

New Advocacy Groups Shaking Up Education Field: Their sway over policy/politics appears to be growing, especially at the state/local levels

Stephen Sawchuk

May 16, 2012

Education Week

A new generation of education advocacy groups has emerged to play a formidable political role in states and communities across the country. Those groups are shaping policy through aggressive lobbying and campaign activity—an evolution in advocacy that is primed to continue in the 2012 elections and beyond.

Bearing names meant to signal their intentions—Stand for Children, Democrats for Education Reform, StudentsFirst—they are pushing for such policies as rigorous teacher evaluations based in part on evidence of student learning, increased access to high-quality charter schools, and higher academic standards for schools and students.

Sometimes viewed as a counterweight to teachers' unions, they are also supporting political candidates who champion those ideas.

Though the record of their electoral success is mixed, such groups' overall influence appears to be growing, and it has already helped alter the landscape of education policy, particularly at the state level.

The rise of such high-powered advocacy groups focused on school issues marks a shift from a decade ago, when few education organizations other than teachers' unions explicitly engaged in political activity beyond statehouse lobbying.

"Until your group plays in campaigns or politics, you don't really have the seat at the table," said Colorado state Sen. Mike Johnston, a Democrat whose campaigns have been supported by both [Stand for Children](#) and [Democrats for Education Reform](#), or DFER.

"Teachers already had a group through their unions, superintendents and school boards through their associations, and there was no other group," he said. "Now, the 'reform' community has one that is supposed to represent kids. And whether you believe that or not, there is definitely another seat at the table."

All the new advocacy groups promote variations on the idea that they represent students' interests over those of adults. They are generally associated with education policy overhauls based on standards, test-based accountability, and some free-market principles in areas such as teacher training.

While supporters paint their ideas as an extension of civil rights liberalism, and detractors label their approaches as neoliberal or even conservative, it is a philosophy that doesn't easily correspond to the political landscape. (Two of the groups examined in this series of stories, StudentsFirst and Stand for Children are nonpartisan; DFER supports only Democrats.)

Sophisticated Tactics

From charter school associations to unions to school funding plaintiffs to the PTA, advocacy is not new to the K-12 education world. Where these new-breed national education advocacy groups differ from most past efforts is in their breadth, scope, and increasingly sophisticated approaches to shaping public policy.

They are active across dozens of states and, although the specifics vary by group, are engaged in subjects running the gamut from early-childhood education to vouchers to teacher evaluation.

From an organizational standpoint, the groups exist as a number of related entities, each of which differs in the type of activity it can engage in under federal and state campaign-finance laws.

They operate as 501(c)3 nonprofit organizations under the federal tax code, which are limited by law to educational activities. But the groups have also established or are related to 501(c)4s—groups that can engage in lobbying and limited partisan politics—and state-based political organizations focusing on elections and campaigns.

The New York City-based [Education Reform Now](#), a (c)3 and (c)4, is best known for its related political action committee, DFER.

With their tiered structures, the groups can take advantage of the benefits of each entity to, for instance, publish a paper on teacher evaluation using (c)3 funds, lobby in support of a teacher-evaluation bill with (c)4 resources, and help elect candidates likely to support such a bill with political action committee funds.

"An organization like ours can take the work we do educating folks and then advocate in a very aggressive and strategic way to make those changes," said Jason Williams, the director of Stand for Children Massachusetts. "You can't simply do that with a traditional 501(c)3; legally and strategically, you have to do it through these other channels."

Though the approach appears to be relatively recent to K-12 education, it is not new to American politics: Consider other single-issue advocacy groups like the Sierra Club, on environmental policy, or the National Rifle Association, on Second Amendment rights. They maintain a variety of entities and have been active in politics since the 1960s.

