

## **“SELF-RELIANCE IN EDUCATION”**

**By Paul T. Mero**

Mr. Mero is an FEC board member and president of the Sutherland Institute. He has focused his efforts on promoting understanding what he calls “self-reliance in education” Through this series of questions and answers he explains his views.

### **Questions & Answers:**

#### **What do we mean by self-reliance?**

Self-reliance is synonymous with self-sufficiency. It means doing things for ourselves rather than having things done for us. It does not mean that we do not need others in our lives; only that the help we ask of others is the kind of help that makes us better able to care for ourselves.

#### **Why should I want to be self-reliant?**

Because it builds the kind of character needed to live both independently and freely in community with others. Unnecessary dependency dulls character and, in community, destroys personal freedom and creates social dysfunctions. The question really is, “do we want to be free?” Self-reliance is freedom.

#### **What does self-reliance in education mean?**

It means to do all that you can as a parent to control and guide the education of your children. It means a parent has *real* control, not just involvement, over the education of their children.

#### **Why is self-reliance in education important?**

Self-reliance in education is important because Utah faces very serious budgetary concerns. State analysts anticipate nearly 145,000 new students over the next ten years. Even if this expectation is only partly true, Utah public schools are in for a very big influx of students. There are three ways, perhaps in combination, to handle this new influx: 1) raise taxes, 2) cut services (i.e., overburden classrooms even more), or 3) unburden the public school system. Self-reliance in education meets this last criterion. It will unburden the system.

Not to be overlooked, self-reliance in education will strengthen families. Perhaps this is its primary benefit.

#### **What effect can self-reliance in education have upon my children?**

Typically, it engenders trust, respect, and love. Your children will see your sacrifices in their behalf. They will see the attention being paid to them. They will feel your struggles in seeking what is best for them. Moreover, they will tend to reflect these important values in their own lives. They will be taught that their future is in their own hands. These children tend to be self-motivated, curious, adventurous, and loyal.

We should add that these qualities are not the sole domain of a self-reliant family. We are saying simply that the human processes of becoming self-reliant do tend to engender these qualities.

### **Is being self-reliant in education a new idea?**

No, actually it is a “back to the future” kind of reality. Our nation was founded and developed on the basis of self-reliance in all things, even when people lived well together in community. Public, or government, schooling was established universally only after the Civil War. Our founding fathers, while clearly understanding the importance of education in a free society, knew nothing of our modern public schools. In fact, given their experience in fighting off an oppressive government that imposed upon the colonists how and what to think, our founding fathers (including our revered Thomas Jefferson) did not support coerced education. Self-reliance in education is not only *not* new, it is innately American.

### **But isn't the “common good” an overriding factor that pushes us into public schooling?**

Perhaps for some people. However, meeting a common good is not the exclusive realm of public schooling, especially in this day and age. We live successfully in community sustained by several values, most of which are derived from family and religious traditions. The term “common good,” while important in context, is often used by well-meaning, but overzealous, advocates of public schools to mitigate the exercise of parental control or in defense of their monopolistic endeavors. A wide and broad support for education is one thing; protecting a *coercive* system of public schooling, even in the face of never-ending problems, is quite another thing.

Addressing the “common good” is an important ingredient in public policy considerations. Within the context of modern education, protecting the “common good” now actually refers to championing educational freedom.

### **How does our family become self-reliant in education?**

This could take some time and a great deal of patience. But your family can do it! Self-reliance in education is no different than the circumstances of self-reliance in any other of life's ventures. It is often a matter of priority and focus. The key is parental control – do you or don't you really, truly control the education of your children. The closer you are to being able to home school your children, the closer your family will be to self-reliance in education. This ideal, of course, means that at least one parent is home to educate the

children. On the other hand, you might choose to send your children to a private school that allows parental control. And sometimes this can get expensive requiring both parents to work outside of the home. This latter scenario is less-than-ideal but can move your family toward self-reliance as long as you keep your focus on the ideal. Our web site offers many links to practical help in your efforts to become self-reliant in education.

### **What are the first steps toward self-reliance in education?**

The first step is to sit down with your spouse and make it a priority. If you are a single parent, then you must commit yourself to this priority. You must decide whether you will home school or private school or some variation thereof. You must be extremely realistic in your discernments. There is no room for Pollyannaish thinking. Self-reliance in anything is hard work; self-reliance in education is very difficult (but it is worth it!). Be honest with yourselves. Ask tough questions. If you choose to home school your children, you must ask yourselves some fundamental questions about your parenting style and the personalities of your children. Do you even like your children? Can you reasonably expect to spend 24-7 with them and they with you? And there are always the financial questions. Can you live on one income? If you choose a private school that allows parental control, can you afford it? This decision to be self-reliant in education entails more than wishful thinking; it requires a dedicated plan of attack and a commitment to endure to the end.

### **How can I offer my children all of the resources available in public schools such as curriculum, interscholastic sports, and specialization programs?**

This question is more pertinent to families that will choose to home school their children. Curricula abound for home school families. This will not be a problem. Attend a local or state home school conference and you will see what we mean. Sports might be a problem but many states allow home school children to pay their fees and participate in public school sports. Otherwise, in the general area of “socialization,” if you are even concerned about this, there are many private opportunities for children to interact, everything from Boy Scouts to church to dance clubs. You will often find local home school networks that associate regularly.

### **I am a single parent with limited time and resources. Is self-reliance in education a realistic expectation?**

It will be much more difficult for you. The ideal is often out of reach for many people but that does not prevent them from desiring and encouraging the ideal. If you work at home as a single parent, or if you make a good salary that allows you to choose a private school that permits parental control, then it will be easier for you. But two-parent families are better at self-reliance in all aspects of life, so why rule out the possibility or eventuality of that future? If nothing else, keep your eye on the ideal and do what you can to influence the education of your children.

### **Is self-reliance in education an all or nothing proposition?**

Of course not. There are degrees to self-reliance. There is the ideal and the less-than-ideal in all its shades and hues. The key is to keep your eye on the ideal.

**How can I measure how effective I am in educating my children?**

You must first create your parental goals and expectations. What do you want for your children? What do they want? You can test your children in a variety of ways, some formal, some not so formal. You can purchase tests online or you can ask your local public school to test your children regularly. Or you can talk with your children and easily determine where they are in their understanding of the world around them and the materials you have asked them to study. There are many, many ways to measure the progress of your children.

**I appreciate the theory of self-reliance in education, but I support the theory of public schooling. How can I choose between them?**

You do not really have to, thanks to the taxing power of the state! You will pay your fair share (and then some) of taxes in support of public schools even if you are self-reliant in education. But you must decide in principle what theory you will hold to, self-reliance or government schools. Sorry, it is unavoidable. Ultimately, you must decide what is more important – your children or the “system.”