



*How they've been taking the **public and education** out of **public education***

**PARENTS
ACROSS
AMERICA**

Democracy Convention, August 7, 2013 * Julie Woestehoff

You know them - Gates, Rhee, Walton, Broad, Pritzker, ALEC, Bloomberg, Daley, Emanuel, our state and Congressional legislators (Republicans *and* Democrats), Duncan and, yes, President Obama. These 1%ers (they provide less than 1% of overall education spending across the US) have used their money and political clout to force ineffective and harmful changes in our public schools. Here are some of these bad policies.

Mass school closings and staff firing, decimated school budgets

Some background on school closings and draconian budget cuts

The guidebook of the mass school closings movement is a 2009 “**School Closure Guide**,” written by the controversial Broad Foundation. Another major player in the mass school closings movement is the notorious American Legislative Exchange Council, or ALEC, which openly seeks to privatize public education. ALEC has promoted mass school closures through **parent trigger laws** and **A-F grading systems** for schools, while simultaneously promoting **charter school expansion**.

This year, dozens of public schools were closed in large urban areas like Chicago and Philadelphia. Following quickly on these closings were **disastrous school budget cuts**. For example, in Chicago alone, between 3-4,000 teachers and other staff are being laid off. Class sizes will go up substantially and the longer school day, which Mayor Emanuel instituted last year, has lost its funding but not its extra 90 minutes.

Some research on school closings etc.

- The National Education Policy Center released a review of the four strategies mandated under NCLB for schools that have failed to make adequate yearly progress for a number of years. NECP found that “**there is little or no evidence to suggest that any of these options delivers the promised improvements in academic achievement**” and recommended that policymakers refrain from relying on restructuring sanctions (takeovers, private management, charters, and reconstitutions) to effect school improvement, as they have produced **negative by-products** without yielding systemic positive effects. (Mathis, W. (2009). NCLB’s Ultimate Restructuring Alternatives: Do they Improve the Quality of Education?)
- Eight in ten Chicago Public Schools students displaced by school closings were transferred to schools ranking in the bottom half of system schools on standardized tests. Because most displaced students transferred from one low-performing school to another, **the move did not, on average, significantly affect student achievement**. (When Schools Close. Consortium on Chicago School Research, Oct. 2009)

A related issue: privatizing education by expanding charter schools and moving to replace teaching with “virtual learning”

Some background on privatization and charters

The 1%ers' fondness for school closure goes hand in hand with their love of **privatization**, which relegates parents to the role of consumers rather than educational partners. This does not provide parents with a real voice, only a dizzying array of unknown and unreliable options. The first choice of most parents is to send their child to a high-quality neighborhood school, but the rapid expansion of the charter sector has undermined neighborhood schools, drawing resources from them while at the same time expecting them to serve our most at-risk students. Furthermore, as more states remove their charter caps, we will see more districts that are majority charter schools. Students must compete for access in a lottery, which means **some are left without any school to attend in or near their neighborhood.**

Race to the Top promoted state laws establishing **appointed charter authorizers independent of local district school boards.** State charter authorizers have the power to overrule district decisions to deny charter proposals. They are not elected officials accountable to parents and the community and do not have the same stake in the vitality and improvement of local public schools, but they are allowed to require use of local taxpayer funds to support charter school operators, a form of **taxation without representation** that violates principles deeply rooted in our nation's history and values.

Some research on privatization/charters

- The newest research shows “**insignificant**” **positive impact of charter schools** over traditional schools. (National Education Policy Center, July 2013)
- **Voucher students did no better** than a matched set of non-voucher public school students in a study of the longest-running voucher program, in Milwaukee, WI.
- Online instruction for students in grades K-12 has little or no research backing (Barbara Means, September 2010). Students at K12 Inc., the nation's largest virtual-school company, are **falling further behind in reading and math scores** than students in brick-and-mortar schools. Students at these virtual schools are also less likely to remain at their schools for the full year, and the schools have low graduation rates. (National Education Policy Center, July 2012)

Some alternatives to privatization/charters

The soundest alternative is to **improve the schools we have** using sound, effective, research-based programs. This is the **choice** of most parents.

Promoting fake “parent empowerment” using parent trigger laws.

Some background on parent trigger laws

As corporate efforts to privatize and capitalize on public education are increasingly being exposed as ineffective and damaging, the wealthy sponsors of these controversial strategies – e.g. school closings, turnarounds, charter school expansion – have been attempting to **re-brand them as “parent empowerment.”** Last year, Congress passed the “Empowering Parents Through Quality Charter Schools Act” on a strong bipartisan vote despite the lackluster outcomes of most of the nation’s charter schools.

This year, the big push is for so-called “**parent trigger**” laws, which would allow 51% of the parents at a low-performing school who sign a petition to trigger one of a narrow set of options – firing all or some of the staff, turning the school over to a charter operator, or closing the school. Parents will have little or no voice once a school is turned into a charter; most charter school boards are made up of businesspeople who do not have children in the school,

Some research on the parent trigger

The parent trigger has no track record of success. Several attempts have been made in California by the well funded, astroturf Parent Revolution group. Their first effort failed when a judge threw out the petitions. Other attempts have fizzled for lack of support. **The charter school resulting from PR's first “successful” effort has not opened yet.** In May, a Los Angeles principal was fired using the parent trigger; it was reported that 21 of the school's 22 teachers requested transfers in response.

