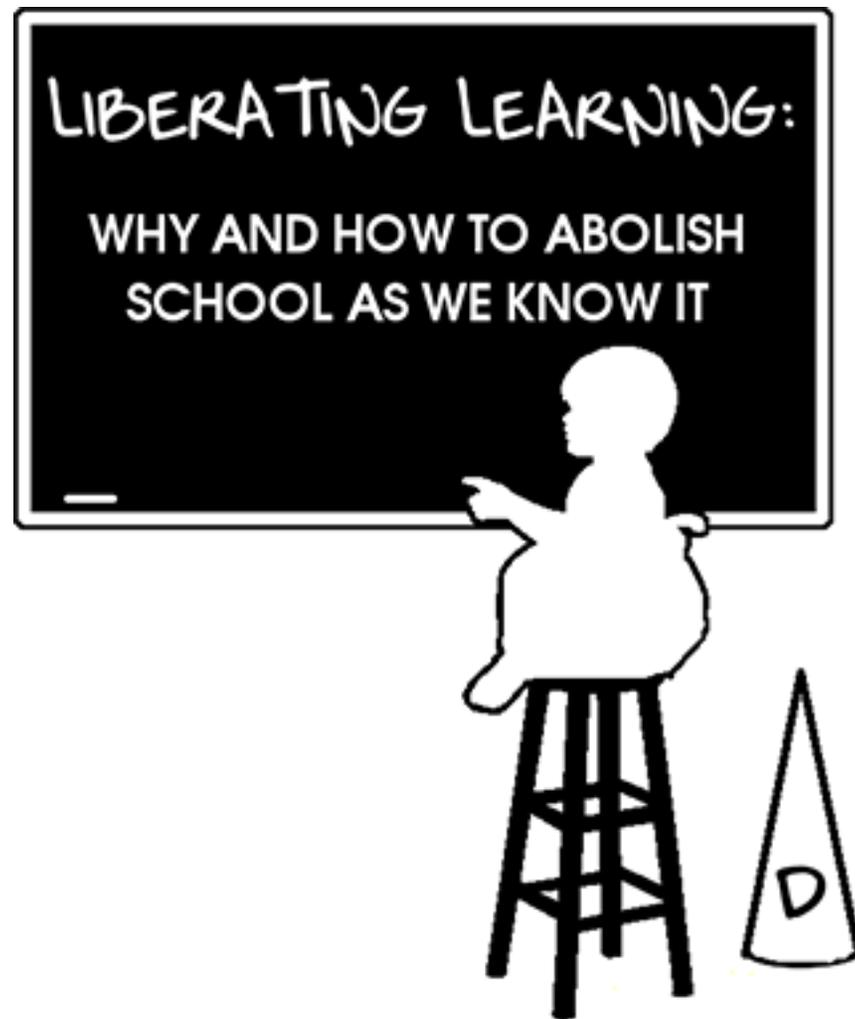


We are not taught to figure things out. We are not taught to live. We are taught to listen. We are taught to fulfill the demands of those who outrank us. Those of us who do this best will then be taught to command or to figure out new methods of control.



“A primary purpose of the educational system is to train school children in good citizenship, patriotism and loyalty to the state and the nation as a means of protecting the public welfare.”

-California Second District Court of Appeal,  
March 2007 (1)

Your life belongs to you.  
Seize control of it!

## Authoritarianism: The Problem

The K-12 schooling system functions primarily to teach obedience to authority. The problem is rooted in the very nature of the schooling establishment.

The classroom environment severely limits human mobility and curiosity. Students are expected to passively accept lessons from teachers and experts. Teaching fellow students in school generally means only helping them understand the lessons presented by official teachers. Students are expected to learn en masse and do most other things en masse. The surrounding world is separated from school life by walls and fences, and the lessons it holds are supposed to be learned only through lenses that authority provides.



Schools isolate students from their communities. Within the school, social interaction is supposed to be governed by rules set by authority figures. Students have little contact with people of other ages besides authority figures, instilling a sense of social hierarchy.

