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The Red Lobster Declaration

**A Manifesto for School & Teacher Liberation
A Call to bring about Educational Humanism in a
Post-Managerial Age**

Red Lobster Group (collective authorship)

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V. Call to Fellowship

Let us work together to liberate ourselves, our schools, and our students. Let us stand against the false values of our age by leading vocational lives that testify to our love of truth over comfort. Ultimately, let us work for the greater liberation and harmony of our world. Schools are the temples of cultural renewal, and must be reinvigorated in purpose and spirit from their current profanation. Let us raise the teacher to the prophetic potential desperately needed in our world.

We make this commitment in solidarity not to restore the old world, but to author the next.

learning, cultural gatherings, and community-led teaching. Schools must be centers of democratic deliberation and shared intellectual life, serving not merely the young, but the whole community. Such porousness keeps education rooted in lived social reality and collective inquiry, cultivating civic agency, political responsibility, and ethical solidarity through direct practice.

14. We are accountable to love

Love is the root of justice, commitment to human dignity, liberation of the oppressed, and flourishing of all. Learning is an enterprise that must be undertaken in and out of love.

15. The torch must be passed

We cultivate successors who will carry on the fire of our calling, both in schools of tomorrow and to the world as its citizens.

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students and the broader community. Teacher leadership is meant to protect our vocation and covenant to one another without any end of power for its sake.

Though school government systems and practices will change to be responsive to each community's needs and contexts, we recognize that we protect and insist upon appropriate and expansive realms of student autonomy and governance within our school community. We also recognize that a horizontal power structure with appropriately demarcated realms of authority and autonomy in accordance with the roles of each member community within the school is ideal. Our insistence on teacher autonomy and fully democratic governance structures for the faculty is a significant step toward modelling good governance, turning away teaching members who seek power over others, and to prevent the perpetuation of dominance-over-others as a master value taught to students. We reject both bureaucratic domination and pedagogical authoritarianism as betrayals of the educational calling.

13. Schools and communities are porous

Schools are part of their larger communities, belong to those communities, and serve as loci of learning and community events. In most circumstances, we find it illegitimate to close off the campus to its broader community, and it is equally inappropriate to confine school learning to the campus.⁵ The exchange between school and the broader community must be constant and meaningful for real-world education to be successful. Not only should students and teachers regularly engage in learning beyond the campus, but our schools should function as civic commons with spaces for community classes, public lectures, collective study, night

⁵ n.b. We recognize the monastic model as a legitimate form of school. We also see it as a slim minority within the broad range of schools that would emerge in the post-managerial liberated age.

place any appointed leaders under accountable control of the teachers at large, and include a fully democratic process for decision-making.

Teacher body authority flows outward not downward, fostering responsibility, trust, and shared ownership in the wider school and outside community. Teacher leadership models and facilitates paths for students to grow into freedom rather than obedience, wisdom rather than compliance, and dignity rather than submission. Our schools are led by teachers not because students lack dignity or agency, but because education requires asymmetrical responsibility in temporal continuity and custodianship of intellectual traditions.⁴

12. We cannot replace one tyranny with another

While teacher sovereignty at the heart of school governance is essential to our cause, we recognize the illegitimacy of establishing a new hierarchy of top-down authority over

⁴ Some early experiments in student-governed schools reveal the persistent structural limits. For example, in the medieval University of Bologna students exercised direct control over hiring, pay, and discipline of professors, producing instability, intellectual decline, and quickly to the emergence of a proto-managerial bureaucratic administration; by contrast, the teacher-governed University of Paris sustained stronger scholarly continuity and intellectual autonomy for a longer run. See Alan Cobban, *The Medieval Universities: Their Development and Organization* (London: Methuen, 1975) and *A History of the University in Europe*, Vol. 1., Walter Rüegg, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). For modern examples: Summerhill is often cited as a student-run school; in fact, it preserves clear pedagogical authority for teachers, with student governance limited primarily to communal norms rather than curriculum or academic direction. Sudbury Valley School approaches full student governance with localized success, yet depends on highly favorable and select cultural conditions, and the faculty there recognize its model works for some children, in some contexts, not as a universal educational structure. Where such models work, they are not counter to our purpose, and we expect that the variety of community-responsive schools under teacher stewardship will present varying degrees of student democratic input.

This document was a collective project setting forth our philosophy and aims for horizontal school governance under community control. Our group movement is called the Red Lobster movement; and now spans four countries across two continents. At the time of drafting this document there were only four countries with Red Lobster groups, and an online community, all of which contributed to the document. The core Red Lobster group started as a meeting of teachers at a school in Madrid, growing out of that school's "Humanities Coalition." The coalition's mission was to build a network supporting various humanities initiatives through voluntary direct teacher creation and implementation. In the 24–25 year the group shifted away from a humanities-only focus to become a teacher's society dedicated to bringing about larger change in our school. This is also when we changed the name to "Red Lobsters" in reference to an event that was emblematic of the top-down managerial control that was antithetical to our grassroots teacher innovation. In the 23–24 school year, our school had tasked the faculty and teachers with creating house names for a Winter Carnival event and ongoing competition. We let our students run this, practice the democratic process, and have some fun. One of the house names chosen by a student group was the "Red Lobsters." In a subsequent faculty meeting the administration overruled the students' decisions and admonished us for not taking the task seriously enough. Their objection was that the "lobster" was not dignified enough, so they proceeded to rename the house with their choice (the Red Stags). Though the

incident is minor in its larger impact, the need for absolute control that it illustrates so perfectly encapsulates the problems of managerial overreach we oppose, that we renamed our teachers' group in honor of that fallen house. As the same need to control quickly extended over many other more impactful parts of curriculum, school life, and teacher/student autonomy, this name change also marked our shift to becoming a more underground group with a mission of supporting bottom-up innovation around the barriers of managerial control and a goal of eventual teacher and community horizontal governance of the school. We extended to an international underground movement in the 25–26 school year; and have been distributing the declaration since March 2026, in its current form, on online education fora, discord servers, podcast episodes, and good old fashioned colleague to colleague networking.

* * * * *

“I have thoroughly tried school-keeping, and found that my expenses were in proportion, or rather out of proportion, to my income, for I was obliged to dress and train, not to say think and believe, accordingly, and I lost my time into that bargain. As I did not teach for the good of my fellow-men, but simply for a livelihood, this was a failure.”

— Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (1854)

“Education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it.”

— Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future* (1961)

“The classroom remains the most radical space of possibility in the academy.”

— bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress* (1994)

10. Schools must be independent

Every school is rooted in its social and ecological place and responsive to its community. Every school is the bringing of life to its community's intellectual spirit. Schools should encourage exchange, build friendships, and formalize leagues with other schools, but the character, governance, and culture is always unique to each school. We reject school chains, widely shared standardized curricula, and constraining models on schools from states and accreditation agencies.