"It's pretty much been a defining characteristic of the modern political process that organizations that have common interests, be they political and partisan or legislative, can adopt lots of different approaches to trying to influence the policy discussions," said Bob Biersack, a senior fellow for the Center for Responsive Politics, a Washington-based organization that tracks federal campaign spending. "Health-care, energy, environmental advocacy groups of all kinds—they have PACs, they make independent expenditures, and some of them have been very aggressive in these areas for 30 years or more," he said.

Why have education advocates been slower to embrace such tactics?

Kenneth K. Wong, a political scientist and professor of education at Brown University, points to the decentralized nature of American schools as having generally kept education isolated from national politics until the school reform movement of the 1980s, followed by the standards and accountability movements of the 1990s and beyond. In successive waves, governors, mayors, and eventually legislators and presidents began to claim education reform as a major campaign issue, he said.

As a result of that phenomenon, "there is an incentive for the foundations and the advocacy and service-delivery stakeholders to protect the policy conditions," Mr. Wong said. "What we are seeing is part of a larger interlocking policy system, and that was not here a couple of generations ago, when education was not on the national policy map."

The rise of more voices in the debate, he added, also portends a more complex advocacy landscape with multiple centers of influence—a change in a field that traditionally has been dominated by administrators' groups and teachers' unions.

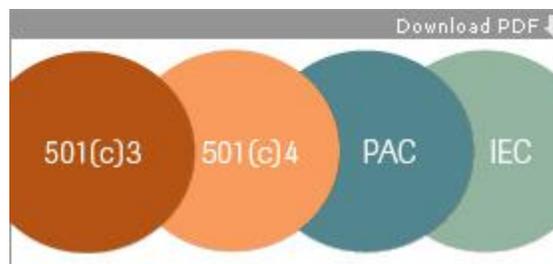
Teachers' unions alone spent \$60 million in 2010 state contests, according to the Helena, Mont.-based [National Institute on Money in State Politics](#). And they have embraced many of the lobbying and campaign tactics now being used by the education advocacy organizations.

A Look at the Players

Stand for Children, established in 1996, has the longest history of the newer groups seeking to wield political influence in education policy. The Portland, Ore.-based organization prides itself on community organizing, with some 240,000 "supporters" or volunteers nationwide.

Defining the Players

Advocacy can take many forms, ranging from grassroots lobbying, to direct lobbying of legislators, to explicitly political activities such as campaigning. Each of the entities operated by the advocacy organizations is subject to different restrictions under the U.S. tax code and campaign-finance laws.



A Tiered Structure

All three of the groups examined in this series use a multitiered structure allowing for flexibility in shaping advocacy activities.



SOURCES: Alliance for Justice; *Education Week*; Stand for Children; StudentsFirst; Democrats for Education Reform/Education Reform Now

Its early years were focused on a swath of children's issues. The group did not make specific policy changes in public schools a priority until about a decade later, when it ramped up its state-level political efforts, beginning with Oregon legislative races in 2006. The organization has since established PACs or other state-based political organizations in eight states.

"We've evolved from being focused on any and all children's issues ranging from dental care and mental health ... to a focus specifically on education and on education policymaking, in addition to funding," said Jonah Edelman, the founder and chief executive officer of the group. "From the initial conception of Stand for Children, there was a recognition of the need to ensure that elected officials supported children's needs, and to make that possible, we needed a 501(c)4. PACs are really just an extension of that need."

Democrats for Education Reform was set up in 2005 with the express goal of helping to elect politicians who were less beholden to teachers' unions, according to DFER's executive director, Joe Williams.

"There were these pedigree Democrats getting [pummeled] in education, and they were horrified," said Mr. Williams, a former reporter for the *New York Daily News*. "It seemed like there was a battle to be fought in the Democratic Party.

"There were enough pragmatic Democrats out there to try to pull them together and to make a statement," he said. "And there are candidates that desperately need money for elections, and if you present yourself as a reasonable partner, they are willing to listen."

Initially focused on congressional races, DFER is now also involved in state and local contests.

