

# Top 3 Critical Issue for Educating America

(+/- 20 min.)

On the following pages you will find a series of sample questions with Paddy's answers. This Sample Interview transcript is just one of many available on Paddy's website for your use. The Sample Interviews are designed to assist you in planning your available time slot and fulfilling the needs of your audience.

## Interviewer:

*It's back to school time and we all have concerned about Educating America's kids. Today we have Paddy Eger a veteran teacher in the primary and intermediate grades. Paddy's a successful teacher and parent trainer in the Parent Cooperative Education Program located in Edmonds, Washington. Her passion to integrate competent and enthusiastic adult volunteers into America's classrooms created the foundation for her national award-winning book, Educating America: 101 Strategies for Adult Assistants in K-8 Classrooms.*

*Paddy is with us today to encourage each of our listeners to step-up and step-in as a community volunteer for their local schools so that truly no child is left behind. Welcome Paddy.*

## Paddy:

*Thank you for having me. I'm excited to be here to share my passion for Educating America's kids.*

**Q:** *Paddy, we hear that states and school districts across America have struggled to meet the No Child Left Behind deadline of 2014 that's enshrined in that law. We all are aware that our educational system is in dire need of revision. Your belief is that community volunteers help teachers and students reach those tough goals. Right? How is that?*

**A:** That's right. When we're educating America's next generation of leaders they must be prepared for college or various careers. With the increased pressures placed on today's teachers it's urgent to have more hands, more minds, and more support available to meet those standards. Community volunteers play a huge role improving achievement among all students. When the community steps-up and steps-in to help educate America's kids, student and teachers as well as our communities experience huge gains.

Whether you have children in school or not, our nation must be a place where kids learn to read, write and think. Today's students are tomorrow's leaders. That impacts all of us. We want and need capable, intelligent grown-ups for the generations yet to come.

**Approximate Time: 80 Seconds**



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**Q:** *Paddy, you taught elementary school for over 20 years and you're a strong advocate for classroom volunteers. What leads you to be so passionate about implementing volunteers into every classroom?*

**A:** Volunteers improve teacher effectiveness. Many of my teaching years involved training and implementing the talents of classroom assistants. I invited parents and community members into my classroom to listen to and read with students, lead art projects, help with math review, direct small groups and help create classroom learning centers. All found their comfort zones and helped my class grow and learn in areas that I'd not have been able to cover such as geography, paired reading time, expanded science and field trips.

When the assistants were parents of my students, they established special connections among the students and myself. Often the assistants knew most of my students from previous years in school or from other activities. Through being involved, they experienced few surprises when they received their child's progress reports.

**Approximate Time: 60 Seconds**

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**Q:** *The experience you have shows that when there is more help in classrooms it not only benefits the teachers but also aids student success. Share a handful of ways teachers use assistants in classrooms.*

**A:** Every classroom has opportunities where assistants may contribute to daily activities. Some teachers ask volunteers to roam the room to answer student questions, read over student work, and point out problems or places where students might want to take a second look. Other teachers ask assistants to correct turned-in assignments, assemble tools for projects or perform clerical tasks. Many teachers ask assistants to lead small groups, make classroom presentations or work one-to-one with students. Teachers attempt to utilize an assistant's strengths whenever possible.

In my classroom one parent wrote plays and songs for our second grade animal unit and another taught basic sewing stitches to make vests. A father who was a commercial fisherman brought in samples of seafood for students to taste during our sea life unit. The kids loved each and every presentation!

The way to involve assistants is almost endless. There are dozens of Free PDF's on my website including **101+ Jobs Adult Can Do To Assist Teachers**. Go to [paddyeger.com](http://paddyeger.com), click on the link *Educating America* and look for a link to *Downloads*. Look through the list and find tasks you're comfortable doing then head to a school and volunteer your time. Remember, when you step-up and step-in, you become part of the solution to educating America. Everyone benefits.

**Approximate Time: 100 Seconds**

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**Q:** *There's a lot of recent talk about critical problems in today's education. What do you view as the top three critical problems and how can adult assistant help lessen those issues?*

**A:** I believe the top problems in education center around budget cuts, testing issues, and classroom scrutiny. Educating America's children is vital. It's important to find straightforward solutions. As we've seen, the budget cuts to education leave classrooms overcrowded and teachers stretched and stressed. This problem is reaching critical levels in our current economy. Our listeners may not realize that teachers are forced to take furlough days so state funding stretches to the end of the school year. Those release days, or half days, mean less hours of classroom instruction and less teacher contact time to teach the ever-expanding curriculum.

Adult assistants, volunteers from our communities, provide valuable time and expertise which off-set these critical issues. They become partners working with teachers to overcome the deficits from budget cuts and supporting teachers in preparing for the mandatory testing. They ease classroom scrutiny by becoming the extra hands and minds helping teachers accomplish all that is expected of them.

