

K-12 Education Doesn't Have to be this Difficult

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Public school district superintendent is the world's [most difficult unnecessary job](#), but as we should expect from the [roots](#) of the persistent low performance problem, every key job in our current school system is incredibly difficult. The vast majority of educators and education analysts seem to think that the difficulty is inherent in the task of imparting high value knowledge and skills to our school-age children. Of course I disagree. The unusual degree of difficulty reflected in the widespread disgust, complaints, and high turnover rates is only inherent in the public schooling 'business plan' to deliver a uniform product to a diverse clientele. That creates often insurmountable [ability grouping](#) and '[differentiated instruction](#)' challenges; in effect, multiple simultaneous lesson plans for a single classroom. It also creates demoralizing and often unresolvable conflict as parents complain about poor fits for their children, and from policymaker demands aimed at making the system come closer to being everything to everyone. The conflict arising from the mismatches yields debilitating attitudes like [teachers wishing for minimal parental involvement](#).

In *Education Week*'s "Program Preps New Superintendents for Pressures of District Leadership" [Corey Mitchell](#) reports that, "districts may face a shortage of qualified and willing candidates," which is incredible in light of [typical superintendent pay](#). While there has been some reduction in [turnover rates](#), Mitchell says that, "the position still tends to burn through leaders at rapid rates, especially in urban districts."

The Editor of a recent *Education Week* leadership series wonders if Public School Principal is an "[Impossible Job](#)," something that has yielded principal supervisors, another expensive job that is only necessary in the persistently low performing school system we have cobbled together over

time through the political process. Private schools are proof that principals can run schools that do not have to serve a uniform product to a diverse clientele without supervision, except from their customers. [Arianna Prothero](#)'s "Continuous Learning Key for Principals" describes "rapid turnover rate" circumstances that require training just for survival, but difficulty developing training that addresses the stressful challenges of making one size fit all.

Even at state-level education policymaking jobs, we see high and growing levels of stress and frustration. [State chiefs](#) now have "a turnover rate that rivals the chronically high churn among urban superintendents." Increasingly, "people had just had enough and decided to move on."

Indeed, as longtime insider [Jack Jennings](#) said, it's time to move "Reform from the Negative to the Positive." We need transformational change that creates a school system wherein price signals arising from market forces orchestrate the consumer choice and entrepreneurial initiative that will produce a relentlessly improving a dynamic menu of schooling options as diverse as our schoolchildren. Why do teacher, principal, and superintendent associations, other than unions (the union self-interest is obvious), support and fight to preserve the school system status quo.