[StudentsFirst](#) was begun in 2010 by Michelle A. Rhee, the former chancellor of the District of Columbia public schools, whose battles over the city teachers' contract made national headlines. It partners with or has set up political organizations in at least three states.

Ms. Rhee also credited a lopsided political arena with her entry into campaign politics.

"You have these special interests that have tremendous resources they put into elections and campaigns," she said. "I think unions and textbook manufacturers are all doing what they're supposed to. The problem is that we don't have a balance in that dynamic, and you end up with a very skewed policy landscape and environment.

"We wanted to start an organized national interest group constantly pushing for the interest of kids."

The entry of the high-profile, if polarizing, Ms. Rhee and StudentsFirst has had both positive and negative implications for her allies. Their policies have gained more attention, but the groups themselves have been put under a microscope by those critical of their interests.

"I knew things would never be the same" with Ms. Rhee's entrance onto the scene, said Mr. Williams of DFER, whose group initially provided support to StudentsFirst. "But I thought she would bring more attention to the issues. I mean, she can [go on 'Oprah.'](#) She can bring education reform to a national audience."

Wealthy Donors

Much public interest has focused on the sources of the groups' funding, which has grown significantly in just a few years.

An *Education Week* review of financial disclosures shows a degree of confluence among sources of funding to the groups' educational arms, especially from private foundations. (See story, Page 19.)

The advocacy organizations also appear to have succeeded in growing local networks of like-minded donors. Stand for Children's (c)3 wing, known as the Leadership Center, counts among its donors at least seven individuals who have worked at or have connections to Bain Capital, a Boston-based financial-services firm. (Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney co-founded Bain Capital.)

Among them are Jonathan Lavine, a managing director at Bain's credit affiliate, who with his wife has given at least \$800,000 to Stand for Children since 2006 and who sits on the board of directors of Stand for Children's (c)3 organization, and Joshua Bekenstein, Bain's managing director, who with his wife has given at least \$1 million since 2006. (Mr. Lavine declined an

interview request through a spokeswoman, and Mr. Bekenstein did not return a message left with an assistant.)

Contributions to a variety of the advocacy groups' political wings show a similar lineup of individuals, again mainly concentrated in the financial sector. Donors to Stand for Children's Illinois PAC, for instance, include Paul Finnegan, the co-chief executive officer of Madison-Dearborn Partners, a Chicago-based private-equity firm, and John Canning, the chairman of the same firm. The two gave \$500,000 and \$250,000, respectively, to the PAC. (Mr. Finnegan referred a reporter to Stand for Children for comment, while Mr. Canning did not return an email request for comment.)

Financial managers are also among the contributors to DFER's federal PAC and New York state PAC, its two largest. Among them are Charles H. Ledley, an analyst at Highfields Capital, a Boston-based investment firm, who has given at least \$145,000 to DFER since 2006, according to campaign-finance records.

Mr. Ledley said he became interested in education policy in the late 1990s, after a consulting firm he was working for did a pro bono analysis for the Boston school system. The analysis used a preliminary form of "value added" statistical analysis showing a strong correlation between certain teachers and student achievement. But the document didn't galvanize policy changes in the district, he said.

Mr. Ledley said he found a similar dynamic at work during a stint in New York City, in which he was acquainted with the leaders of several high-performing charter schools that, he said, had problems getting lawmakers to support them.

"Rather than having the system come in and say, 'Let's replicate this,' you had people aiming their guns to blow it up," he said. "It became clear there was a political problem, and DFER seemed a very high-impact way to affect the issue."

Asked about Stand for Children's donors, Mr. Edelman said that his group raises money in much the same way as it organizes parents: "Building relationships, discussing values and vision, talking about the organization, answering questions, assessing alignment, and discussing whether it makes sense to work together."

The DFER group offered a pragmatic explanation for why it has tapped wealthy donors: The quickest way to raise money is to go to the people who have it. "We're one PAC," Mr. Williams of DFER said. "Most PACs take money from whomever they can. You generally don't want to refuse it."

