOLS AS WE KNOW THEM, ARE NOT THE ONLY PROVIDERS OF EDUCATION. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IS OFTEN ON-THE-JOB PROVIDING TRAINING THAT IS JOB-SPECIFIC. PRIVATE COMPANIES ARE ALSO EDUCATIONAL PROVIDERS. PLUS, ONLINE PROGRAMS OFFER CERTIFICATIONS FOR CERTAIN SKILLS.

EVEN IF STUDENTS GRADUATE FROM HIGH SCHOOL AND MATRICULATE TO A FOUR-YEAR COLLEGE, HEATHER MCGOWAN IN THANKS FOR BEING LATE GOES FURTHER TO SAY THAT "LEARNING BECOMES MORE IMPORTANT THAN KNOWING" BECAUSE AS MUCH AS 50% OF AN UNDERGRADUATE DEGREE MAY BE OBSOLETE WITHIN 5 YEARS—EVEN BEFORE THE DEGREE IS ACHIEVED. P. 258.

THAT LEADS TO THE NEXT SECTION WHAT WOULD A CONTEMPORARY AND FUTURISTIC HIGH SCHOOL BE LIKE? WE HAVE TO ASK IS EDUCATION DISCONNECTED FROM SCHOOLS? PARTICULARLY, IS HIGH SCHOOL DISCONNECTED? IF SO, IS THERE A WAY TO RECONNECT IT

IN A MEANINGFUL WAY THAT MEETS THE NEEDS OF OUR KIDS IN A 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY MANNER? IS THAT NECESSARY? OR IS THE IDEA OF SCHOOL, PARTICULARLY, HIGH SCHOOL MORPHING INTO SOMETHING NEW?

IN THEIR BOOK LEAVING TO LEARN WASHOR AND MAJKOWSKI FEEL THAT CONTEMPORARY HIGH SCHOOLS HAVE A REAL PLACE IN OUR SOCIETY BUT THAT PURPOSE IS ONE WHERE STUDENTS "EMBRACE THE WORLD OF LEARNING OUTSIDE SCHOOLS AND HELP YOUNG PEOPLE ENGAGE THAT WORLD SUCCESSFULLY." P. 137 FRIEDMAN SAYS IT THIS WAY, " AT A MINIMUM, "EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS MUST BE RETOOLED TO MAXIMIZE THESE NEEDED SKILLS AND ATTRIBUTES; STRONG FUNDAMENTALS IN WRITING, READING, CODING, AND MATH; CREATIVITY, CRITICAL THINKING, COMMUNICATION, AND COLLABORATION; GRIT, SELF-MOTIVATION, AND LIFELONG LEARNING HABITS; AND ENTREPRENEUSHIP AND IMPROVISATION AT EVERY LEVEL." P. 226

IN THEIR OPINION "TRADITIONAL INSTRUCTIONAL PROCESSES AND ASSESSMENTS CANNOT BRING ALL STUDENTS TO COMPETENCE, MUCH LESS CRAFTSMANSHIP AND MASTERY. TO KEEP STUDENTS IN SCHOOL AND ENGAGED AS PRODUCTIVE LEARNERS THROUGH TO GRADUATION, SCHOOLS MUST PROVIDE MANY EXPERIENCES IN WHICH ALL STUDENTS DO SOME OF THEIR LEARNING OUTSIDE SCHOOL. THE LEARNING OUTSIDE AND INSIDE SCHOOL MUST BE SEAMLESSLY INTEGRATED. "P. XXVI-XXVII.

MY ACTUAL PROPOSAL FOR WHAT THIS NEW HIGH SCHOOL COULD BE LIKE IS THE SUBJECT OF THE NEXT PODCAST. HERE'S A CAVEAT: MY IDEA IS ONLY ONE. IT'S A DISCUSSION STARTER. OF COURSE, I WOULD LIKE TO SEE IT, OR PARTS, ADOPTED BUT HIGH SCHOOLS MAY BE DIFFERENT FROM COMMUNITY TO COMMUNITY. NO LONGER DO THEY ALL HAVE TO LOOK THE SAME EVEN IN TRADITIONAL SETTINGS. WE HAVE TO GET OVER BEING STUCK IN THAT IDEA. WE DON'T NEED TO BE A CHARTER SCHOOL TO BE CREATIVE.

