

# The Salt Lake Tribune

---

## Not optional

### Education should be required

PUBLISHED: JULY 20, 2013 01:22PM

UPDATED: JULY 20, 2013 01:22PM

Poor Aaron Osmond. Tossed into the Utah Senate in midstream (filling the unexpired term of retiring Sen. Chris Butters), the South Jordan Republican quickly immersed himself in the details of one of the most important and controversial responsibilities of state government — public education.

He met with stakeholders on all sides, avoided the stereotypical teacher-bashing that is all too common on his side of the aisle, even proposed some good ideas, including a plan that could have attracted private money to such underserved needs as pre-kindergarten education.

Then, just the other day, he punted. Gave up. Threw in the towel. Surrendered. Retired from the field. Pulled the plug. Called it quits.

Or maybe he just found a way to get people thinking.

The marker Osmond laid down was a thoughtful essay, posted on the The Senate Site. Entitled “A Practical Argument for Ending Compulsory Education in Utah,” it makes the case that the K-12 public education system in Utah has become so overloaded with expectations that it not only teach our children to read, write and figure, but also make up for so many of the woes of modern society, inadequate parenting and economic depravation that it would be better for the state to repeal its law that mandates school attendance for all children below the age of 14.

As befits a Utah politician, he put the case in terms of individual freedom.

“In a country founded on the principles of personal freedom and unalienable rights,” Osmond writes, “no parent should be forced by the government to send their child to school under threat of fines and jail time.”

But the courts are hardly clogged with parents facing misdemeanor charges for “intentionally or recklessly” failing to enroll their kids in school. And Utah’s law is full of loopholes, including home schooling and online education.

What Osmond omits is the fact that public education is offered free for the benefit of children (something he favors), but made compulsory for the benefit of the larger society.

It is compelled on the theory that no family has the right to fail in the duty to educate their children because such a failure harms those around them. It would create, in the words of Salt Lake City School Board member Michael Clara, a “subclass of illiterates on a large scale.”

As we don’t want to be surrounded by firetrap buildings, open sewers or drunk drivers, we also choose not to be immersed in a crowd of stupid people. That’s why education, in civilized societies, is not optional.

---

© Copyright 2013 The Salt Lake Tribune. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.