The names of some reported funders have raised eyebrows in the K-12 education community, which is often associated with the liberal or progressive end of the political spectrum. In his 2011 book *Class Warfare: Inside the Fight to Fix America's Schools*, the journalist Steven Brill reported that StudentsFirst had received \$50 million in funding from Rupert Murdoch, whose News Corp. is known for its ownership of conservative-leaning news outlets and has been embroiled in a scandal over the news-gathering practices of some of its British newspapers. News Corp. records do not show a donation to the group, but Mr. Murdoch could have made a personal donation. A spokesman for News Corp. did not return a request for comment, and StudentsFirst does not discuss its donors.

Even so, because many Democrats have moved closer to what are often seen as predominantly Republican positions on such issues as charter schools, teacher evaluation, performance-based

pay, and, in limited cases, even voucher programs, it is not easy to characterize the bent of the new advocacy groups' supporters in strictly political terms.

And two of the major funders of StudentsFirst's New Jersey partner organization straddle the partisan divide. One of them, David Tepper, is a Democrat, while the other major supporter, Alan Fournier, is a Republican. Both men also work in the financial sector. They declined interview requests from *Education Week*.

Hidden Funding

Sources of funding to these newer groups' lobbying wings are generally harder to trace. While PACs are obligated to reveal the sources of their funding under federal campaign-finance rules, 501(c)4 groups are not typically under similar requirements. (For state and local elections, specific disclosure rules and timelines vary by state law.)

Stand for Children is unusual in that it issues [an annual report](#) that details major donors to its (c)3 and (c)4 wings. StudentsFirst, by contrast, appears to have taken advantage of campaign-finance rules exempting it from disclosure. The group would not disclose the sources of its donations for this story.

Critics argue such rules allow the groups to use their 501(c)4 arms as a way of spending money on political purposes, including by funneling dollars to PACs, without having to divulge donors.

"I think a lot of groups are moving to (c)4s because it gives them flexibility in structuring activities with minimal reporting requirements. Voters and the public and parents and students have no idea who is giving money," said Karen M. White, the political director for the 3.2 million-member National Education Association, which has been largely critical of the advocacy groups' activities. "They're dressing up electioneering communications and reporting it as a lobbying message."

The StudentsFirst group, for instance, gave \$126,000 from its (c)4 wing to its PAC in Tennessee in 2011. Because of that move, none of the group's subsequent expenditures in Tennessee races, totaling about \$117,000, can be traced to particular donors. Political contributions are only part of the story. The DFER organization, for instance, has served as a middleman of sorts, encouraging Democratic donors to contribute directly to candidates, especially in states in which it does not operate a PAC.

"We're essentially bundlers," Mr. Williams said.

DFER sends email notices to its members touting one candidate the organization labels its "reformer of the month" and asking for donors to support the candidate financially. The emails reach 35,000 people nationwide.

Much of the criticism of the groups' activities draws on their wellspring of support from wealthy individuals. Some observers worry that too few individuals are supporting organizations with similar policy aims, thus giving them a disproportionate say.

"In my mind, it's not a bad thing for people to be able to speak, whether through a megaphone or not, but it's a bad thing if the overall ability of policymakers to hear different voices or constituencies becomes compromised," said Kevin G. Welner, a professor of education at the University of Colorado Boulder. (A policy center Mr. Welner also directs receives funding from the National Education Association.)

Questions linger about whether, and to what extent, funders' political or policy leanings exert influence on the groups' advocacy positions and campaign activities. The education advocacy groups' leaders contest the implication that they are beholden to their funders' political or policy agendas.

"If there is any belief out there that I allow anyone to dictate what I do, they are sorely mistaken," Ms. Rhee of StudentsFirst said. "If a funder wants to be the one driving the decision-making, they should do it through some other vehicle."

But Mr. Williams of DFER acknowledged that while "no one's ever said, 'Here's money, you have to do X,' the dollars won't come in unless I'm putting together a compelling argument" about what the group plans to do with them.