Hierarchy and tribalism among students are encouraged and it is common for students to physically and mentally abuse each other. Students who defend themselves from abuse are often punished as severely as those who instigate fights, and may be considered threats to their peers. Everyone is expected to accept any kind of search and surveillance measures, including violent security guards, searches of personal property, or even giving samples of bodily fluid to test for unapproved substances. (2)

Drug testing and homework extend the school's authority into the homes and hangouts of students. This reinforces the lesson that "responsibility" means satisfying the demands of authority instead of tending to one's own needs.

If students do not wish to pursue learning through school, then economic sanctions, forced drugging, and every weapon of the paramilitary police officer can be used to force them to accept the situation that has been thrust upon them. Schooling teaches that an individual's security, knowledge, society, and personhood derive not from his or her own efforts but from authority. The effects are anti-intellectual, anti-individualist, and anti-social thinking habits.

All of this is avoidable, but the solution cannot come through government. It must be created by the people outside of government channels.

12 More ideas for students can be found at <http://www.school-survival.net>.

Anti-authoritarian materials can be found at the following websites:

<http://nj.libertarianleft.org/resources.html>

<http://sonv.libertarianleft.org/distro>

<http://libertyactivism.info>

<http://invisiblemolotov.wordpress.com>

<http://zinelibrary.info>

Alliance of the Libertarian Left encourages you to be creative and make your own educational materials, whether you use a professional design program, word processor, photocopier, or markers. Keep it revolutionary (be consistent, effective, and move towards liberation).

This is a publication of the Alliance of the Libertarian Left. It and other subversive materials can be downloaded and printed from [nj.libertarianleft.org/resources.html](http://nj.libertarianleft.org/resources.html)

All graphics except for handshake on page 9, a3 on page 13 and the ALL logo below are by Laur of [ArmorForActivists.com](http://ArmorForActivists.com).

Dress for dissent with her liberty-themed shirts.



Alliance of the Libertarian Left  
[all-left.net](http://all-left.net)

7 Hood, John. "The Failure of American Education." The Freeman, February 1993. Online at: <http://www.thefreemanonline.org/columns/the-failure-of-american-public-education/>

8 Samuel Edward Konkin III, quoted at <http://agorism.info/counter-economics> . For more on counter-economics, read Konkin's *New Libertarian Manifesto*, available as a free download from <http://agorism.info>.

9 A computer donation program is described in a post on Wendy McElroy's weblog, "Building Freedom: Alternative Charity 2", online at <http://www.wendymcelroy.com/news.php?extend.1599>.

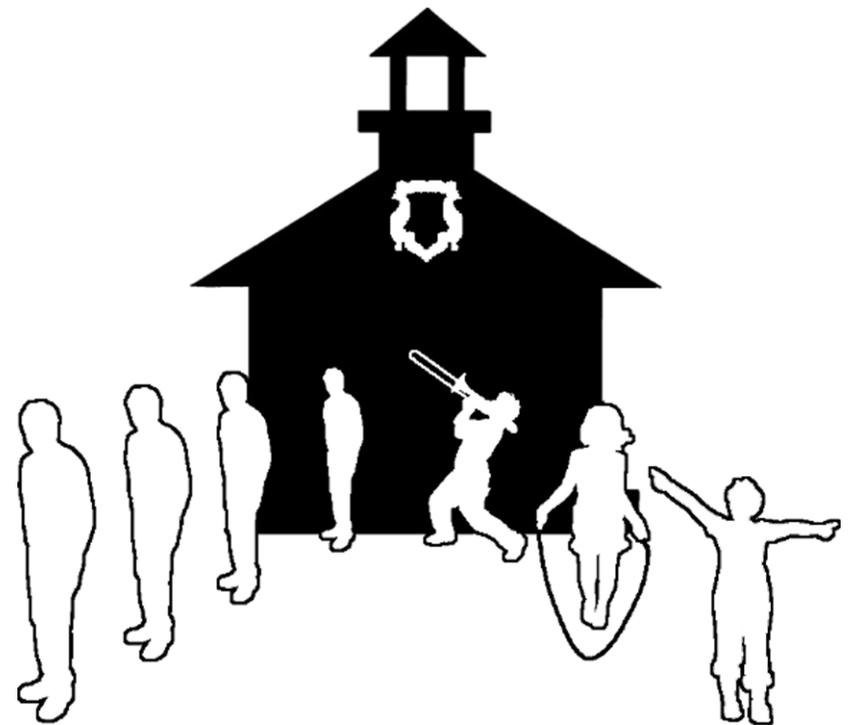
10 A beginner-friendly introduction to email encryption can be found at Rad Geek People's Daily: "How to Talk so the Government Can't Listen," [http://radgeek.com/gt/2008/10/29/how\\_to/](http://radgeek.com/gt/2008/10/29/how_to/)