WHY NOW? WHY THINK ABOUT REFORM, PARTICULARLY WITH HIGH SCHOOLS? IF WE LOOK AT CURRENT STATUS, THE NATIONAL RATE OF GRADUATION FOR 2009 WAS 75.5 PERCENT. NEARLY FIVE MILLION EIGHTEEN-TO TWENTY-FOUR-YEAR OLDS LACK A HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA. THE US RANKS TWENTIETH OUT OF TWENTY-EIGHT IN THE PROPORTION OF YOUNG PEOPLE WHO FINISH HIGH SCHOOL. AND THOSE NON-GRADUATES ARE DISPROPORTIONATELY MEMBERS OF HISTORICALLY DISADVANTAGED MINORITY GROUPS. (BALFANZ ET. AL. IN WASHOR AND MAJKOWSKI, P. XXIII. WE CANNOT AFFORD TO LOSE ALL THIS TALENT.

IN AN ARTICLE ENTITLED "ONLY FOR MY KID: HOW PRIVILEGED PARENTS UNDERMINE SCHOOL REFORM" BY ALFIE KOHN PUBLISHED IN THE KAPPAN MAGAZINE IN APRIL 1998 <https://www.alfiekohn.org/article/kid/> .HE TALKS ABOUT HOW THERE IS A POLARIZATION IN COMMUNITIES ABOUT THOSE THAT WANT SCHOOLS TO BE AND DO WHAT THEY'VE ALWAYS DONE WITH AP CLASSES, GRADES, AND SO ON WITHOUT A GREAT DEAL OF CARE FOR THOSE WHO DO NOT DO WELL IN HIGH SCHOOL. THE ARTICLE HAS A GREAT BIBLIOGRAPHY OF OTHER STUDIES ON THIS TOPIC.

IT IS NO COINCIDENCE THAT WE SEE MORE STRATEGIC REFORM EFFORTS IN HIGH POVERTY SCHOOLS, CHARTERS, OR ALTERNATIVE HIGH SCHOOLS. IN THIS RAPIDLY CHANGING WORLD SCHOOLS ARE OFTEN THE LAST MAJOR CULTURAL INSTITUTION THAT PEOPLE EXPERIENCE. STUDENTS MAY NOT BE PART OF A NEIGHBORHOOD WHERE EVERYONE KNOWS AND SUPPORTS ONE ANOTHER, OR A RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATION THAT PROVIDES COMMUNITY AND A SENSE OF BELONGING, OR A "HOMETOWN" WITH ITS SENSE OF IDENTITY AND PURPOSE. PARENTS WANT WHAT WORKED FOR THEM TO BE AVAILABLE TO THEIR CHILDREN. ALSO, BECAUSE WE DON'T KNOW WHAT SOME CHANGES WOULD LOOK LIKE, IT IS HUMAN NATURE TO RESIST CHANGE FOR FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN.

WE HAVE "TINKERED" WITH SCHOOLS FOR A LONG TIME, TO USE A TYACK AND CUBAN PHRASE FROM THEIR BOOK, TINKERING TOWARD UPTOPIA BUT WE REALLY DON'T CHANGE THE FUNDAMENTAL STRUCTURE OR DELIVERY. WE DO NOT BUILD A NEW HOUSE; WE MERELY MOVE THE FURNITURE AROUND. IS IT TIME FOR US TO DO SOMETHING BEFORE THE SYSTEM FALLS APART OR BEFORE WE ARE FORCED TO REACT ? THE ITEM ON THE LEGISLATIVE PLATFORM OF MASA GIVES US AN OPPORTUNITY, PROPELLING US FORWARD TO THINK ABOUT AND DO SOMETHING NOW. IT IS THE RIGHT TIME AND RIGHT THING TO DO.

I WOULD CHANGE THE OLD ADAGE THAT "IT IS EASIER TO ASK FOR FORGIVENESS THAN PERMISSION." TO "IT'S BETTER NOT TO WAIT FOR PERMISSION SO WE DON'T HAVE TO ASK FOR FORGIVENESS FROM THE STUDENTS WHOM WE DID NOT SERVE WELL."

THE NEXT PODCAST GIVES AN IN-DEPTH SUGGESTION FOR A POSSIBLE HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAM. I LOOK FORWARD TO HEARING YOUR THOUGHTFUL RESPONSES.

MY EMAIL IS [JLSIGFORD@COMCAST.NET](mailto:JLSIGFORD@COMCAST.NET) PLEASE FEEL FREE TO EMAIL ME WITH IDEAS, AHAS, WONDERMENTS.

I LEAVE YOU WITH WORDS THE SAGE DR. SEUSS, "NOTHING IS GOING TO CHANGE, UNLESS SOMEONE DOES SOMETHING SOON."

THANK YOU FOR LISTENING.