Political scientists agree that while it's unlikely funders have specifically demanded certain policy outcomes, their support could come with a type of implied deliverable.

"There's much more pressure to show the payoff and show it quickly, and more of an atmosphere created where these groups are competing with one another for the attention of what they fear may be a fickle community," said Jeffrey R. Henig, a professor of political science and education at Teachers College, Columbia University. "These folks have opportunities to put money where they want to, and many of them are not necessarily patient."

Moving Forward

Debates about motives are likely to persist, but this much is clear: With the rise of the newer wave of education advocacy groups, the K-12 field is crowded with more powerful players than ever before.

The scaling-up of education advocacy is not without risks and challenges—a fact the groups' backers say they are keenly aware of.

"None of them is content to work in just three or four or five states," said Ed Kirby, a senior program officer for the Walton Family Foundation, which provides support for Education Reform Now, Stand for Children, and StudentsFirst. "At what pace do you execute that growth plan in a manner that allows you to hang on to quality work in each of the places you engage in?" (The Walton Family Foundation also underwrites coverage of parent-empowerment issues in *Education Week*.)

And while both Stand for Children and DFER have several years of campaign experience under their belts, Ms. Rhee's group, the newest of those three advocacy organizations, has participated in a limited number of elections and has yet to be tested on a larger scale.

Mr. Henig of Teachers College suggests that all the groups will be under pressure to build and generate community buy-in and support for the legislative changes they champion, something he views as a potential stumbling block.

"The school 'reformers' see a lot of their opposition still residing in those local arenas, where teachers' unions and parents have been active," he said.

"I think they went through a period where they thought the power of their reforms and the evidence that these were superior would be sufficient to generate broad political support," he said. "And as it's turned out, it's both the case that the evidence is more subtle, more contested than they imagined, and that the general public has proven slower to get enlisted in these broad movements than they might have expected."

Assistant Editor Sean Cavanagh contributed to this article.

Library Intern Amy Wickner provided research assistance.

Vol. 31, Issue 31, Pages 1,16-17, 20

19 comments

Sort by:

Oldest to New est



Report Abuse



Score: 8

[HerbEd](#)

10:08 AM on May 14, 2012

The most illuminating point here is that so many of the large individual donors to these organizations are in the financial sector. If a couple of financial sector executives were taking an interest in education policy, I'd chalk it up to their individual interests and concerns. However, when numerous such individuals are giving large sums of money to education advocacy organizations (which aren't exactly a direct fit with the financial sector), I start to wonder if there's some other motivation. In this vein, I can't help but notice that Stand for Children, Students First, and DFER are all strong advocates of choice policies, particularly charter schools. Business has for some time tried to turn running schools into a profitable model. The high costs associated with running schools have been a huge hurdle. Having those schools subsidized by states via charter school funding would certainly help to lower the costs to the companies running those schools. The same is true of online schools, for-profit universities, and private teacher preparation. These are huge markets that have historically been the domain of the nonprofit and public sectors (as opposed to testing and textbook publishing, which, while funded through public contracts, have always been executed by private companies). An astute financial analyst would obviously be interested in opening up these markets more to the private sector. But regulations and funding get in the way. What better way to remedy that situation than by funding political advocacy to alter the regulatory landscape in your favor? No analysis of education advocacy is complete without looking into not just who the funders are, but what their interests and motivations might be. Hopefully, this will be the next step in this series.

Report Abuse



Score: 10

[Jim Hunt](#)

11:13 AM on May 14, 2012

Question - What happens when the reformers are wrong? In many instances, the data does not support positions taken by the reform groups.

A case of big money trumping the truth?

 [1 reply](#)

[Report Abuse](#)



Score: 8

[Anyman321](#)

12:00 PM on May 14, 2012

Gosh, I keep reading articles like this again and again. The same groups who push for reform are the same groups who lack understanding of teaching and learning at a most basic level. Merely because one is rich doesn't make them right. Many of these wealthy donors have never really met an actual public school teacher.