11 See for example Dukceovich, Davide. "College Vs. No College." Forbes.com, July 28, 2003. Online at [http://www.forbes.com/2003/07/28/cx\\_dd\\_0728monday-match.html](http://www.forbes.com/2003/07/28/cx_dd_0728monday-match.html)

## The State: The Source of the Problem

Authoritarian schooling is historically linked with the authoritarian goals of government. Throughout history, schools have been used to implement social control. Authoritarians use the power of the school to impress upon youth the values they want the country to have.

Schools in America are no exception. Though there were some government schools in the early days of the nation, modern state education and compulsory attendance did not exist in America until established by the government of Massachusetts in 1850. Other states mandated compulsory schooling in the decades that followed. (3)



Sheldon Richman describes the political motives involved in the foundation of American government schools.

A small group of intellectuals, enamored with what the authoritarian Prussians were accomplishing with public schooling, decided that America could no longer leave education to the chance of family management... The intellectuals promised that the America of the future would be populated by loyal, enthusiastic, literate, obedient people who put the nation ahead of themselves and their own narrow concerns. Look at what advocates of government schooling said.

“Let our pupil be taught that he does not belong to himself, but that he is public property,” said Benjamin Rush, a signer of the Declaration of Independence and one of America’s earliest advocates of government control of education. “Let him be taught to love his family, but let him be taught at the same time that he must forsake and even forget them when the welfare of his country requires it.”

The father of public schooling, Horace Mann, said, “We who are engaged in the sacred cause of education are entitled to look upon all parents as having given hostages to our cause.” (4)

Students have indeed become hostages of the state. Every effort to decrease the power of the government schooling system is portrayed as an attack on students, and the system tries to make students suffer more from budget cuts than the bureaucrats who administer their confinement. More generally, politicians often claim that minors will be harmed if the government is not allowed more power to infringe upon the

## Notes

1 “Homeschoolers’ setback sends shock waves through state.” San Francisco Chronicle, March 7, 2008.  
<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2008/03/07/MNJDVF0F1.DTL>

2 For a few examples of teen oppression, see the story and links at “Public schooling #2: Criminal texting,” Rad Geek People’s Daily, Feb 18, 2009:  
[http://radgeek.com/gt/2009/02/18/public\\_schooling/](http://radgeek.com/gt/2009/02/18/public_schooling/)

3 Rothbard, Murray. *Education: Free and Compulsory*. “Compulsory Education in the United States.” Ludwig Von Mises Institute website:  
<http://mises.org/story/2226#9>

4 Richman, Sheldon. “Back to the Government’s Clutches.” Freedom Daily, August 1997.  
<http://www.fff.org/comment/ed0897b.asp>.  
Sheldon Richman is the author of *Separating School & State: How to Liberate America’s Families*.

5 For an introduction to weapons freedom, see Worden, Darian, “Why Gun Freedom is Important,”  
<http://ncc-1776.org/tle2008/tle474-20080629-06.html>.  
For an introduction to drug freedom, see Gregory, Anthony, “The Drug War’s Immorality and Abject Failure” <http://www.fff.org/freedom/fd0607e.asp>.

6 Gatto, John Taylor. *The Underground History of American Education*, Chapter 3.  
<http://www.johntaylorgatto.com/chapters/3b.htm>.

There are countless ways to undermine the school system from within and from without. Current and former school students can get involved in counter-establishment education and subvert the authoritarianism that is the prime lesson of government schools. School grounds are great places to put anti-school and anti-authoritarian messages.(12)

The most important way to resist the schooling establishment is to un-learn the harmful lessons it gives. Thinking towards independence and liberty is the essential action that each student must take.

