



Education Expert Available To Discuss "Googlization" Of Public Education

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Dec 8, 2009

DURHAM, N.H. – Education expert Todd DeMitchell at the University of New Hampshire is available to discuss the growing trend of cash-strapped public schools relying on advertising and other new revenue ideas to raise money and the implications of these decisions for students and public education.

According to DeMitchell public schools around the nation are increasingly look for new ways to raise money as budgets are cut. Calling this the "Googlization" of public education, school districts are considering plans to developing revenue streams by allowing businesses to advertise before a captive audience -- students.

For example, schools in North Carolina, Michigan, and Texas are weighing allowing display ads on public school buses. A Virginia high school is making money by selling ads on its school website. In Missouri, schools are considering selling the naming rights to classroom buildings and sporting facilities, while a Florida school district has proposed selling sponsorships of academic programs. One California school district is selling the naming rights to two sixth-grade science camps while another is trying to convince Hollywood producers to film TV shows at district headquarters. Beverly Hills High School officials are working on an apparel line to capitalize on the popularity of "Beverly Hills 90210." Teachers in Idaho and California have sold advertisements that appear on exams and other materials.

"Public schools provide a free service in that parents do not write a check or use plastic in order to get their child inside the schoolhouse gate. Once inside the schoolhouse gate, the Goggle business model would advertise to an audience captured by compulsory education laws who seek the free educational service. Savvy marketing departments would quickly see the value of a somewhat homogenous age demographic gathered at the advertisement site without cost to the advertiser and use targeted ads to that group. Smart business decision, but is it a smart educational decision?" DeMitchell asks.

In Brown v. Board of Education, the U.S. Supreme Court declared public education to be the most important function of state and local government, DeMitchell says. In addition to these new revenue ideas, many states already partially fund public education through lotteries and other gambling activities.

"As a society we can and should do better than leaving our public schools to such dubious funding mechanisms. The fact that our teachers, administrators, and school board members seriously consider using their schools as a billboard, no matter how tasteful and age appropriate, underscores this societal shortcoming and shortsightedness," he says.

According to DeMitchell, schools have been held to be special places within our shared stories

and understandings. The courts have acknowledged our public schools as special through cases involving curriculum and student constitutional rights.

"The old metaphor of the schoolhouse gate keeping out the harshness of the world and providing a place of refuge, calm, and safety is still very much alive. There is a ubiquity of commercialism, the competition of market forces trying to define habits of action through influencing spending outside the schoolhouse gate," he says. "Do we really want to tear down the schoolhouse gate and consider the school to just be another competitive market?"

The professor warns that there is no free lunch and that the cost of managing these new revenue streams – from negotiating contracts to selling ads – will eat up precious resources. Ultimately, the students will suffer.

Public schools need only look at college athletics programs to see how revenue streams can shape educational decisions, he says. "Can we keep the tail of advertising from wagging the dog of the classroom if that tails grows bigger and bigger?"

"As a former teacher, principal, and superintendent I understand the need to find secure funding sources. However, the chocolate sale that we organized to raise money for the library is small potatoes compared to the larger force of advertising dollars from corporate sponsors. I have this dark vision of McLectures for instruction, the Central High School Nike Gymnasium with a swoosh over the entrance and a large 'Just Do It,' The Avis Pine Street Elementary School with the 'We Try Harder' slogan, and the General Electric Science Building boasting 'Progress Is Our Most Important Product,' " DeMitchell says.

"It is one thing to advertise our school and another thing to allow our school to be an advertising platform. Educators faced with the harsh reality of dwindling revenue may well turn to advertising as a means to stem the ebbing tide of revenue, but at what cost? Can that revenue tide turn to flood without the consequences associated with breached dikes? The Googlization of public education needs a sharp watch on the tide of this new revenue stream. Students cannot be transformed into consumers within the schoolhouse gate," he says.

Todd DeMitchell, professor of education and justice studies and chair of the UNH Department of Education, studies the impact of court cases and other legal mechanisms on schools, school liability, and adequate supervision. In addition to his research in this area, DeMitchell has two decades of experience in K-12 as a teacher, principal and superintendent. He has published more than 130 articles/chapters and five books. His most recent books are "Labor Relations in Education: Policies, Politics, and Practices", "Negligence: What Principals Need to Know to Avoid Liability" (Roman & Littlefield Education, 2009 & 2006) and "Sexual Orientation, Public Schools, and the Law" (Education Law Association, 2007).

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