[Report Abuse](#)



Score: 9

[Django](#)

12:00 PM on May 14, 2012

K12 education is the third largest taxpayer-funded market segment in this country, right after defense and health care. It is a \$700 billion industry, essentially untapped by the private sector.

'nuff said.

 [1 reply](#)

[Report Abuse](#)



Score: 6

[Extra](#)

12:43 PM on May 14, 2012

Readers wishing to learn more about opposition to these reform groups are directed to look at American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) model legislation and see why conservative is a term attached to these reform ideas. Others are advised to read the article, "Tom Luna's Education Reforms A Long Time in the Making" to learn of the profiteering motive behind the reform stances which contradict research .

 [1 reply](#)

[Report Abuse](#)



Score: 8

[Fangtai](#)

2:30 PM on May 14, 2012

Follow the money. Large corporations do not simply donate money because they are generous.
Report Abuse



Score: 7

[Mark Simon](#)

3:40 PM on May 14, 2012

There is a qualitative difference between the advocacy organizations that represent teachers, parents, school boards, superintendents, and other stakeholders in public education, and these groups bankrolled by hedge-fund managers and financiers to push an ideological agenda. Their goal is to alter the political landscape, so Michelle Rhee writes big checks to Scott Walker and Paul Scott. The claim to represent students is empty rhetoric.

They are not structured as representing anyone but their ideology, except for PR purposes on glossy web-sites. Its a mistake to refer to them as advocacy organizations, as if they are like the national PTA, NSBA, or the NEA of AFT. Their goal is to overwhelm the political process with money. In that sense, they are symptomatic of the larger threat to democracy of economic inequality. The irony is that teachers, parents and students are learning to disrespect the notion of reform because of these hateful messengers.

Report Abuse



Score: 7

[sandy Scarborough](#)

4:43 PM on May 14, 2012

"We wanted to start an organized national interest group constantly pushing for the interest of kids." Really? Please explain how the emphasis on frequent testing is pushing for the kids' interests? We spend so much time on testing that should be used actually teaching these children. They don't need to know how to take another high-stakes test. The amount of instructional time that is forfeited in the constant collection of data is absurd. Reform should concentrate on eliminating a great number of these tests, and instead, focus on the educational needs of the kids.

 1 reply

Report Abuse



Score: -8

[Artg](#)

5:05 PM on May 14, 2012

Why is it the motives of people that have different views from that of the biggest special interest group in K-12 education, the teachers union is always questioned? The teachers union's position is to further their members' interest whether it coincided with the interests of the students or not. It is OK for them to siphon \$60 MILLION of dues collected to fund elections while the motives of these other organizations are suspect. I am hoping with the rise of virtual learning, the teachers union days are numbered, just like the industrial union membership in this country today. Check out Sweden. They have changed funding to public schools. They now give funds directly to the parents for them to choose the particular school for their kids. Now, the public schools would have to compete for customers, the students. What a novel idea! The reason why it is not happening here is the teachers union.

 [2 replies](#)

[Report Abuse](#)



Score: -2

[brownchestnut](#)

9:28 PM on May 14, 2012

We need to keep our eyes on the ball. The Teachers' Unions are now in bed with the Reformers (for the most part) and the only interest they represent are their own. The only group in this equation that is truly "standing for Children" and working to protect them from the extreme and irreparable damage these reforms present are THE TEACHERS. "Choice" and "accountability" in education reform "New-Speak" is code for siphoning off billions of \$\$ meant for true, public education, and putting them in the pockets of corporations and speculators.

[Report Abuse](#)



Score: 2

[Leonie Haimson](#)

9:33 PM on May 14, 2012

This is a very soft picture of what these guys are trying to achieve, which is essentially privatization and the imposition of a rigid, damaging corporate agenda: "They are pushing for such policies as rigorous teacher evaluations based in part on evidence of student learning, increased access to high-quality charter schools, and higher academic standards for schools and students."