11. Schools must be stewarded by their teachers

Teachers are entrusted with carrying the mission and moral purpose of schools. As our vocation leads us to covenant in answering the calling at the heart of the institution's *telos*, we hold the responsibility of stewardship and the right of sovereignty in our educational line and profession. Leading a school is not through the rule of domination, but through faithfully serving its shared pursuit of truth, wisdom, and flourishing. This is not to be taken to mean in any way that teachers stand above students, families, or communities, nor that they may exercise authority through control or coercion. Rather, teachers are accountable first to the vocation of education itself and to the living communities we serve.

Schools therefore must be guided and governed by teachers in all major matters of institutional life. This does not exclude fully administrative positions, but these positions will be under the authority of teachers and tasked with carrying out their will. The sovereignty of the teachers' body carries authority over all major aspects of school life, including ultimate authority over school finances, admissions, school policy, curriculum design, hiring, et cetera. The governing structure will change from school to school, but it must protect teacher autonomy, allow all teachers access to information for governing decisions,

must be allowed to bring their whole, uninhibited selves to that project. Teachers are not to be made to fit prescribed practices or standards, but are creators of the educational experience and the school's practices are shaped by their differences, accommodating them and giving them room to grow and develop.

7. Inquiry must remain dangerous to current power structures

Education must challenge power; this freedom for critique and dissent is essential in the search for truth. The radical promise of education is to offer the sight, tools, and wisdom to transform our world for the better while respecting its many lineages and heritages.

8. Solidarity, not competition

We build alliances across borders, languages, and communities. We refuse the logic of competition against one another, and the values of advancing by consent to the rules of the system rather than the constant work of progress through transforming our systems. We reject the false merit of compliance.

9. Schools must nurture imagination and courage in addition to concepts and knowledge

Justice requires the capacity to envision a world that does not yet exist. As Hannah Arendt has said, “[e]ducation is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it and by the same token save it from that ruin which, except for renewal, except for the coming of the new and young, would be inevitable.”³

³ Hannah Arendt, “The Crisis in Education” in *Between Past and Future* (New York: Penguin, 1961).

“We must destroy that which is dying, because it does not die by itself [...] The old world is dying, but a new world is being born. It generates inspiration from the chaos that beats upon us all [...] The old world is dying so that the new world will be born with less sacrifice and agony on the living.”

— Carlos Bulosan, *America is in the Heart* (1943)

* * * * *

Introduction

This manifesto is a call to take our time seriously, and in taking stock of both the reality of institutions that run education and the creative opportunities that catastrophic moments open for us, to find solidarity in bringing revolutionary change to the institution of school.

The root of much of our current predicament is institutional idolatry which breeds complacency and cowardice where new realities are mandated. If we cannot get past the feeling of inevitability and belief in the “naturalness” of our inherited structures, narratives, and institutional forms, then we are doomed to exist bound by the very forces that have foreclosed our imaginations and limited our power. This is important in all institutions, and ever more important in catastrophic times if we want to improve both freedom and institutional quality. It is also the responsibility of *every* citizen not to be merely concerned about this in the abstract, but to work for justice and transformation at the proximate meeting point with institutions and power structures. In short, it is our civic and vocational duty in one. It is essential we not get lost trying to substantiate the dissipating mirages in our desert of the real itself: policies mistaken for necessity, systems confused for reality, and constraints internalized as common sense. Surely, clinging to such mirages brings comfort to some, while it brings harm to our society and our collective well-being. To see past them is not just some intellectual exercise, but an act of liberation, the key to recovering our capacity to imagine otherwise, to perceive that the limits imposed upon us are simulations sustained by habit, fear, and bureaucratic inertia rather than by any true necessity.

5. Schools must be sites of resonant world-relation

Education must cultivate living, responsive relationships between teachers, students, and the world itself. Resonance cannot be produced instrumentally, it requires *a stance toward the world*.² Yet, the current managerial school model is incapable of relinquishing its need for control that, in its best moments, attempts to simulate or manufacture engagement, but in doing so suffocates the very conditions from which resonance emerges. Structurally, current schooling often denies the conditions for resonance through constant evaluation, instrumental goals, efficiency logic, bureaucratic surveillance, and standardized curricula.

Schools must instead cultivate axes of resonance as spaces in which meaningful encounter, dialogue, transformation, and unpredictability remain possible. Rather than optimizing outputs, schools must open pathways of relation. Resonance is not a method or technique, but a lived ethical orientation toward reality, grounded in wonder, responsibility, and mutual transformation.

Resonance requires sustained contact with the “other,” recognized in its inherent dignity and worth. Teachers and students must meet one another as interlocutors and co-creators of knowledge, each bearing understanding, insight, and wisdom. Every participant shares roles of student and teacher, and in living a journey of discovery, self-transformation, and world-renewal.

6. Teachers are autonomous intellectuals

We hold authority rooted in knowledge, care, and ethical responsibility. We respect the right of teachers to develop, refine, and implement their own pedagogies, interests, and philosophies. Teachers bring life and character to the school, and they

² Hartmut Rosa

as such schools may not attempt to monopolize the education of an individual or a society.

Not all learners, nor all students, need to belong to a school community to be properly engaged in their education. Currently, only a minority of students in school are best-suited to undertake their education in the school to which they belong. Furthermore, many learners and students are not best-suited to undertake their education in schools at all.

As well, the current prevailing view of education is as a child, adolescent, and young adult undertaking. This is also wrong, and schools must be amongst the providers of education to community members of all ages and expand the contexts in which we undertake education and take on students.

In general, we have an overarching agreement with Illich¹ that the educational landscape of a healthy society must be liberalized to include many non-school communities and paths to legitimately honored education, must allow choice, and must be open to learners of all ages and not only through adolescence. Additionally, families, friends, community groups, and communities themselves all carry a responsibility toward fulfilling the education of their members, and education is not something to be sequestered to the domain of select formal institutions alone. Amongst this rich educational ecosystem, schools in a variety of forms will serve but one (non-compulsory) role.

4. Learning is communal, relational, and embodied

Learning cannot be reduced to consumption, automation, or isolation. Teachers and students constantly undertake learning as self and communal growth. The process requires active engagement, and the product is a joint effort and a common good. Learning is not mere practice or simulation for later life, but it is real, relevant, and immediately applicable.

¹ Ivan Illich, *Deschooling Society*

If we read our institutions as contingent rather than permanent, constructed rather than natural, then new possibilities that are more humane, resonant, and just become possible. If we see our institutions for what they are, then we can take our work in (and on) them seriously. Institutions are never neutral, but they are never fixed. It is our job to constantly reform and redirect them in service of *the good*, and it is our blinding idolatry of them that most prevents us from doing so. Any step back makes it clear that institutions themselves are never our Pole Star. They must instead shift to meet what truly guides us and what ultimately matters.

What this manifesto proposes for the Pole Star of education is that the currently existing model of schools must be wrested from managerial and state control in order to be brought to life once again. While we understand the view that we should be dismantling schools altogether, we think that schools are important institutions that need to be reëmpowered through a return to teacher and community control and greater creative autonomy and variance. However, we fully agree with moving away from school monopoly on formal education and away from compulsory schooling. What the manifesto proposes is just the first step in a larger education revolution which frees education from corporate, managerial, and state control. We agree with the spirit of Ivan Illich's *Deschooling Society* (1971), and believe that when those who have made education their vocation and guiding Pole Star take ownership over the institutions of education that schools will no longer be centered as *the* educational model, but will remain as one institution within a broader, more organic and community-tied, educational ecosystem.

