Introduction: Don’t judge today’s public education by how you were taught. What is taught in Fairfax County schools today differs greatly from what was taught a decade or so ago.¹ Is the current education better? We examine nine topics.

1. You went to neighborhood schools; your children might not. The FCSB wants not only every school but every classroom to have the same mixture of races, family incomes, and abilities. Because busing is strongly opposed by parents, the FCSB has a new idea: transfer the students by re-drawing the school boundaries. In the FCSB proposed “Boundary Policy 8130.7,” the opinion of residents and a negative impact on quality of education are not to be taken into account. Instead, the first criterion in redrawing school boundaries is the “socioeconomic and/or racial composition of students in affected schools.” This criterion is in keeping with the County’s “One Fairfax” policy and FCSB’s idea of “equity.”² On July 22, 2019, the School-Board majority, Democrats, delayed the vote on this new policy until after the elections. They realize that parents (and real-estate agents) will object strongly. The Democrat-supported majority on the School Board wants the Democrat-supported candidates to be re-elected.

2. Students with mid-range academic performance now receive little attention. Fairfax County teachers are already burdened with teaching children in classrooms of students where there is a wide range of abilities and a wide range of behavior. These classroom teachers are to be commended for working in this difficult environment. The range of abilities is seen in the persistent performance gap between schools and between races, a continuing embarrassment to the FCSB. Much money and ink has been spent in trying to reduce the gap, whereas any narrowing has been minimal. Busing students from poorly performing schools into highly performing schools would solve the intra-school gap. All schools would then have approximately the same average SAT scores, but the racial gap would remain. The School Board’s “equity” program will intensify the mid-range problem. Because teachers are judged by the number of their students passing the Standards of Learning tests (SOL’s), classroom teachers will focus their attention on the lowest-performing students. Good students do well in any environment, but the middle-performance students will continue to suffer. Low-performing students also become frustrated and discouraged, and possibly a disciplinary problem, when they compare their academic performance with the performance of superior students. Having classrooms that have students of nearly equal performance – not necessarily equal ability – is a better idea. The teacher would be able to tailor the teaching approach to the ability of all students in the class. Her teaching load would be greatly lightened and made more satisfying. The SOL pass rate as a measure of teacher performance would need to account for the level of her students.

3. What you were taught is not what is currently taught. The burden on the classroom teachers is compounded by the curriculum. For example, in mathematics, instead of memorizing the multiplication table, students spend much time envisioning, with the help of cartoons, the process of multiplication – at too young an age for conceptualization. Instead of learning the traditional, efficient method of multiplying multi-digit numbers, students spend much time learning five different methods for performing the same process. The schools detest the traditional memorization and drill, claiming that memorization inhibits reasoning, but the students must memorize in either case, not one method but five methods. Because so much time spent on the multiplicity of methods, logical thinking that comes from solving mathematical problems is at best barely taught. The FCSB claims, without proof, that some students can learn only the non-traditional methods; therefore, teaching all students all methods is better. Of course, then the majority must suffer. Many require tutors.

4. Reading is taught by word recognition, not phonics. The curriculum leaves the students deficient in reading. Although phonics is used somewhat in the current curriculum, the basis for the reading education is “whole-word” reading –

² A critique of the policies can be read at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iM4AfGQqTWE. It contains excerpts from the July 22, 2019, meeting. The current draft of the new policy is at https://go.boarddocs.com/vsba/fairfax/Board.nsf/files/BDZRXX6E892C/$file/20190711_Draft_Policy8130.pdf. The first criteria for boundary changes is “Socioeconomic and/or racial composition of students in affected schools”.

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reading by recognizing entire words, not by sounding them out. Reading education based the whole-word approach is not working to narrow the performance gap; reading education based on phonics has worked where tried. Whole-word reading limits a student’s vocabulary, thereby limiting his range of knowledge, and has been associated with dyslexia. It has given rise to a large remedial industry.

5. **Social studies have morphed from facts to feelings.** The social-studies curriculum teaches a distorted history, emphasizing the role of minorities in the development of our country. Evil motives are imputed to many famous people – primarily white men. The textbooks judge people and their imputed motivation rather than facts.

