

ANALYSIS

Why shouldn't our schools,

By Rick Miller
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When you think of words or phrases to describe local schools, I'm curious if the expression, "the happiest place on Earth," comes to mind.

Maybe it does if you are discussing Disneyland. But would thinking about schools in such a way be too much of a stretch?

Schools evoke a great number of images when it comes to their purposes and missions. Some are good, some are bad. Some students do very well in school, some do average, and many — after a century and a half of public education — continue to struggle.

Some schools focus on a rigorous curriculum and pride

themselves on high academic standards. Others experiment yearly with new disciplinary programs, trying to maintain a focus on academics while struggling with student behaviors.

When you read the thousands of different mission statements schools define themselves by, it is unlikely you will find such words as "happy" or "fun" offered as descriptors. Why not? Shouldn't our schools be places of "happiness" and "fun," or should they be relegated to serious institutions where only an examination can effectively determine a child's future?

We can also explore this question from a different perspective. Why aren't our schools the happiest place for

Is the process of learning incompatible with happiness?

children?

They theoretically possess the three most basic and key elements for that ideal environment to exist. First, they are a place where kids get to be with their friends. Second, they are a place where children learn about the world, gain new knowledge and skills in order to dream and grow, and plan and prepare for the future. And third, they are a place where youth are surrounded by adults who care about them.

So, did someone decide our schools shouldn't be happy

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teachers, staff be happiest on Earth?

places? Is the process of learning incompatible with happiness? Most importantly, do we even think about the term happy when it comes to our schools?

Certainly, we have come to understand that happiness is also an expression of health, both physical and psychological. Children and adults who are happy perform better in school and at work, are absent less, are able to set and reach their goals, and achieve a greater sense of personal fulfillment in all aspects of their lives.

So the question remains, should we even place an emphasis on our schools to include "happy" as part of their missions?

When Walt Disney envisioned the "happiest place on

Earth," it was more than a marketing ploy. He first had to believe that he could create such a destination. He also had to find a way to make that assertion come to life.

Although there are many examples of why Disneyland and its sister properties sustain such a powerful expression, most people would agree much of it has to do with the people it hires. Disney learned that to create the "happiest place on Earth," he needed to find happy people to work there. He sought people who were secure in their own lives, maintained a sense of optimism, were fully engaged in what they do, easy with smiles, genuine, and able to create an environment around them conducive to success.

In other words, for our

schools to achieve the "happiest place on Earth," they need to first start with happy people. Not just teachers and administrators but all people who are part of the campus culture. Interestingly, it's also been discovered that happy people are hopeful people. Thus, creating learning institutions that are, indeed, a place to experience happiness and hopefulness for the future should be a top priority along with high academic standards in every one of this country's schools. After all, the very roots of this nation were founded on life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

Rick Miller is the founder of Kids at Hope and a faculty associate at ASU West. Contact him at rick@kidsathope.org.

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