We see the place for work in the hedges, from the historic Irish rebel hedge schools' break from the dominant institution to building and working within hedges inside of our existing schools. Yet, work in the hedges is not a solution. The goal is not the margins, but institution shaping through more just

governance. A current growing strain of post-liberal thinking now prescribes retreat to the margins, creating alternative communities and institutions while abandoning the possibility of a shared civic order. While the work of justice and creativity starts on the margins, it should always aim for institutional control and not to stay marginal. For educators, this means organizing collectively and acting with professional solidarity. Teachers must develop the capacity to speak and act together, to make principled demands, and to insist upon meaningful participation in the governance of their schools. Professional associations, unions, and teacher-led councils remain among the most powerful instruments for achieving this aim. Without such organization, the most thoughtful reforms risk remaining temporary or symbolic.

This manifesto is therefore an invitation to action. The renewal of education will not come from distant reform initiatives. It must arise from educators and communities willing to claim responsibility for their institutions. As Frederick Douglass reminded us, power concedes nothing without a demand.¹ If schools are to serve human flourishing rather than bureaucratic systems, teachers and communities must be prepared to make such demands — and they must be prepared to organize together to achieve them.

— The Red Lobster Teachers’ Group
Madrid
Luxembourg
Vermont
and globally, online
March, 2026

* * * * *

¹ see his speech on West India Emancipation (1857)

IV. Principles that Bind Us

1. Education is a public and collective good

Schools may never be a private commodity or tool of extraction. While we believe that private schools have a right to exist, that right, as with any school, is in its ability to bring something new and unique into the world of education that emanates from its members and their shared quest to find truth and shape meaning. Schools that buy corporate curricula, work for profit, or focus on the competitive advantage or narrow good of their individual students are obscene and have forfeited their justification to be counted as “schools.”

2. Education is a human act

Education is a natural act, a coöperative act, and a caring act. Education is found in the process of collaboration. Education does not require data management, technological platforms, nor standardized grading schemes, and the more natural and organic the process is kept, the more meaningful it is. Education is an act which perpetually improves its participants and humanity overall.

3. Education is larger than school

Schools are one particular community and institution of education, and make up a small proportion of education both for society overall and in the lives of those in schools (teachers and students). Education is the higher mission of schools, and

carry the responsibility of careful and honest selection of their peer-teaching fellows and students.

7. Prepare for continuity underground if needed

If institutions collapse or are captured beyond the possibility of liberation, we will keep alive our radical line wherever free minds gather, our “schools.”

Preamble

We, teachers bound by our calling to preserve and advance the flame of open inquiry, the light that has guided our human journey, seek mutual aid and fellowship in this moment of catastrophe. The institutions we have served, often too obediently, stand fully captured by the managerial class,¹ capitalist corporate markets, and a techno-politico values system that sees teachers as disposable and interchangeable employees and places students simultaneously as customers and individual competitors against one another in a gamified world of managerial meritocracy.

Teachers have been permissive in bringing about the demise of a human-centered education system and raising a corporate competitive credentialist model in its place. After all, we have sacrificed the human act of focusing on inquiry and communal knowledge building to appease state curricular requirements, to meet imposed standards, to focus on prescribed skills and standards over the development of enriched selves. We have allowed our freedom to be curtailed by national government control of our curriculum, or handed it to corporations selling homogenized requirements and exams, or ceded over autonomy as directors of learning to a managerial class of administrators within our schools who claim authority over our classrooms. We have agreed to take on administrative and data management responsibilities that go beyond and often against our educational focus, we have al-

¹ By “managerial class,” we refer to the administrative strata that govern institutions through metrics, compliance systems, and bureaucratic oversight rather than participation in the substantive work of education.

lowed ourselves to be burdened with additional non-teaching obligations and misplaced students,² and we essentially now accept our position as one subordinate to the managerial class of state bureaucrats and school administrators. Teachers have lost true solidarity with a mission to advance our calling — for where were the unions when it was time to refuse to implement the data and testing schemes of No Child Left Behind, or to refuse to teach the prescribed national curriculum of states around the world, or to refuse to teach the competitive exam score-centric curricula sold by corporations that build business off of education? We have participated in our own demise and the propagation of competitive individualistic market values in society, if not through our words then through the lessons of our actions, for at best we have mistaken compliance for professionalism, utility for purpose, and credentials for learning. We have broken our solidarity with one another, our covenant with truth and higher ideals that we seek to bring to our societies, and our calling to the students who seek

² This is not to say that not all children can be educated, but that teachers have given up their say on what students are appropriately placed in their classrooms or school. It is to say that diversity of options is appropriate, and when we abdicate our selective voice, schools have the incentive through state or capitalist (often mixed) incentives to say all students can be taken into one model, that more selective or advanced learning cannot be chosen by adequacy or the real input and interest of a student that would recommend readiness to gain and offer value to the community. The burden is then often left to teachers to work out in its additional consequences of having to deal with significant behavioral or intellectual inadequacies from some that detract from the community of learning for all, and often to have to justify lower marks for the inadequate student, which also usually results in additional work for differentiation that would be unnecessary if diversity and difference in educational models and classrooms were actually respected, or simply inflate the grades of the unprepared. It is also to say that academic schools need not be the norm, and are, almost certainly, inappropriate for many of the youth who have a right to some form of education. Our manifesto remains focused on schools that advance intellectual and self growth, and it is uninterested in how the state fulfills its obligation to educate the youth who do not fit this model and deserve different institutions.

over all others in our schools, and work to make it the living institution of our schools at large. While we pledge solidarity with one another across schools, societies, and countries, we recognize that every school community requires and auto-constitutes its own and the binding agreements that give its community shape must be unique and authentic to that group.

4. Rebuild schools in our image

We believe that schools are communities of learning where the teacher scholars, bound in intellectual friendship, work to lead investigations of the world, the good life, and the human condition. Our schools set and build such a community, and are auto-justified in their purpose from their communal pursuits of truth, by sharing traditions and pushing them forward, and by striving for excellence, honesty, and self-development in all members. Given the *telos* of the school, it must be under the control and authority of wise and capable teachers. We will work together in founding new schools and taking control of those existing for this purpose.

5. Rebuild intellectual solidarity

We will no longer be isolated employees, but a fellowship thinking, acting, and risking together in the sacredness of our calling to preserve and progress the intellectual tradition for our various and global societies.

6. Renew the communal purpose of learning

Schools must once again be places where human beings gather together to ask: *How shall we live? What must we change? Who must we become?* Schools' functions are to put into practice the shared pursuit of knowledge, truth, and wisdom. As each school will do this in different ways, they

prophetic vision and care for our calling. When we reach critical numbers within a school, we will work together to disrupt the managerial system and replace it with democratic systems fully under teacher control.⁵

2. Refuse complicity with corporations and state control

We refuse to enact an education limited by the designs of corporations or governmental control that dampen our missions, are not responsive to our communities, or promote competitive individualistic values. We will support one another in refusing to teach curricula that are not designed, implemented, and fluid within the community. We will support one another to teach from passion, with relevance, and for transformation. We will support one another to hold to our highest standards and values, and not to compromise them in the face of requests from outside of the school community.