6. **Guidance counselors now guide with little or no parental involvement.** Problems in the classroom environment and curriculum are compounded by the social atmosphere. Policies are developed based in part on the Youth Survey that the schools conduct³. This survey is not a scientific survey, in part because it is voluntary. The survey asks many questions about the student’s social and sex life. Counselors can use the survey results to guide them in private counseling of students, sometimes without parental knowledge, consent, or involvement, after age 13. Guidance at this critical age is thereby coming from the schools, not the student’s parents.

7. **Morality has been abandoned.** The Board says that they cannot teach morality in the schools. Of course, the Board contradicts itself by teaching that bullying and using opioids are bad. Nowhere is the absence of morals more insidious than in the Family Life Education (FLE) program. It should teach marriage skills, but teaches that masturbation, anal sex, oral sex, homosexual sex, and extramarital sex are not bad things but just things that people do – as if family life is sex life. The schools do not teach the psychology of sex or the healthy connections between love and sex or marriage and sex. Abortion is also taught simply as something people do. The abortion process is not described. The product of conception is thought of as non-human, whereas DNA science proves that abortion kills a human being, even when first conceived. Placing thoughts over physical reality undercuts the entire science education.

8. **The cost per student has greatly increased.** The long record of increasing funding has not solved the problems caused by performance diversity, the curriculum, and the social and moral atmosphere. The County and Board always justify the need for more funds on the basis of the need for retaining highly skilled classroom teachers. The County and Board never mention that nearly the same raise is given to all County and school employees, thereby causing a rapid rise in real-estate taxes without a commensurate rise in working conditions for the classroom teachers. The classroom teachers should be paid more, perhaps with financial awards given by the parents directly to the classroom teachers, independent of the school pay scales.

9. **Parental involvement has moved from educating to fund-raising.** Parents would return to the educating focus if the schools provided greater transparency. Parents as well as all citizens should be enabled to see easily what is being taught: homework assignments and tests as well as text books, handouts, videos, charts, and slides. This transparency should cover all courses, including reading, writing, mathematics, social studies, health, and family-life education. The transparency should also allow citizens to know the number of students in each classroom. With full transparency, citizens would be in a position to greatly influence the quality of education, possibly calling for more classroom teachers or calling for the removal of ineffective programs and inadequate education material.

**Conclusion:** The educational deficiencies cited above will not be overcome and the suggested remedies employed by simply expanding the current ideas with more funds. The current school board is dominated, 10 to 2, by members backed by the Democrat Party. These members almost always vote as a bloc. New Democrats can be expected to do the same. Vote for the Democrat candidates if you want no change. Vote for the Republican candidates listed below if you want to get fresh ideas, some taken from successful private schools and some taken from traditional methods like the ones you had years ago – ideas that are practical and proven, not theoretical and ideological.

Of the candidates for the November 5, 2019, election, the platforms of Laura Ramírez-Drain (Hunter Mill), Cheryl Buford, Priscilla DeStefano, and Vinson Palathingal (at large) are most likely to correct the current policies and programs. Voters can vote for all four.

Appendix A: Email to get modified version on Next Door

My original post was (9/11/2019):

“My grandchildren attend Fairfax County public schools, so I investigated. My disconcerting findings are documented at http://fcta.org/Pubs/Reports/2019-08a-fac.pdf. Your comments would be appreciated, especially if they can allay my fears.”

My follow-up posting, after my original post was deleted, was (9/25/2019):

My post on the School Board was deleted by Nick Longworth, one of the two leads who have such authority, because he received so many complaints. Although the posting received many compliments, Nick receives only complaints. Those agreeing with my ideas, possibly the minority, were silenced. This is a case of mob rule. My supporters were told to move to the back of the bus, to take what the mob gives them and be happy with it. What has happened to this neighborhood? When we moved to this neighborhood 44 years ago, we had civil, intellectual discussions of ideas coming from all sides. Now the mob suppresses ideas it doesn’t like. We can recommend painters and pastors, but not politicians. I continue to wish that those who did not think the posting was helpful, would propose ideas that they think would be helpful -- just as I requested in the original posting.

This also was deleted – immediately – as not being helpful. The two leads are listed at https://nextdoor.com/directory/leads/.