Your articulation of the policy goals of these groups is more flattering than they deserve. Most experts do not think that teacher evaluation and job security linked to annual variations in student test scores is "rigorous" or even accurate, and it is hard to argue that the untrammelled and rapid expansion of charters that they guys are pushing for will yield any sort of "high quality". And though you trace the influence of hedge funders on this agenda, you do not mention the Gates Foundation , which is probably the largest funding source for these astroturf groups.

 [1 reply](#)

Report Abuse



Score: 7

[Linda/RetiredTeacher](#)

10:39 PM on May 14, 2012

The people who put children first are those who are willing to care for them: parents and teachers.

Almost all these "advocates" have two things in common: they are not teachers and they make a lot of money.

With the 60 Minutes broadcast yesterday about the charter schools run by a Turkish entrepreneur and Turkish teachers, I hope the American public is waking up to the legalized theft of its public schools.

Report Abuse



Score: 0

[thrifty32](#)

7:37 AM on May 15, 2012

Unions and educational reformers tend to miss the bigger picture when discussing public education, rationale. Its purpose from inception was selective, restrictive, and for the wealthy. So who should it benefit in the long run but those who benefit from it.

By law, Americans are mandated to send children to schools that do not benefit the underserved in the long run. Unless you have college tuition to send children to schools that claim progressivism or independence (other outlets supporting classism), your child is doomed to populate the workforce as an employee (most times with marginal skills).

In that vein, until folk begin to look at the root of education, advocate groups or attacks on unions will divert sincere and needed critiques on education.

Understanding their influence is important as an extension to power, access, and symbolism however, the root cause of educational inequality is the foundation of it.

Report Abuse



Score: 0

[Scott F.](#)

1:17 PM on May 15, 2012

Please keep this series going. Folks need to understand how these organizations operate and what they're up to. Thank you Ed Week!

 [2 replies](#)

Report Abuse



Score: 3

[lbarrios](#)

3:57 AM on May 16, 2012

This was a quick response I made to an article today in The Advocate - Baton Rouge newspaper. One of the myths we're addressing and my stance on working with our local unions.

<http://theadvocate.com/news/2832484-123/teachers-leader-assails-jindal-laws>

ABayouBoy - Much of the "failure" of our public schools has been orchestrated beginning with NCLB (No Child Left Behind federal legislation) - actually before, but this law sealed the deal. A wolf dressed in sheep's clothing, this law presented a worthy concept (equity in education outcomes) but enacted it with a process that was doomed to "failure" - high stakes standardized testing. Worse - it was promulgated by the profit motives of many who would benefit from the billions of dollars that it necessarily costs to educate every child in this country.

One only needs to look closely at Pearson, the textbook/testing/virtual school company that sucks funding from the top most to the lowest (local) taxpayer coffers. Pearson has successfully perpetuated the myth that a single STANDARDIZED test can measure LEARNING. And to bolster that myth, we now have been handed a STANDARDIZED set of Common Core Standards that will necessarily result in a STANDARDIZED CURRICULUM that will necessarily require a new STANDARDIZED TEST that is designed to STANDARDIZE our children - impossible I hope. I cannot envision straight lines of quiet children goosestepping from one class to another where teachers will read from scripts to ensure they are all on the same page every day with a curriculum that focuses on the lofty (and statistically impossible) goal of producing "proficiency" for every child. A haunting but now realistic vision.

When will teachers be allowed to return to the celebration of success which can be found in varying degrees in every child. Will we ever be able to return to the previously mandated identification of STRENGTHS in our students rather than what now is the PUBLICATION of weaknesses and the demeaning labelling of our children as FAILURES? And assigning the responsibility for that orchestrated FAILURE to teachers while ignoring all the variables is the ultimate "crime of the heart."