3. Organize together

We recognize one another, and will craft local covenants to bind us in communal work. We will craft constitutions, policies, and visions that guide us, bind us, and respect our calling as autonomous and diverse equals in a shared mission. We will hold ourselves accountable to this organic institution

⁵ We reject any objections that this transformation of schools cannot be implemented until a thoroughly set tenable new system of teacher control is presented. The nature of reality, of every revolution against a decadent and dead system that clings stubbornly to its carcass of an order, is that power is taken as a new order comes into being. Indeed, the current managerial model is one of discovery, experimentation, and formation on the ground to ever increase its own control and in service of its values being more firmly cemented and upheld over free teaching and learning. We further and emphatically reject that there exists, or should exist, any standard model of teacher-run school governance, and we expect and require that every individual school form its own model only in covenant and responsiveness to its own community of scholars that form their schools.

the power to transform themselves and their world through knowledge and learning. We have betrayed humanity and sold the birthright of our lineage for *nothing*, not even a mess of potage.

Where is the teacher today working freely and in good conscience for liberation, transformation, and the living act of advancing human knowledge and well-being who feels at home in schools? Where is the teacher who works *from* and *for* love of the world with the power of knowledge and open-inquiry who feels uninhibited by the school? Where is the teacher or group of teachers whose creative output and innovation finds resonance and support, rather than oppression and coöptation, by the power holders and internal institutions of a school?

We now find ourselves in institutions where efficiency is hailed as a chief virtue, where “community” is reduced to vacuous branding, where schools can neither find a *telos* in their own right nor any original voice.

Yet, we know what is the power and promise of our work as teachers. We know that we are best entrusted with the progress of our calling, and that it cannot be forces other than those of care for knowledge and learning for its wise application to advance universal flourishing that continue to take control of our schools.

In this crisis lies the possibility of a turn, not a return to what was or a hope that the dominant managerial culture will save us, but of renewal in our commitment to one another and our vocation. We can once again assert that education is a human good, not a business nor a data-driven field. We can make schools meet their promise of being collective, emancipatory, defiant of domination, and faithful to love and to truth.

It is our duty to resist obsolescence under managerial capture, restore solidarity, and build schools that can survive a possible looming dark age of climate disaster, economic and rights inequality, capitalist supremacy, and political authori-

tarianism, and to carry within it the spark that can ignite a renaissance against the most oppressive of forces.

the nation-state, and our mission and calling is to a higher and more permanent value than that of the political state. Our lineage gives us the responsibility and the right to lead each school as an independent educational community. We look not to the allure of some previous condition, but always to advance our calling in our day and age. We are inspired by and share the humanist belief that “[the school] should be an instrument for the development of the person, promoting freedom, creativity, and the exploration of knowledge. The intelligent use of the scientific method for human welfare requires continuous innovation and experimentation in education.”⁴ And we would add to the scientific method, all fields and interests known to our species and the discovery of others yet unstudied, always applied to honest reassessment and transformation of ourselves and our world for the purpose of self, social, and ecological flourishing.

While we are in good company, the task of creating schools is our job and must be undertaken by us, not from without, not by permission, not through conformity.

Thus our duty is a duty to the larger world, and one part of a larger mission for progress, freedom, and mutual flourishing.

In this, we see our duty as:

1. Resist the managerial order

We refuse to act as instruments of domination, standardization, and training-for-obedience. We support one another in non-compliance with a managerial system and its values. We will refuse to call or follow any member of the school as a leader other than the teachers who are leading through their work, inspiration, and innovation. The purported leaders who act through control, we will openly call “managers,” reserving the term and respect “leader” for our teachers who lead with

⁴ Paul Kurtz and Edwin H. Wilson, *Humanist Manifesto II* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1973), §6 (“Education”).

change ourselves, our students, and our world is the value and justification by which we live and work.

We recognize that our mission is universal, and is intertwined with the cause of international human rights and general humanitarian convictions throughout the ages. International law recognizes that education belongs not to the state or the market, but to the sphere of human freedom itself. The *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (1966) requires states to “have respect for the liberty of parents [...] to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions.”² The *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (1966) goes further, affirming in Article 13 that parents and communities have the right to choose for their children schools other than those established by the public authorities and that individuals and bodies are free to establish and direct educational institutions, subject only to minimal public standards.³ Such provisions offer a human rights shield against the state’s attempt to monopolize meaning through schooling, but its protection relies on the actions of members willing to enact it on the ground. It is the duty of a teacher guild to push this promise to its state of maximal freedom, creating the best schools serving a mission of advancing a radical and democratic search for truth, knowledge, and the good life, and to impart the intellectual tools and wisdom in that pursuit from one generation to the next and between one culture and another. We assert that state control of schools has overstepped its moral and legal bounds and that schools, whether financed by the state or not, are autonomous and independent institutions within society. Our lineage pre-exists

² United Nations, *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, adopted December 16 1966, entered into force March 23 1976, U.N. Treaty Series, vol. 999, p. 171, Article 18(4).

³ United Nations, *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, adopted December 16 1966, entered into force January 3 1976, U.N. Treaty Series, vol. 993, p. 3, Articles 13(3)–(4).

I. The Historic Rise of the Managerial Class and the Loss of Educational Autonomy

Education began as a free and liberating human act, and everywhere it is truly practiced that is how it remains. As such it is a danger to the *status quo*. Resistant state, ideological, and market forces become an enemy of education when they gain the power to shape it to serve their ends. The dominant model of education across the globe today is the line started with the late-medieval schools and universities that sparked the renaissance which has set the stage for our modern world, and it is precisely this model that has been captured by our world’s managerial classes in an attempt to neuter its transformative possibilities.

Early universities were nodes of cosmopolitan fellowship undertaking experiment, debate, and translation in a basis of intellectual friendship across borders. Schools grew from guilds of scholars who understood learning as a shared human vocation. Authority was earned through inquiry, not compliance.

The covenant binding scholarly communities increasingly came under the function of the state. The emerging nation-state of the early modern period sought not only armies and treasuries but minds disciplined to its ideologies. The bureaucratization of education, a slow birth of the administrative

class, arose as states recognized the power of schooling to forge the citizens, laborers, and loyal subjects it sought.

In medieval Europe, the earliest universities, such as Bologna and Paris, were largely self-governing guilds of scholars free from state oversight or control.¹ Teachers and students negotiated the terms of their association; knowledge was a communal enterprise. With the rise of absolutist regimes in the 17th and 18th centuries, these institutions were gradually subordinated through the imposition of state oversight. The Prussian reforms under Wilhelm von Humboldt in the early 19th century, often celebrated for their humanistic ideals, also established the state's central role in defining the aims and structures of education.² The university became both a site of intellectual inquiry and an arm of the nation-state. Bureaucracy entered education through the language of "efficiency," "examination," and "curriculum."

