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High School Students Offer Solutions for Improving Education



YORK, Pa., Sept. 29 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- Teachers and tax payers are surrounded by media buzz on the education debate. From President Obama's Back to School address, to Mark Zuckerman's \$100 million donation to Newark public schools, to the NBC News "Education Nation" summit, to the recent release of the film documentary on charter schools, "Waiting for Superman," the national conversation over education is heating up. Some would argue boiling over.



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However, through all of the hype and hyperbole, little has been gleaned about the student perspective on the [education crisis](#). In an effort to capture the voice of teens on this issue, StageofLife.com, a non-partisan blogging resource, asked a simple question in its recent writing contest for high school students:

"What suggestion(s) do you have to make a positive change at your school or with the educational system as a whole?"

Over 1,500 visited the [student writing contest](#) page and scores of teen leaders submitted a response. From the essays, five themes emerged. These student-generated, [education solutions](#) could play an integral part of the road map that teachers, administrators, and public policy decision makers use to chart the fate of education in America.

Rebecca Thiels, M. Ed., Education Consultant for StageofLife.com and current high school Language Arts teacher at Red Lion Area Senior High School in Red Lion, PA, stated, *"The education system in the U.S. needs an overhaul. Students' voices could help find a solution. We've been allowing state and federal mandates to drive what's happening in the classroom and it's not working."*

If student voices are to be heard, five themes were transparent in the teen responses:

- Focus Less on Test Scores:** Students strongly feel that teachers' primary role should be to produce critical thinkers and shape young minds, not churn out test takers. They want the classroom environment to emphasize the learning process versus hammering away on rote memorization or test taking skills. At a larger level, students feel the education system perpetuates a test taking culture verses the advancement of critical thinking, analysis, and passion for learning. One student went so far as to suggest that "multiple choice and true and false tests should be eliminated" as they do not challenge analytic thinkers but simply reward those with a talent for memorization.
- Get Out of the Classroom:** Students desire experiential and out-of classroom instruction. Essay examples ranged from a request for more field trips to the desire for greater access to online courses to some encouraging schools to foster partnerships with community, civic and volunteer organizations as a way to round out a secondary education. As one StageofLife.com student writer aptly put it, "School is not life," but it should reflect more of it.
- Refresh Teacher Training:** Students feel that many teachers are not trained or equipped to deal with the "Facebook nation." One teen blogger specifically called for an "Education Renaissance" by asking teachers to "target and talk to students directly," at a level that will better engage them in the learning process. Another high schooler asked what many students probably feel...when will favoritism stop? These types of issues could be tackled with innovative teacher training addressing the new social-networked-generation.
- Reduce the Cost of College:** The stress of planning for college, financially, has students upset. One student suggested a system of university internships for freshmen based on intended major, vocation or trade to reduce the cost of tuition. Increased involvement from high school schools and guidance offices on the financial aspects of college preparation, in addition to assisting with the admission process, is needed.
- Combat Peer Apathy:** Finally, and most importantly, the writing contest named an ugly truth that for many students is no surprise...student apathy. Essays painted pictures of "jocks who rarely show up for class" or unmotivated burnouts "sleeping on their desks." While these may seem like gross stereotypes, for teachers, it is often a reality dealt with everyday. However, for an increasing number of high school students -- they are fed up with it.

Students are tired of watching their peers waste class time, disrupt the education process, or simply float through the school day

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disengaged with the opportunity for learning. These disconnected students hamper the learning environment for those that want to be in school. The spark of change to improve this issue will need to come from the students themselves, at a local level. Young leaders must emerge in their schools to hopefully change apathetic cultures and combat classmate apathy.

StageofLife.com has consolidated some of the "[How to Improve Education](#)" essays on one landing page for review at www.stageoflife.com/How_to_Improve_Education.aspx

The current [writing contest for high school students](#) asks the question, "Who is your hero?" National sponsor Shutterfly.com is providing the monthly prize and StageofLife.com is offering up SWAG and Featured Blogger status on the site to the student essay winner.

About Stage of Life™: StageofLife.com is a free, non-partisan grassroots project hosting blogs, information and resources for teens, Millennials/Gen Y, Gen X, and Baby Boomer generations. Its specialized content includes [lesson plan ideas and writing prompts for Language Arts teachers](#), educational training, curriculum consulting, guest speaker seminars, monthly [writing contests for high school students](#) and [college students](#) and much more. Its *My Life Rewards®* program provides site visitors a wide collection of [in-store coupons](#), [shopping discounts](#) and exclusive cruise and resort offers as StageofLife.com provides "Rewards for Life's Journey®."

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