Our legislators and unqualified policy-makers who bypassed their brain cells to promulgate this and the many MYTHS OF REFORM must be taken to task. The movement to undermine the strength of the one voice that teachers have - unions - is the primary task of the corporate privatizers and their political allies.

The attack on educators nationwide has become so fierce and so pernicious that a groundswell of individual teacher voices joined together will continue to develop to join forces with their union voice to dispell the MYTHS and put forth the real principles of true education. The movement has to be grassroots because there is no matching of the money invested in this attack funded by huge corporate interests.

One patch of grass that has taken root is in the gubernatorial recall and the several legislative recalls with more to come. Meanwhile many of those patches of grass have grown into statewide organizations which are morphing into national coalitions that will add to the strength of our unions to make their voices heard. The People's Principles Convention will take place in Washing D.C. August 3-5 for representative groups of parents, educators, students and engaged citizens to come to concensus on principles, policies and actions regarding the most urgent issues facing public education. Visit www.saveourschoolsmarch.org for more information and to contribute your voice.

Report Abuse



Score: 0

transforming.educator.advocate

9:39 AM on May 16, 2012

So in regards to thrifty32 comment, should there be no standard for which I children should be assessed on? I'm not fond of the push and heavy reliance on testing but I would hope that we can come to general consensus that each child in this country should have some standard of education that students should be able to demonstrate knowledge of. Let's not go off the deep in with standardizing or get to loosy goosey with it :)

 1 reply

Report Abuse



Score: 2

[Peter Smyth](#)

4:52 PM on May 16, 2012

What is misleading is that the article and headlines make it appear these are educational advocacy groups. They are not. They are financial, privatization, political advocacy groups. Is a journalist doesn't see the red flags when Rhee's name is attached, he is negligent or compromised.

[1 reply](#)

[Report Abuse](#)



Score: 1

[Wtryonjr](#)

1:33 PM on May 17, 2012

About a year or so ago I was looking at an LAUSD board meeting on TV. The person who had the floor at that time was the head of the teachers union. This union head articulated to the board and I quote,

"I would have to be certain every possible cut to the CLASSROOM has been made before I can go back to my members and talk about cuts in their pay".

I nearly barfed. It is clear the teachers unions are not advocates for the CHILDREN and have the own agenda.

For years and years, teachers ratified union contracts that benefited both the union and teachers agenda, not the classroom or CHILDREN. If they did not get what they wanted they would simply go out on strike. I have yet to see teachers and their union strike for anything other goal than their personal gain like money, retirement, medical benefits. It is never for thing that benefit the CHILDREN; like every student having a book, more AP classes, and lower teacher to student ratio.

Our state is ranked 49th in education 49th. For years our graduation rates has been in the 40-percentile range.

For years, corporate America and higher education institutions have been telling us our CHILDREN are coming to them inadequately educated.

It seems to me if you are against charter competition, teacher/school accountability, student advocacy groups in education, corporate and/or financial sector taking interests in finding a solution to this failing system, you are for the same o same o.

At least we are here talking about.....

However for our CHILDREN AND OUR COUNTRY WE NEED TO STOP TALKING AND START DOING.

AND START DOING

Report Abuse



Score: 0

BVALIANT

4:33 PM on May 19, 2012

Parents and educators ALERT! It is time to turn off the SNOOZE BUTTON and pay attention to the alarms going off all around you. In the past you have been able to hunker down until the fad passed and you could resume doing what is best for your kids.

Ain't going to happen this time because the sharks smell blood in the water and as usual, it is the money. Money to be made on tests. Money to be made operating charter schools or private schools run on vouchers. Money to be made on test prep materials. Money to be made on all of the new curriculum materials required for Common Core Standards. Money to be made on online education and the technology required to implement it. Even money to be made on real estate when they close your local school.

It is time to stand up and shout, "Hell no, I won't play your game!" Tell President Obama what you think!<http://dumpduncan.org/>.