The administrative class (the inspector, the minister, the managerial "headmaster") was born to translate the state's political will into educational form. In France, Napoleonic

¹ See Hastings Rashdall, *The Universities of Europe in the Middle Ages*, ed. F. M. Powicke and A. B. Emden (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936) and Walter Rüegg "Foreword" and "Themes" in Hilde de Ridder-Symoens, ed., *A History of the University in Europe, Volume I: Universities in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992): xix-34, and consider the liberal nature of the Grand Tour as constitutive of the early modern university education. Consider also this as a common theme from contrasting views, such as those of Paul F. Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy: Literacy and Learning, 1300–1600* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989) and Robert Black, *Humanism and Education in Medieval and Renaissance Italy: Tradition and Innovation in Latin Schools from the Twelfth to the Fifteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

² See Wilhelm von Humboldt, "On the Internal and External Organization of the Higher Scientific Institutions in Berlin" (1810), *Minerva: A Review of Science, Learning and Policy* 8, no. 2 (1970): 242–250, and Walter Rüegg, ed., *A History of the University in Europe, Volume III: Universities in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries (1800–1945)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

III. Duty, the Need to Survive, and Transformation

We reclaim the identity of the teacher as the free agent of the communal search for truth and collective liberation.

We agree with Paulo Freire that education is never neutral: it either functions as an instrument of domination or becomes the practice of freedom, through dialogue, critical consciousness, and collective humanization.¹ Our duty relies on recognizing the inability of neutrality, its implications, and what it demands then of our work given its impact on students and society.

We stand in ready judgement of our lineage. Our responsibility and calling is to the likes of Pythagoras, Euclid, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Epictetus, Confucius, Quintilian, Cicero, Vittorino da Feltre, Peter Abelard, Guarino da Verona, Juan Luis Vives, Tommaso Inghirami, Isotta Nogarola, Desiderius Erasmus, John Amos Comenius, Immanuel Kant, John Locke, Maria Montessori, Paulo Freire, Kurt Hahn, Hannah Arendt, Davi Kopenawa Yanomami, Malidoma Patrice Somé, Gregorio Condori Mamani, Robin Wall Kimmerer, Suzanne Simard, Vine Deloria Jr., *not in any way* to the managerial class that has currently taken control of schools. Teachers always work on the margins of state control and social norms, and we have a long set precedence of working outside of laws and institutional rules when needed. Our calling to preserve the intellectual traditions we carry, to bring its power to

¹ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (trans. Myra Bergman Ramos) (New York: Continuum, 1970).

trophe is what gives us the chance. At such times, teachers are a major prophetic voice in leading us to the new world both in vision and practically. We have done so before, most recently with the Renaissance, *studia humanitatis*, and the modern education seed, revamped with the Age of Enlightenment. It is now our time to stand up and lead for another major turn in human history; we have a calling and a duty at this exact point in time.

That duty cannot be fulfilled under a school system of managerial control. Thus, our liberation and the liberation of our schools is necessary if we are to have a role in making a turn for the good in this catastrophe.

To live in an age of catastrophe is a privilege for it demands of us a choice, and we now stand firmly within the valley of decision: Submit to the flood of erasure or stand and work in the fire of transformation.

reforms consolidated education under the authority of the *Université Impériale*, that centralized apparatus whose mission was not emancipation but uniformity.³ Teachers became civil servants, their loyalty owed at least as much to the state as to truth. Across the industrializing world, from Victorian England's Education Acts to the American Common School movement, the same logic prevailed: education was too important to be left to educators.⁴ The teacher was reduced from free intellectual to the bound implementer of state curricular goals.

Modern history connects movements and governments of very different ideological stances in a shared goal of expanding state control over education. The Young Turks sought to modernize the late Ottoman Empire through a unified national school system, reducing the pluralism and autonomy of free religious and communal schools to the control of one levelled, centralized administration.⁵ The same demand for uncompromising central control, taking education out of the hands of teachers and communities and making it a tool of the state is the pattern of China's Cultural Revolution reorganizing schools to enforce ideological conformity, and Mussolini's and Hitler's fascist governments subordinating education to the aims of the state. Justified under language of modernization, revolution, or national unity, modern reforms consistently narrowed educational plurality and replaced

³ François Furet, *The French Revolution, 1770–1814* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 292–95.

⁴ R. Freeman Butts and Lawrence A. Cremin, *A History of Education in American Culture* (New York: Holt, 1953), 120–167.

⁵ In 2016, Erdoğan continued this legacy, closing down the long-standing Kuleli Military High School founded in 1845, replacing all other military academies with a centralized system. Following the failed coup, he identified the danger to his government from independent institutions, especially independent schools that could stand up to his growing authoritarianism and consolidation of power. A decade later, his control of the state has only further cemented.

institutional independence with systems directed from the political center.⁶

By the mid-20th century, the managerial class had become the *de facto* sovereign of schooling.⁷ Its control extended not only over pay scales and schedules but over meaning itself, over what counted as knowledge, what was examinable, what was permitted in the classroom. When students and teachers

⁶ n.b. Today authoritarian prime minister Viktor Orbán has used Hungarian control of schools to push out independent, pluralistic education, like that seen in his crusade against Central European University and in bullying schools into becoming mouthpieces for his government through centralized control and a rigid curriculum focused on nationalistic ideology. Under his tenure educational quality in the country has drastically and continually declined, while the managerial apparatus of state and school administration has remained solidly in-tact, even strengthened. Similarly, authoritarian president Donald Trump promised to use accreditation as a “weapon” of the state against school independence, and in his second term has continually waged war against schools’ abilities to stand as independent institutions while expanding the role of the federal government over schools. See: “Academic Freedom in Jeopardy” in David Cadier, “Orbán’s Lawfare against Liberal Democracy in Hungary,” *Global Challenges*, no. 2 (2017), accessed March 9, 2026, <https://globalchallenges.ch/issue/2/orbans-lawfare-liberal-democracy-hungary/>, and Cory Turner, “Trump Signs Education Executive Actions Targeting Accreditation and Foreign Funding,” *NPR*, April 23, 2025, <https://www.npr.org/2025/04/23/nx-s1-5374365/trump-signs-education-executive-actions>

⁷ Consider that this fits the logic of necessary control to quell freedom for revolutionary thought that may lead to sedition or questioning of the sovereign’s ideologies (now ruling class) from Thomas Hobbes’s *Leviathan* (see II.30 and IV.46), and runs contrary to a liberal vision of education, like that developed by J.J. Rousseau in *Emile*. While modern schools craft statements that express commitments to liberating education, open-inquiry, and even pedagogy that is closer to Rousseau, all of that is either vacuous language or superficial dressing to look nice and market/sell its education as a consumer product, papering over a deeper, truer Hobbesian structure of control. class) from Thomas Hobbes’s *Leviathan* (see II.30 and IV.46), and runs contrary to a liberal vision of education, like that developed by J.J. Rousseau in *Emile*. While modern schools craft statements that express commitments to liberating education, open-inquiry, and even pedagogy that is closer to Rousseau, all of that is either

At the same time, recent AI education experiments show some promise at addressing the lagging school-for-all model through individualized instruction at scale and efficiency. It is important to note though that these models, while enticing to the market, are not schools. They are service platforms optimized for profit, surveillance, and ideological homogeneity. What values will their codes enforce? What questions will never be asked? Where will they cut-off or redirect free inquiry and radical dissent from the *status quo*? Even if such concerns are satisfactorily allayed, these are not schools, not the meeting place of diverse minds for a communal project of jointly exploring big questions, experimenting, and seeking to create new knowledge and discover truth together.

