

CULTURAL ATTACKS UPON THE FAMILY ...

THE REAL SOLUTION: HOW TO HELP OUR KIDS SUCCEED

by Chuck Colson; Monday, March 12, 2007

It's an argument that has gone on almost as long as we have had public schools: What makes children succeed in school — and what makes them fail?

In a recent New York Times column, David Brooks offers a big part of the answer: If kids have a chaotic home life, he writes, it is much harder for them to succeed in school.



Brooks mentions programs in which mature women visit mothers under stress to offer “the sort of cajoling and practical wisdom that in other times would have been delivered by grandmothers or elders.” If we want better students, Brooks concludes, the government ought to fund more of these programs. The next president, he suggested, could win on such a platform.

I admire David Brooks, but he is dead wrong on this. He is addressing symptoms, not the sickness: The sickness is broken and unformed families.

Instead of relying on a government program to fix families after they break, wouldn't it be better to keep families from breaking in the first place?

Wouldn't it be better to find ways to encourage parents to marry before having children, instead of telling them — as our cultural elites often do — that marriage does not matter?

Second, when it comes to families, government itself is often the problem, promoting policies destructive to families. For example, courts that force states to accept same-sex “marriage” are redefining true marriage out of existence. That's not good for kids.

And many studies have shown that kids do best in married, two-parent families. Yet some states now force adoption agencies to send kids into the homes of homosexual couples.

No-fault divorce laws allow one parent to abandon the family with impunity. Welfare programs provide support for moms so long as they do not get married to their child's father.

Even worse, our political leaders do not support programs that would mean the most to help kids — including kids from healthy families — who languish in bad public schools. If they really cared about kids, they would support school choice — allowing kids to move from failing public schools into private ones. Sometimes we forget that, often, the best solutions do not involve the government at all.

A story in the Wall Street Journal this week revealed that one 16-year-old South Carolina boy is not waiting for “the government.” Last summer, Rontrell Matthews walked into Capers Preparatory Christian Academy in a poor rural community with terrible public schools. Rontrell held out a check for \$32.86 — his first paycheck from his after-school job. If they would let him in, Rontrell promised, he would give them every paycheck from then on.

Rontrell — who is willing to literally work his way out of a bad public school — is now excelling at Capers. God bless him and the school that was willing to take him in.

The story made me wonder: What if more kids were willing to do this — to simply abandon bad public schools and work their way into good ones? So sure — let's help stressed-out moms form healthier attachments to their kids, as David Brooks proposes. But better for politicians to work to prevent problems from forming in the first place.

And we should celebrate when kids like Rontrell Matthews find their own solutions — solutions that show that individual ingenuity always trumps the best government program.