

SNG-send them to boarding school-3-4-19

Get kids out of violent neighborhoods

By Jim Nowlan

A thoughtful, experienced educator friend of mine has a proposal for getting kids at extremely high risk of failure out of their violent neighborhoods—send them to boarding school!

The idea isn't so nutty as it might appear at first blush. The state of Illinois already has experience with running a boarding school: The Illinois Math and Science Academy (IMSA) near Aurora. And the expense of taking kids out of the worst of the worst neighborhoods for during their formative years would cost less than prison you need to qualify this.

Charles (Charlie) Roy of Peoria is a senior fundraiser for Bradley University. He returned to Illinois from California a few years ago to be close to family. In the Sunshine State, Charlie was president (headmaster) of Villanova Preparatory School, an Augustinian Catholic school favored by Hollywood celebrities and the like, as well as for a few poor kids.

Charlie says that children from poor backgrounds can do well at residential boarding schools. So, Charlie proposes that Illinois consider piloting one or more 7<sup>th</sup> thru 12<sup>th</sup> grade “prep schools” for kids identified as otherwise likely—maybe almost certainly—to end up in prison.

“Parents, whether of privilege or poverty, want the best for their children,” says Charlie. “Getting at-risk youngsters out of their neighborhoods might be best for them.”

Charlie says the value of boarding schools is not just a good education; maybe more important is the structured after-school time for study and club activities with adult role models, even dinner

now and then at their advisers' houses. The students might help pay for their experience by doing some of the chores at the school, in the kitchen, housekeeping, lawncare, whatever.

My former headmaster friend has in mind drawing upon shuttered seminaries or small colleges in the Chicago and metro-East areas, so youngsters could spend weekends at home, if they wished.

I am thinking as well about schools in Downstate Illinois that are closed due to consolidations, where the students would stay full-time. I think the youngsters may well need to be removed almost permanently from their toxic neighborhoods.

Many small-town white folks I know have warped pictures of city folks from the 'hoods. But once they came to know the youngsters at a boarding school located in their midst, I am confident these good folks would embrace and go all out to support them.

For example, during the infamous Flood of 1993, inmates from Illinois prison bootcamps worked shoulder to shoulder with small-town residents along the Mississippi to sandbag and protect the small towns from the deluge.

Grateful locals came to realize their helpmates weren't all bad. Jim Edgar, governor at the time, recalls that residents in Calhoun County invited inmates into their homes to have dinner with them.

I see these boarding schools as a cross between the Depression-era CCC camps for white boys at loose ends and present-day education hot houses like the Illinois Math and Science Academy.

Illinois spends \$\_\_\_\_ per student annually [awaiting figures] to provide elite educations for the children of the mostly well-heeled at IMSA. These children would do about as well wherever they attended school, because their parents would insist upon it, and make sure it happened. By

the way, there are more Asian than white students at IMSA, which makes my point about intense parental interest in their children's education. Again: this could sound QUITE racist.

And Illinois spends more than \$100,000+ per year per youngster in our state Department of Juvenile Justice facilities.

I am not a Pollyanna. There would be problems and challenges. But, hey, the violence and destined-for-failure environment of some of our most depleted neighborhoods have to be addressed.