Simultaneously, authoritarian governance and corporate extraction converge. Managerial schooling grows more punitive, less democratic. Teachers exist as labor cost, tolerated only until replaceable.

As schools have become machines for speed, optimization, efficiency, and output, they are a system hurling itself to the brink for the sake of doubling down on society’s dominant values over humanity. The nihilism that is born in the thanatotic dash is not surprising, and the narratives of the dominant system as a saviour are more and more revealed hollow, though neither the system nor its managerial guardians can change course or seriously reimagine the role of schools for bringing to life new values for a new world.

Whether we are living through the turbulence of heavy crises, or entering full-on catastrophe, we are in a privileged position to bring about change. Catastrophes come from the convergence of neglected crises that burst through the background of history to confront us with a turning point.

We believe that catastrophe is the opening up of an order that has become too tightly bound and highly controlled, now discredited in its own contradictions and injustices. The radical voices stand ready at all times to improve our world, but catas-

Instead of confronting crises, our schools mask them in bureaucratic compassion. At best they nod to the increased stress and mental distress of today's youth without taking serious responsibility for having created this wellbeing crisis.² Rather than respecting diversity in communities' needs and interests, schools can only insist upon standard structures with increased measures for diversity and academic support that disproportionately add work to the teacher's load without seriously addressing the malaise or need of the students. Rather than justifying their existence with a turn towards quality education and wise innovation, schools can only point to corporate test score achievement, college admissions results, or a growing demand for showcase campus amenities and entertainment. Something must give way soon.

² In fact, schools have mostly treated this problem by implementing complicated grade inflation schemes that add work to teachers while trying desperately to maintain an appearance of the grade as having been earned. The managerial-run school is too unimaginative to offer education that does not treat scored attainment as currency. Ironically, these measures often reduce the quality of teaching and learning and they place more emphasis on grades and the necessity of high achievement, the message being that grades are such an important reflection of a student's worth that they need to be able to raise it. The focus of schools has, under this scheme, become more grade-conscious and more grade-focused, while the grades also come to mean less and to be poorer reflections of learning. For two examples that have heavily influenced the managerial class by appealing to its authority and necessity in these matters (over teachers, of course) attempting to salvage their bankrupt system through final raising of reflected score and credential outcomes for student consumers, read Ken O'Connor, *A Repair Kit for Grading: 15 Fixes for Broken Grades*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Pearson, 2011) and David L. Gleason, *At What Cost?: Defending Adolescent Development in Fiercely Competitive Schools* (New York: Developmental Empathy LLC, 2017). Also consider within the past decade the managerial-imposed misuse of concepts from Bloom, Benjamin S., et al. *Handbook on Formative and Summative Evaluation of Student Learning* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971), which itself was not needed in relation to the long tradition of good teaching which had already run on the valuable components of their model. In all cases, the books are targeted to managers, and condescending towards teachers and their ability to teach without imposition and managerial direction.

alike in 1968 France challenged that order, demanding that the university serve as a crucible for social and political transformation, the state's response symbolized the full ascendancy of the new prevailing managerial order. The French government decided that it would rather dismantle the University of Paris, one of the oldest centers of autonomous thought in Europe and the second oldest university in the world, rather than tolerate what its free-inquiry may inspire for social transformation.⁸ The government fragmented it into thirteen smaller institutions hoping to curb any future unity of intellectual and political force.⁹ The message was clear: autonomy in education is a threat to the managerial *status quo*.

This pattern repeated across the industrialized world. From McCarthy-era purges of radical educators in the United States to Thatcher's imposition of national curricula in Britain, the managerial impulse deepened.¹⁰ What came under the language of "accountability," "standards," and "outcomes,"¹¹ but the function was always the same: to regulate the unpredictable vitality of teaching, to domesticate the prophetic vocation of educators who might otherwise awaken transformation.

U.S. public schools of the 1960s saw the active movements for community control and teacher autonomy briefly

⁸ Julian Bourg, *From Revolution to Ethics: May 1968 and Contemporary French Thought* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), 45–68.

⁹ Jacques Donzelot, "The Invention of the University," in *Policing the Poor: Social Regulation and the New Governance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 33–36.

¹⁰ Ellen Schrecker, *No Ivory Tower: McCarthyism and the Universities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) and Stephen J. Ball, *Education Reform: A Critical and Post-Structural Approach* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1994), 32–47.

¹¹ n.b. all of these openly represent managerial values and its attempt to claim some objectivity for a constructed meritocratic justification of its order, underpinning competition and attainment that commodifies academic earning, not education.

positioned educators as democratic actors shaping schools as communities of intellectually informed social justice and local self-determination.¹² In response and self-protection, the state and managerial class solidified its hold over the growing active teacher control of schools and its radical implications for nurturing an active and informed democracy that could challenge the prevailing order in a generation to come. By the 1970s and 1980s, an accountability paradigm in which managerial and state oversight replaced teacher governance had come to dominate schools. This is especially true after the state and managerial-minded power seekers clung to the pro-management, anti-teacher infamous *A Nation at Risk* (1983) report that favored managerial control over schools, constrained teacher autonomy, and explicitly promoted standardized curricula and accountability measures that subjected educators and schools to market-style pressures and increased workloads, marking the full shift away from the democratic, community-centered vision of teachers as active agents of educational and social reform.¹³ The managerial empowering tools of standardized testing, value-added models, and performance evaluations reframed educational progress as a problem of “fixing teachers,” compelling them to embody dominant market values and commodify their labor within a narrowing, data-centered profession.¹⁴

Increased public and private funding to American universities has fed the explosive growth of administrative bureaucracies and managerial oversight structures. Over the past half-century, executive compensation and a bloated

¹² Dana Goldstein, *The Teacher Wars: A History of America’s Most Embattled Profession* (New York: Anchor Books, 2014), 133–163.

¹³ see National Commission on Excellence in Education, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, 1983).

¹⁴ Dana Goldstein, *The Teacher Wars: A History of America’s Most Embattled Profession* (New York: Anchor Books, 2014), 164–230.

II. Crisis and Catastrophe

We stand at the precipice of catastrophe.

The crises of the modern world — environmental, mental health, social justice, political, economic, and those of an impotent educational model left hollowed, pablumized, and spiritually vacuous through decades of managerial control and its mix of state and corporate complicity — may soon be coming home to roost. Multiple failures of our societies now lay clearly visible in the immediate future.

