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## A Manifesto for Schools Post-COVID

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Given that many teachers and administrators have found this current school year more difficult than the last;

Given the existence of a teacher shortage, a substitute teacher shortage, and accelerating rates of teacher retirement;

Given a decade-long decline in the number of students entering teacher preparation programs;

Given that many children and adolescents have lost the stamina that allowed them to attend school for seven or more hours a day, five days a week, for forty or more weeks a year;

Given increasing rates of depression and anxiety among young people;

Given that human happiness is greatly supported by high-quality sleep, food, and exercise; and

Given that human happiness is greatly supported by a sense of belonging and social acceptance—

Public schools should move to adopt the following measures with all due speed:

Active instruction in the core academic subjects—mathematics, the language arts, the social studies, and the sciences—should be limited to three hours a day.

The fine arts—the making of music; the practice of drawing and painting; the enjoyment of beautiful objects; the telling of stories—are a source of pleasure and can no longer be denied to anyone in our public schools. They should be experienced on a daily basis.

The joys of physical movement and bodily health are inherent goods that also support rigorous mental activity. They should be practiced, repeatedly, on a daily basis.

Board games teach children how to win and lose with grace. Games such as chess, backgammon, and scrabble should be taught and played in schools.

Outdoor play, both organized and unorganized, should occupy at least two hours of the school day.

Religious and spiritual practices are connected to human flourishing. Schools can and should support such practices.

The school day should respect the sleep needs of adolescents; core academic instruction should not commence prior to 9 am.

The schools should serve healthy foods that are prepared on-site.

Teachers and students should have one hour to eat lunch. Ideally, teachers and students would eat lunch in the same space. In this way, students might have an example of what a meal shared among friends, in conversation, without devices, might entail.

Access to bathrooms should not be restricted to teachers and students for any reason. Bathrooms should be clean, well-stocked with personal care items, and provide privacy for teachers and students alike.

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Teachers should devote no more than 25 hours of their week to planning and carrying out classroom instruction. Assessment activities—such as the imperative to closely attend to data on the abilities, needs, and growth of individual students—requires more time than currently allotted.

Teachers should hold daily office hours to ensure that additional help and support can be offered to any student who needs it.

Grades should be abolished and replaced with rigorous, honest, and helpful feedback from teachers.

In an era of flexible and hybrid scheduling, the distinction between “school work” and “home-work” is no longer helpful. That said, a forty-hour workweek should be the expectation for teachers and students alike. This will mean that a student’s required work ends when the school days ends—with due acknowledgement that powerful school instruction may inspire students to want to go on learning after the school day has finished.

Schools should accept that one important function they serve is childcare, thereby allowing working parents a safe place to leave their children at no cost. Therefore, the hours of the school should match the working hours of the majority of working adults. At a minimum, schools should be open for students from 9 am to 5 pm, with specified times within that period for compulsory attendance.

Schools should no longer close for inclement weather. As long as parents are going to work, schools should remain open for whomever can attend.

Adolescents need not be supervised at all times and should be trusted to make good decisions.

High school students deserve the right to learn important life skills in addition to core academics. High school should be a place where you learn to drive, to cook, and to manage personal finances.

High school students should, upon successful completion of a Civics course, be given the right to vote in all local, state, and national elections.

The distinction between core, elective, and extra-curricular activities should be abolished. Anything that promotes human growth and genuine happiness is appropriate for the school day.

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Many of these proposals are already in place in some of our best schools, or at some particular age level—pre-K, elementary, middle, or high school. While none of these proposals would, in and of themselves, address the massive inequity present in the American school system, they would contribute towards a humanization of the system that would improve the everyday lives of teachers and students alike.

COVID has revealed to us the depths of our collective alienation and the levels of dehumanization in our schools, for teachers and students alike.