An alternative to the parent trigger

The best model for the kind of meaningful, effective parent empowerment that parents actually want is the Chicago **local school council (LSC)**. LSCs are duly-elected bodies for each Chicago elementary, middle and high school. Parents hold the most seats on the LSC, and the LSC chairperson must be a parent. The LSC is not an advisory body – it has real decision making authority in the school including hiring the school principal. Research shows that **LSCs are also a successful element of effective school reform.**

Increasing the misuse and overuse of standardized tests

Some background on testing

American students are spending growing amounts of time preparing for and taking high-stakes standardized tests. In response to the increased testing mandates of NCLB, RTTT and other federal grant programs, some states and districts now require standardized tests for every subject, including art, music, journalism and physical education. Test scores are used to bar students from moving from one grade to another, to determine teacher and administrator pay, and to label schools as “failing” – a step that often leads to closure. Preschools are being stripped of play equipment to make more time for “academics.”

Nationalizing curriculum via the Common Core State Standards will only serve to increase the testing pressure. CCSS were developed between 2009-10 by the National Governors' Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers with funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Federal education laws actually forbid the imposition of national standards, but the CCSS escaped this ban because they were supposedly “voluntary” – states could opt out of them if they were also willing to miss out on RTTT and other federal education funding.

Education advocates have raised concerns that the CCSS and the tests that are coming with them

- were **written too quickly**, without reasonable time for review by states or the public,
- **excluded educators as well as parents and the community** from the process,
- were overly influenced by **publishing companies with a financial interest** in the outcome, and
- **failed to allow for a trial phase** that any sound program would include.

Education Secretary Arne Duncan has claimed that this “new generation of state assessments” will be different from and better than the current crop of standardized tests. No one knows if that's true. But what we do know is that the CCSS tests:

- will have **high stakes**, with most states having agreed to connect student test scores to teacher, principal, and school evaluation,
- may cost between **\$1 and \$8 billion** to develop, with profits going mainly to test publishers, and
- will require **major investments** in technology hardware, software and connectivity.

Some research on testing

- The scholarly consensus that documents the limits of standardized testing is quite clear. For example, a comprehensive nine-year study of testing and evaluation commissioned by the National Academy of Sciences recently concluded that **“available evidence does not give strong support for the use of test-based incentives to improve education.”**
- A second National Academy report questions the use of test scores to evaluate teachers, noting that such scores “have not yet been adequately studied for the purposes of evaluating teachers and principals,” and **“face substantial practical barriers to being successfully deployed** in a personnel system that is fair, reliable, and valid.”
- Value-added results, which have recently been touted as a better way to use standardized test scores, are actually **no more accurate** than year-to-year comparisons of different groups of students. [A 2010 study](#) by New York University economist Sean Corcoran concluded that the promise that value-added systems can provide such a precise, meaningful, and comprehensive picture is **not supported by the data**. Annual value-added estimates are highly variable from year to year, and, in practice, many teachers cannot be statistically distinguished from the majority of their peers.

Some alternatives to standardized testing

- Students, teachers and schools should be evaluated by a rich set of measures that does not require extensive standardized testing and which covers multiple kinds of skills and the full range of teaching and

learning.

- Used judiciously, data from relatively **infrequent, low-stakes standardized tests** has some value as a snapshot of student abilities that can diagnose areas of strength and areas that need improvement.
- Teacher and student **portfolios** that compile a variety of work – assignments, tests, projects, etc. – provide a far richer portrait of teaching and accomplishment than is possible with standardized testing.
- Some districts have effectively turned to **peer reviews** for teacher evaluation. Montgomery County, Maryland, for example, has received widespread attention for its “Peer Assistance and Review” plan, in which principals and “consulting teachers” evaluate teachers through observation, work closely with those in need of support or improvement, and make firing decisions when necessary. Unfortunately, the US Department of Education has ruled that the district has to stop using this system because the system does not link its ratings of teachers to student test scores – a condition of Maryland’s federal “Race to the Top” grant.

A related issue: Collecting confidential student data in a national database which will be accessible to private companies.

From Class Size Matters:

Education officials in several states and districts have been remarkably secretive about their plans to share substantial amounts of students’ personal information with a corporation called inBloom Inc., and through inBloom, with for-profit vendors. inBloom Inc. is a non-profit corporation, funded by the Gates and Carnegie Foundations to the tune of \$100 million, created to **collect personally identifiable student and teacher data from states and districts and share it with vendors**. The data is being stored on a cloud run by Amazon.com, with an operating system created by Wireless/Amplify, a subsidiary of News Corporation, owned by Rupert Murdoch. inBloom is planning to commercialize this data, with the agreement of states and districts, by offering it up to for-profit companies. **All this is being done without parental notification or consent.**

inBloom Inc. is planning to collect about 400 student and teacher data points, going back as far as 2006. Many of these data points are highly sensitive and controversial. inBloom is also collecting teacher data, including names, addresses, social security numbers, and detailed employment histories, all linked to student test scores.

FERPA, or the *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act*, the federal law that governs student privacy, was rewritten and considerably weakened by the Duncan administration to facilitate the sharing of confidential student data without parental consent. The Electronic Privacy Information Center (EPIC) has filed suit in court against the US Department of Education, on the grounds that the federal government has rewritten and weakened FERPA’s regulations in a way that violates the language and original intent of the law.

States received many points in their RTTT applications if they agreed to create “data systems to support instruction.” If they were awarded these funds, they were supposed to use them to build these systems.

References to the research and other information in this paper can be found on the PAA and PURE web sites.
www.parentsacrossamerica.org www.pureparents.org