As Hartmut Rosa has argued, the modern crisis of education is not merely one of inequality or efficiency, but of *alienation*: the collapse of meaningful, resonant relationships between teachers, students, and the world itself.¹ Schools are failing our students, societies, and the larger world not because they are unjust or underfunded, but because they have become structurally incapable of sustaining living relationships to knowledge, truth, community, and purpose.

Rather than offering a bulwark against authoritarianism, the impotence to act with any autonomy, courage, or self-confidence against state or corporate interests makes schools the ready-laid highways for authoritarian implementation, when that time comes. At this time, rather than offering renewed and meaningful visions of *eudaimonia*, our schools can only insist upon utilitarian justifications of their functions under capitalistic individual competitiveness.

¹ For example, see Hartmut Rosa, *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity* (trans. Jonathan Trejo-Mathys) (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013) and Hartmut Rosa, *Resonance: A Sociology of Our Relationship to the World* (trans. James C. Wagner) (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019).

To reclaim education, we must see that our struggle is not just for better resources or humane conditions, but for sovereignty over the meaning and purpose of our work. The teacher's authority is not administrative but existential. It arises from the calling to name what matters in our shared life, to reveal the *real and substantive* through the curriculum, to guide the formation of selves capable of transforming the world. When teachers reclaim this calling, education ceases to be a branch of management and becomes an autonomous and necessary site of revolution and renewal.

managerial-class administration have dramatically outpaced both faculty hiring and student enrollment; meanwhile instructional spending as a proportion of university budgets has steadily declined.¹⁵ This managerial expansion has redirected institutional priorities toward compliance, branding, data surveillance, legal risk management, and marketing, further entrenching a controlling professional managerial caste that was increasingly detached from the intellectual and educational life of their schools.¹⁶ Across all levels of schooling, financial expansion under market logic has led to bureaucratic hypertrophy, displacing democratic governance and professional trust with managerial control, audit cultures, and managerial class self-preservation.¹⁷

Under the neoliberal marketization of education, schools became factories for credentials that are used to run a managerial world of compliance and uniform, safe advancement. Learning became an extractive economy. Teachers were rendered technicians; students, products; knowledge, a commodity. As Ivan Illich foresaw, institutionalized schooling, once

¹⁵ See Benjamin Ginsberg, *The Fall of the Faculty: The Rise of the All-Administrative University and Why It Matters* (Oxford University Press, 2011) and Donna Desrochers and Rita Kirshstein, *Labor Intensive or Labor Expensive? Changing Staffing and Compensation Patterns in Higher Education* (Delta Cost Project, 2014). Since 1975 American university managerial administrators increased by 369%, while full-time teaching faculty increased 175% and student enrollment 164%.

¹⁶ See Ronald Ehrenberg, *Tuition Rising: Why College Costs So Much* (Harvard University Press, 2002) and Robert Archibald & David Feldman, *Why Does College Cost So Much?* (Oxford University Press, 2011).

¹⁷ See Henry Giroux, *Neoliberalism's War on Higher Education* (Haymarket, 2014); Bill Readings, *The University in Ruins* (Harvard University Press, 1996); Sheila Slaughter and Gary Rhoades, *Academic Capitalism and the New Economy* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004); Diane Ravitch, *The Death and Life of the Great American School System* (Basic Books, 2010); Wayne Au, *Unequal by Design* (Routledge, 2009); David Hursh, *High-Stakes Testing and the Decline of Teaching and Learning* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2008); and Richard Ingersoll, *Who Controls Teachers' Work?* (Harvard University Press, 2003).

subordinated to bureaucratic and market logics, ceases to serve learning and instead becomes a system for the reproduction of obedience, dependency, and social control.¹⁸ A pretense of renewed school independence led to a more totalitarian control of the managerial class that ran schools as its administrators.¹⁹ The credentialist scheme entrenched an almost permanent control of schools by EdDs and EdMs, of managers who embodied dominant market values instead of educational leaders. This system of credentialed promotion selected for people who actually sought and claim to have found value in life through the tight constraints of capitalist-managerial advancement guarding the stability of the *status-quo*, or who were uncommitted enough to any higher values to so successfully play the game for so long that their bald cynicism leaves them incapable of dreaming or leading transformation by the time they rise to positions of influence.

To them, the free teacher, the free-thinker, the innovative creative forces within their schools are suspect, dangerous, a gad-fly to be contained, coöpted, or rid of. As the state demanded metrics for funding, corporate industry demanded uniformity and score-centric education, and managerial school administrators demanded dominance and data along with self-serving overprotectionism under the guise of safeguarding, equity, objectivity, and other invented values set to justify and strengthen their dominance over teachers.²⁰ Accrediting agen-

¹⁸ Ivan Illich, *Deschooling Society* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971).

¹⁹ Mark Fisher. *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2009).

²⁰ n.b. These goals come as fads, are spread universally and cannot be at the concern of the immediate community. The words are used in a customized meaning to take them away from their underlying virtues to act as a shield against criticism and defiance when merely used to push forth further managerial control for its own sake. For example, in 2024, teachers at Brewster Madrid were told by administrators that they were not allowed to discuss their pay with one another or new hires for the sake of “equity,” while this was in fact being used to make wildly unequal payments and pay

example, take the legacy of perhaps the greatest educational visionary of the twentieth century, Kurt Hahn. Hahn’s *Laws of Salem*, *Six Declines of Modern Youth* and *Four Solutions*, and inspired pedagogy that tied academics, place, service, and self-development have been bastardized, corporatized, packaged and sold in various programs like the United World Colleges, International Baccalaureate, Duke of Edinburgh’s Award, and Outward Bound to become constrained systems, credentialist, and part of commodity education. Compare Hahn’s work and language with the sterile corporatist wording, vision, and self-congratulatory nature of the Round Square network, which serves managerial and branding interest over an invigorated, living teaching tradition.

Whether through fear or exhaustion, teachers have consented to managerial overtake at almost every turn.²⁹ We adopted the tools and language of those who turned our schools into markets under the rubrics of standards, efficiency, and optimization. In doing so, we distanced ourselves from one another, surrendered autonomy, and justified every reduction of our calling in the name of pragmatism. We ceased seeing or defending what was sacred to our vocation, and so have lost what should have been a radical inheritance to become the mere and disposable employees of a managerial class.