Whatever decisions the student makes, keep in mind that your life is yours and you should live it that way. When you live by your own values instead of by the values of others, you have gone a long way toward personal liberation.

rights of everyone. Attacks on personal freedoms like possession of weapons or drugs or even existing without government oversight are introduced with the state threatening the safety of children.(5)

It is worth noting that prior to 1850, Americans who were not held as slaves were generally well educated and literacy rates were high. In *The Underground History of American Education*, John Taylor Gatto writes:

Looking back, abundant data exist from states like Connecticut and Massachusetts to show that by 1840 the incidence of complex literacy in the United States was between 93 and 100 percent wherever such a thing mattered. According to the Connecticut census of 1840, only one citizen out of every 579 was illiterate and you probably don't want to know, not really, what people in those days considered literate; it's too embarrassing. Popular novels of the period give a clue: *Last of the Mohicans*, published in 1826, sold so well that a contemporary equivalent would have to move 10 million copies to match it.(6)

Efforts to strengthen and centralize the government school system in America coincided with authoritarian campaigns to centralize political, economic, and social life. Nationalist rivalries in the late nineteenth century brought ideas to organize citizens toward perceived national strength and greatness. Standardization was considered essential to direct results for the benefit of the nation. Many industrial leaders believed that education organized on a hierarchical factory model would contribute to the smooth and stable functioning of an economy that suited their interests. Fears

of recent immigrants, many of whom were Catholics, Jews, and natives of Southern and Eastern Europe, fueled efforts to use schooling to “Americanize” them and break up their communities.(7)

The use of schools for authoritarian ends cannot be prevented by reform. The power and incentives to oppress are inherent within the political system. Like any enterprise with heavy government involvement, schools answer to political pull, not to the demands of consumers. Politics favors those with political power, while a freed market contains the nearly infinite solutions of human action.

Supporters of government schools will likely respond to this charge by saying that education is too important to be left to market forces and that few people would learn without being forced to. The truth is that education is too important to be controlled by politics, individualism is too important to be suppressed by institutionalism, and learning outside of institutions is generally valued and desired by individuals.

The state suppresses choice and competition in education. An obvious method of state interference is the coercive nature of school funding and operation. Wealth created by productive individuals is taken from them through taxation and given to institutions under state control. Taxation ultimately rests on force. Taxes are money that is taken from people who are told to obey and pay, not asked to consent or trade.

Taxes cost workers not only when they pay directly, but also when prices are increased and opportunities are closed to them due to the cost of taxation. People who are unable to

Quitting school is an option. The benefits of doing so must be weighed against the costs. Dropping out can be liberating, but there can be economic and social costs. It is possible to liberate oneself from school only to be taken advantage of by other tyrants in society. The costs of quitting school can be reduced using methods described in the Counter-Establishment Education section above. Participating in existing networks of support and building new ones can help a former school attendee live a free and prosperous life.