**Approximate Time: 70 Seconds**

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**Q:** *Money issues affect all of us. What can we do as an individual or as a community to off-set school budget problems?*

**A:** I believe three important things deserve consideration:

- The K-12 years are the foundation of each student's education. It must be strengthened. It is important that each of us do our political part and demand that states replace and increase funds so our kids receive a better-than-average education. Adults provide support by attending school district meetings and supporting local efforts to fund education. When they write or speak with state legislators, offer ideas for increased funding and support positive state legislation for schools, everyone wins.
- Next. It's important that districts and other school organizations reinstate planning and teacher prep time. Less time to plan during their contracted hours forces teachers to focus on their day-to-day curriculum leaving little time to plan for assistants in their classrooms, the people who provide additional ways to reach all students every day.
- Each community's obligation includes providing additional hands-on support. Para educators, paid assistants, do their part, but they can't do everything that's needed. When teachers add community volunteers, they have the opportunity to enhance their classrooms. Assistants change the adult-student ratio from 1:24 or more, to any number of possibilities: 1:1, 1:5, 1:12. This creates more opportunities for individual student support, more chances for all students to grow and learn.

**Approximate Time: 110 Seconds**

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**Q:** *Testing controversy is commonly mentioned in the media. You stated testing is a critical issue. What makes this a pressing problem and how can assistants help?*

**A:** Testing is important because states use standardized tests to assess our success as educators. Tests also rank our competency against others in our state and nation as well as across the world. With our current world ranking at seventeen we have lots of room for improvement. Tests help us evaluate how well our core subjects are succeeding.

Adult assistants working with teachers provide added opportunity for individual help on understanding the test expectations. 1:1 or in small groups, they explain to students how to write succinctly or how to scan texts or math problems to uncover important information. Small groups are a great way to work on higher level thinking skills. Those skills help students on tests and throughout their lives.

Currently our states do their own thing. Our results are as varied as comparing apples to elephants. But education is changing. Hope is focused on our establishing a national program, the Common Core State Standards. Once that program is in place, we'll have tools to assess student growth consistently across America's educational system.

**Approximate Time: 90 Seconds**

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**Q:** *What's behind the test cheating by teachers and administrators? Why do they feel the need to falsify student tests?*

**A:** Teachers and educators jobs are on the line. If their students fail, they may be out of a job. In most cases no matter what they do, day-after-day, month-after-month, some students won't be prepared for mandatory tests. While I don't condone cheating, I understand their frustration.

Imagine yourself as a fourth grade student who reads, writes and comprehends at a second grade level because of a learning problem or because English is your second language. You work hard every day and you're learning new skills all the time. Today is the test. You open the cover and read the words but you have difficulty understanding the meaning so your answers to the questions will be incomplete. The teacher knows your ability and how hard you work. He also knows that your test scores will bring down the class average. Out comes the eraser.

If we tested students at their learning levels rather than their grade levels I believe the cheating would end. Besides, what can we learn from testing when the students can't do the work? How does that help us set an educational plan for those students who need more time to grow and learn for whatever reason? With more time, more adult assistants and a more realistic plan, students will have the skills to succeed.

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**Q:** *Several times in our interview you've mentioned higher level thinking skills. What are they, why are they important and what do they have to do with classroom volunteers?*

**A:** Schools often use Bloom's Taxonomy to organize levels of thinking. It builds from remembering information through several more stages. Each requires more depth than the previous skill. The skills include:

- understanding what is presented
- applying the information in new ways
- analyzing and evaluating the information, plus
- synthesizing or creating new information.

For grades K-3 the focus is remembering and understanding what's presented. Teachers also develop student observation and compare-contrast skills. Lots of time is spent talking about how we think and learn.

Older students use those early skills and build on to apply, analyze, evaluate and synthesize their thinking. It's exciting to watch their skills develop.

So how do we begin? We start small. Assistant-led groups provide a great way to work with open-ended or the why and how questions. These create an opportunity for students to consider and evaluate a variety of informational bits rather than answering with single factoids.

How questions are asked matters a lot. Let me explain the differences. "What are George Washington's most important contributions to our country?" is an open-ended question allowing numerous correct answers instead of one correct answer. "Tell us about George Washington." is less-expansive. What is the purpose of the question? Does the person want us to discuss the man, the university or the small town in Washington state?

When teachers invite in adult assistants, they have the opportunity to explore higher level thinking skills in small practice groups. This develops critical thinkers who solve problems and make informed decisions.

**Approximate Time: 120 Seconds**

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**Q:** *Isn't all of this student coaching and practicing 'teaching to the test'? Doesn't this take away from the regular, prescribed curriculum?*

**A:** Some people say schools currently 'teach to the test'. We don't. Giving students guided practice through released questions, those items not included on the actual test, grounds their skills and thinking.

Would you feel comfortable walking into a college entrance exam unprepared? Probably not. More than likely you'd spend days or weeks preparing by reading pertinent materials, buying a sample test booklet with answers, or taking a class about how to take the test. K-8 students need to know how to approach tests just like we need to know how approach most things in our lives. Practice tests are just that: practice.