²⁹ Or they have abandoned their schools, setting the Goliathan managerial values as insurmountable in their quest to be teachers worthy of our lineage. For a recent example, consider Jason Stanley’s principled departure from Yale, saying “I knew that if I stayed at Yale, there would be pressure not to bring the Trump administration’s wrath onto Yale. I knew that Yale would try to normalize the situation, escape being in the press, urge us to see the fascists as just politically different.” from Jason Stanley, “Fascism, Trump, and the History We’re Living Right Now,” *Mother Jones*, November 5 2025, <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2025/11/jason-stanley-fascism-trump-history/>. Also, read Paul Bloom, “Why Aren’t Professors Braver?: Fear and Self-Censorship in Academe,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, September 24 2025, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/why-arent-professors-braver>.

that decried the competitive efficiency-maximizing, self-commodification of modern market higher education, “Time Out or Burn Out for the Next Generation,” spoke to truth and was included for many years in Harvard’s admissions page all without decreasing Harvard’s continual contribution to the issue at the heart of that article.²⁶ The same can be said of the Athenian School’s “Turning Spoiled Kids into Citizens”²⁷ and the wonderful public writing output of Michael Roth while president of Wesleyan. An awareness of the need to change and offer something substantive becomes marketing over the market priorities of schools. We recognize as well that the three examples listed above are some of the best schools that come closest in living up to the values that we share, yet that they are still limited by managerial control and cannot escape its values as the dominant force and purpose of their institutions (only their managers have been better at allowing teachers to maintain quality and passion in their vocation, still with limits under management).²⁸ As a better

²⁶ The original article was published in the NYT: William Fitzsimmons, Marlyn E. McGrath, and Charles Ducey, “Time Out or Burn Out for the Next Generation,” *The New York Times*, December 6, 2000, <https://www.nytimes.com/2000/12/06/national/time-out-or-burn-out-for-the-next-generation.html>

²⁷ No longer available directly through the school; we can only assume so as not to offend the paying customer.

²⁸ Such systems gradually dehumanize all participants. A clear illustration comes in the widely scrutinized 2023 testimony of Claudine Gay before the U.S. House Committee on Education and the Workforce. Faced with simple moral questions, her answers took the form of cautious legalistic and evasive formulations rather than direct human judgments. This revealed the extent to which we expect our leaders to speak in legalistic and risk-managed language that avoids commitment and personal or institutional responsibility. As president of Harvard University, the most venerated school in the United States, Gay theoretically occupied the best position for offering clear and confident moral speech. Yet the institutional environment of contemporary school administrations strongly favors defensive, corporate-safe language, illustrating how systems of managerial governance, leaving her incapable of mustering the direct human speech that genuine education requires.

cies sought to impose their mark through a scheme that pushed schools to be more uniform in structure, concern, and ideology — to use the same language, produce the same branding statements (missions, visions, and definitions of high quality education). Corporations successfully pressured schools to buy their curricula, textbooks, and digital platforms or fear being left behind when performance data and satisfaction surveys come out (which were set as tools and metrics by the same managerial class). The managerial class has been able to reinforce its own power through increased non-teaching work designed mainly to justify the managerial class’s own existence. As a result, teachers’ work has become more and more distant from the core of teaching and learning, and the metrics offered for teacher quality are entirely ensconced within the values of the corporate managerial class.

In recent decades schools themselves have openly become assets for investment and market speculation. Premium K–12 institutions and international school chains are packaged, scaled, and sold on the capitalist market. What started as a local covenant between community and teacher is now

new hires on a lower scale. The growing trends that spread through the managerial world are often reactionary, self-protecting, and justify the existence while expanding the power of the managerial controlled school while limiting teacher power and autonomy. For example, the safe-guarding craze came out of the *Munn v. Hotchkiss School* case (2017) as well as the concern around recently exposed cases of misconduct at schools like St. Paul’s and JIS, but the reaction opened up new divisions and positions of managerial administration with more oversight over teachers, and created more work for teachers while limiting the options for learning and activities. In a correlate to our wider society, the controlling class appears to have a constant aim of control and discreet incidents that lend the justification for broadened control are soon forgotten as the system of control expands for its own sake. Take an analogous example from the U.S. passage of the Patriot Act and its permanence in expanding state control. In schools, the rapidity with which these logics of control spread across diverse contexts reveals an underpinning aim of advancing managerial control as its own end, and a whole cottage industry that exists around assisting that endeavor.

a product marketed to families and investors. Firms and private-equity consortia snatch up formerly-independent campuses, standardize branded curricula, and treat enrollment and margin projections like any other portfolio return. This is not an abstract tendency but an observable market. By way of one prominent example, Nord Anglia, a global operator of private and international schools, is a for-profit company that listed on the NYSE in 2014 and later returned to private ownership through buyouts and investor consortiums culminating in a multibillion-dollar acquisition by a group led by private-market investors and pension capital in 2025.²¹ By the end of 2025, Nord Anglia owns over 80 schools across the globe.²²

Whether overtly for-profit or not, corporations like GEMS, United World College, SEK, IE Universities, and QSI schools, as well as smaller chains, independent for-profit schools, and new break-in international chains like Brewster American Schools are run on market logic, standardization and branding over quality and teacher autonomy, and work to sell the promise of competitive advantage for their students to families who enrol. Even nominally non-profit schools are led to market value positions and decision-making.²³ Indeed the presence

²¹ For Nord Anglia's corporate history and recent transactions see: Nord Anglia Education, "History," *Nord Anglia Education*; Dominic Chopping, "Neuberger Berman Forms Consortium With EQT to Buy Nord Anglia Education in \$14.5 Billion Deal," *The Wall Street Journal*, October 21, 2024; "Sweden's EQT, others to take control of Nord Anglia for \$14.5 bln," *Reuters*, October 21, 2024; "EQT Consortium Completes Acquisition of Nord Anglia Education," EQT press release, March 20, 2025.

²² Nord Anglia Education, "Our Schools," accessed November 3 2025, <https://www.nordangliaeducation.com/our-schools>

²³ On the broader private-capital trend in international schooling, see coverage of private equity's activity in education and Nord Anglia's transformation under private capital: Financial Times reporting on private-market investment in international schools; EQT case studies on growth via private capital; and reporting on the 2024–25 consortium acquisition that situates the sector within pension and PE investment strategies. See: *Financial*

of respected non-profit schools alongside for-profit chains does not negate a broader trend: private capital, from private equity firms to sovereign and pension funds, has increasingly viewed premium schooling as an investible, scalable business. States see public school expenditure as an investment for which a profitable return is expected, mostly in an exercise to justify funding cuts. This capitalism laid-bare upon schools is especially concerning, as even the most classic form of capitalism outlined by Adam Smith demarcated education as one of the few institutions that was not properly susceptible to the market,²⁴ and even noted how market forces degraded the quality of teaching and learning.²⁵ The market logic is so pervasive that it is now near universally the case that teachers find themselves subject to some form of corporate governance, performance metrics, and profitability pressures that set the curricula, staffing, and institutional priorities.

The market hold on schools is so strong that even true voices are coöpted and commodified to become part of the image of the school's sellable brand without shifting its market-based goals and propagation of competitive individualistic values within the larger market or credential-for-managerial-advancement of our world. Consider that the famous article

Times, "Neuberger Berman-led consortium takes stake in EQT-backed private school operator," October 2024; EQT case materials on Nord Anglia growth. Take, by way of market/capitalist decision-making example, the 2025 dismissal of the head of school at the American School of Madrid, a nominally non-profit school. For independent schools, even those that have been the forerunners in liberation from corporate intrusion into their curricula, such as the Eight Schools Association, Sidwell Friends, Moses Brown, and many other top-tier New England prep schools, the market logic of competitively building and "selling" their showcase campuses, catering to family and student customer entitlement, and prioritizing entertainment to genuine education and the vocation of prophetic teachers and the rigors of building intellectual community.

²⁴ Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1981 [orig. 1776]), V.i.c.1.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, V.i.f.54–61.