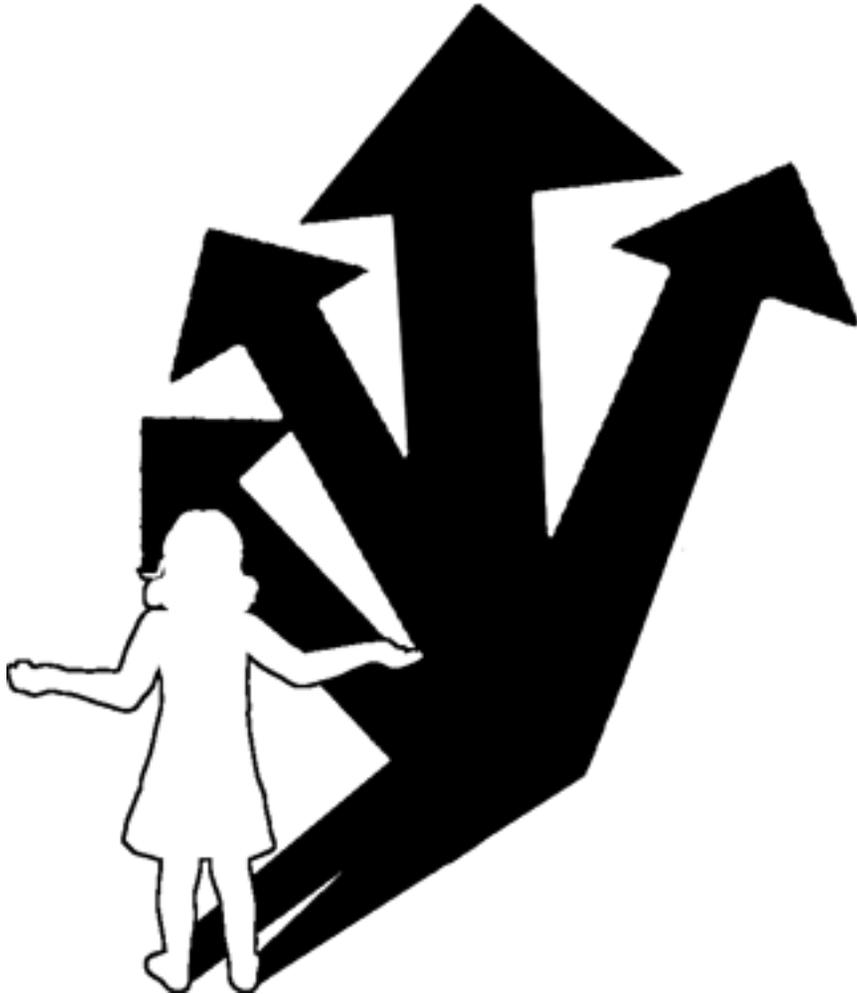
College is not for everyone, but many people find it to be a rewarding experience. College life is less regulated and supervised than K-12 education, especially for students who do not live in official campus housing. For some people, college provides a way out of a living situation they do not desire. Dropping out of earlier schools may decrease college opportunities, though certifications like the GED can substitute for a high school diploma. But many people do live happily and financially secure without completing college.

Success means getting what you want. It should not mean achieving measures of status decided upon by others. But it is instructive that some of the richest Americans never completed college. (11)

One way to break free from the school system is to become homeschooled. The feasibility of this option will obviously depend on the family situation of the student. Many resources for homeschooling and unschooling can be found online or in some libraries.

## Students: Their Options

Students currently held in the government school system can take steps toward personal liberation. Each individual should decide what course is best for himself or herself. One's conscience is more important than doctrine in pursuing life.



afford other options are forced by the state to utilize the state institutions, regardless of what may be in their best interests. The state has forced them to pay for its programs and compulsory attendance forces people to use them.

Private schools in a statist environment will always be influenced by politics. Regulations concerning attendance, curriculum, and testing are obvious state intrusions that impact the operation of private schools. The added expense of private schools often reinforces the sense of hierarchy that government and the regulated economy establish.

In addition to direct controls, government also exercises indirect control of education through economic domination. The economy that schools exist in and prepare students for is heavily influenced by government action.

State control of the economy puts students in a disadvantaged position. Business regulations and the socialization of costs through government action make the economy more rigid and less open to competition. This gives established businesses an advantage over workers. When there is less competition for the labor of workers, the demand for their labor drops. Not only do workers end up getting paid less, but the economic opportunities for young adults are greatly diminished. This increases their dependence on the school system even when attendance is not officially compulsory.

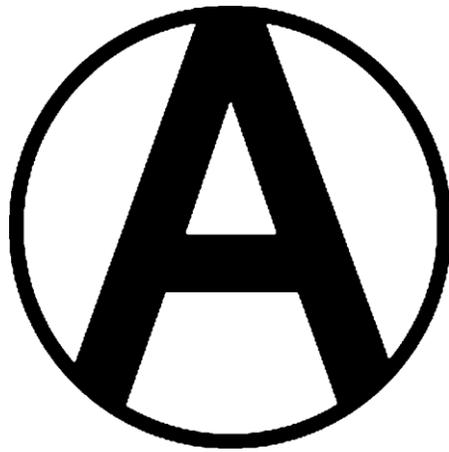
Government control of the school system increases political control of the population. It is neither a necessary condition for learning nor a healthy contribution. In many ways it is the very foundation of the modern managerial state.