Classroom volunteers often step-in and manage small groups or work one-to-one to lead practice sessions. Students ask questions, work to understand concepts then practice their writing and charting skills. Their skill-building isn't wasted time and focused solely on testing. These skills are part of the regular curriculum and an important part of their adult life skills.

School is about teaching students how to think. Using Bloom's taxonomy of higher level thinking skills every day develops their skills across all areas of the curriculum as well as testing. And, since modern testing is seldom filling in bubbles on a page, the practice helps them understand that the tests are challenges to meet rather than impossible situations to be rushed through.

**Approximate Time: 100 Seconds**

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**Q:** *You listed classroom scrutiny as your third critical issue in educating America's students. Exactly what issues fall into that category?*

**A:** Classroom scrutiny covers a pile of issues: teacher indiscretions, classroom and school safety, today's pressures to meet new national standards, class size, and the impact of electronics on education to name a few.

The media often focuses on teachers who have made poor decisions. The majority of teachers are busy preparing engaging, age-appropriate lessons and activities to motivate students to become thoughtful, independent learners and leaders. Take the time to visit a classroom in the next few weeks. I suspect you'll be pleasantly surprised and impressed by the quality of what you see and hear. Then walk to the school office or the volunteer coordinator to sign-up and step-in to help.

Another imperative is student safety. Schools must perform background checks and train assistants and volunteers to insure their actions are appropriate when monitoring students. It's important that all adults in schools wear identification at all times.



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Today schools often have only one door unlocked for entry; some schools ask teachers to lock their individual doors as well. It's a sad commentary on today's world but schools must be safe havens where the focus remains on our most important asset, our children, and our most important objective: educating America's children.

Discussion of the new national mandated Common Core State Standards, class size and the impact of electronics on education are all hot buttons. Most adults have strong opinions on these issues that we could discuss for hours and hours. Let's save those discussions for another time.

**Approximate Time: 140 Seconds**

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**Q:** *What skills help a classroom volunteer prepare to work with students?*

**A:** In K-3, adults assist students by helping them read, write, work on basic math or help them begin to solve their own problems. The key for assistants working with this age is patience. Students are learning how to learn.

Older students require more detailed assistance. I'd not be able to lead an algebra group, but I'd be comfortable working with readers and writers, discussing their work and thoughts about their tasks.

I volunteer in a first grade classroom of 20 students who have a wide range of needs and abilities. Some are non-readers while a handful work far above grade level. On a typical day I roam the classroom, read with individuals and ask comprehension questions. I also help students learn the names of the letters of the alphabet, guide their printing practice and act as a partner for phonics games. Even though this teacher's class size is relatively small, volunteers provide valuable assistance. Imagine how adding two or even three assistants a week helps that teacher support her students. Now imagine the impact you could make in a classroom with 30 or more students.

K-8 classrooms have a job for every volunteer regardless of their years of education. Sincerity, dependability and a love of learning go a long way to support teachers and students. Assistants often receive a 30-60 minute orientation where teachers share ideas on ways to interact with students and how to keep them focused on their task. Students notice your presence in their classroom. It signals that school is so important that you've arranged time in your busy schedule to come in and help.

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**Q:** *Volunteering is an important commitment to our teachers, students and community. Let's review how we do our part in educating America.*

**A:** The most direct way is to contact your local school district or school office and speak with the volunteer coordinator. Let them know when and how you are available plus the skills and interests you are prepared to share. Attend the organizational meeting and you're ready to assist.

You may also contact RSVP (Retired Senior Volunteer Program) or your United Way agency for additional school volunteer information and options. If you are part of Kiwanis, Rotary, Boy's and Girls Clubs, or other service groups, you'll find additional ways to connect with schools.

Perhaps your weekday work place allows time off for community service. Use that opportunity to step-up and step-in to a school near where you live or work. Don't be shy. It takes an entire village to raise our children. Become an active volunteer. Educating America's children truly matters!

**Approximate Time: 70 Seconds**

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### *Closing Suggestions*

#### **Interviewer—**

Wow this has been great information for all of us, Paddy. I'm confident many listeners have more questions and several of these issues certainly deserve more discussion than we had time for today.

#### **Option 1**

Paddy's going help our listeners with that.

Our commitment to you here at [\*Radio Station\*](#) is to Build Better Relationships One Interaction at a Time—

For the next few days, Paddy will monitor our [\*Radio Program's blog\*](#) and answer your questions or address your comments or concerns. We invite you to go to [\*Radio Program's name\*](#) and click on today's interview with Paddy Eger and post your question or comment.

OR

#### **Option 2**

You're going help our listener with that, aren't you Paddy?

Yes I am. My team and I will monitor the Educating America blog hourly over the next few days. I encourage everyone to visit my blog to continue the conversation, leave comments, or ask questions. Remember go to [paddyeger.com](http://paddyeger.com) and click on the link Educating America blog. I'm excited to have the opportunity to build a better relationship with you one interaction at a time.



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