## Anarchy: The Solution

The problems created by statehood and authority can only be solved by ending statehood and authority. Anarchism presents solutions.

In a freed market (not the existing state-capitalist economy), all voluntary human action is free to create whatever solutions are desired. Education is valuable, and valuable things are supplied whenever possible.

Learning is necessary for life to work smoothly today and more smoothly tomorrow. Without the passing of knowledge there can be no innovation. Innovation is valued because new ideas and products can improve life. A culture that values innovation will always demand quality education. Therefore a supply will always be created as long as sufficient resources are available. When educational resources are not inefficiently monopolized through authoritarian privilege, free people will be able to teach and learn more productively and enjoyably.



The internet's importance to the spread of information cannot be underestimated. Counter-establishment education can integrate online learning with personal discussion, or even take place primarily online. Increasing the accessibility of secure online communication could be important to countering authoritarian action.(10)

School authoritarianism can sometimes be stalled by attending school board meetings and working with local media to expose the worst offenders. But moral and strategic concerns must always be considered.

Breaking the state's hold on education requires that the authoritarianism of the schools be rejected in favor of voluntary solutions.



***Agora!  
Anarchy!  
Action!***

Counter-establishment economics (counter-economics for short) is “the study and/or practice of all peaceful human action which is forbidden by the State.”(8) Counter-economics encourages personal liberation and profit while undermining state control. It can break barriers to teen economic and social independence. By working for themselves, trading risk for profit outside of the state-managed economy, teens will learn valuable lessons while liberating themselves. Alternative education can also operate on a counter-economic, underground basis.

The concept of mutual aid is important in anarchist thought. It can be simply described as people voluntarily assisting each other for mutual gain. This can be manifested in former school students trading books, exchanging lessons for labor, or friends helping each other thrive against the forces of school and state.

The state enforces educational inequalities along economic class lines, often coinciding with racial divisions. Counter-establishment education seeks revolutionary empowerment of individuals across all social divisions. People in lower income neighborhoods can use counter-economics and mutual aid to improve the quality of local education and life in general. Those in better financial situations can help them through volunteerism and the distribution of computers, books, and other learning materials.(9)

Anarchism promotes voluntary organization instead of authoritarian establishments. For voluntary communities to function, the individuals within them would have to perceive that they are justly benefiting from their involvement. They would likely have a greater stake in the community than they would today, so they would be better motivated to improve their community, including by contributing to education.

Some claim that anarchy means chaos, but examining anarchy versus other forms of political organization proves otherwise. Anarchism not only affirms individual liberty, but it also removes incentives to treat others unjustly. In all statist ideologies, government (the actual source of most injustice) is considered the one supreme decider of what is just, and the one enforcer to which all must yield.



In anarchy, anything that does not aggress against another person would be allowed, and aggression could be countered in a multiplicity of ways. The severing of political influence from dispute resolution encourages more fair and just solutions. For vastly more detailed explanations of anarchism and libertarian thought, see the Alliance of the Libertarian Left website ([all-left.net](http://all-left.net)).

## Counter-Establishment Education: Empowering Individuals, Not Authority

Because government is the source of the problem, the solution cannot ultimately come through government. Changes must be made by individuals working outside of official channels. Establishment education can best be countered when people build anarchist alternatives, and make it easy for individuals to get involved in them.

People cannot wait for government to put them in charge of their own education. Alternative spaces for teaching, publishing, book distribution, and information sharing should be created and made accessible. Direct teaching, radical literature, and alternative media all have their places in anti-authoritarian education.

Parents can look into homeschooling and unschooling. Lessons can be tailored for the development of individual children's qualities. Homeschooling families often network with other homeschoolers in their region. This increases social interaction and allows parents to teach different lessons depending on their specialties. When such options are not available, counter-establishment educators can create them.

Authoritarian methods of education ought to be avoided. Voluntaryism, discussion, participation, and openness should be encouraged. Lessons could be democratically run or taught by contract. Classes could be structured as meetings of self-teachers to discuss and clarify. Because education would operate on choice, countless teaching styles could be explored and kept or discarded as desired.

