
A necessary history of Stand for Children

Part I 2010-2012

The introduction of Stand for Children to Indianapolis

December 11, 2011 Education-Community Action Team

For or Against Children:

The problematic history of Stand for Children in America

Trampling the Grassroots: A sharp right turn in Massachusetts

Fall 2011 *Rethinking Schools*

Wall Street hedge fund managers find a toehold in Wisconsin

January 13, 2010 *Milwaukee Express*

Stand for Children's Illinois PAC

Stand for Children shows up with big bucks

January 27, 2011 *Illinois Times*

Democracy for \$ale, Buying School Board Elections: Will what happened in Denver in 2011 happen in Indianapolis in 2012?

September 15, 2012 Education-Community Action Team

“While the report suggests some community organizing strategies can be used to advance...education reform, [the Stand for Children] approach undermines an understanding of community organizing as a democratic practice through which organizations and agendas emerge out of the concerns and through the actions of indigenous community leaders working to build a more inclusive public democracy.”

~ National Education Policy Center Review, *Turning Lightning into Electricity: Organizing Parents for Education Reform*

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Parent Power--Indianapolis

Education-Community Action Team

The roots of Stand for Children (SfC) are found in [neo-liberalism](#) of the 1990s which brought privatization and the 2001 [No Child Left Behind](#) law. In addition, such legislation brought: standardization; testing; school grading, turn around, and closing; and, in addition [school choice in Indiana](#). Formed in 1996, [SfC](#) was brought to Indianapolis by the Mind Trust. SfC started here with its “What’s Possible” program [launched 12.10.2011 at Madam Walker Theater](#). This production was the culmination of planning and the beginning of Mind Trust’s actions that started in 2006 to both dismantle and privatize IPS. The event was preceded by the fact that just a month earlier [Eli Lilly gave the Mind Trust \\$3.5M](#) to finally get the ball rolling. Looking back, since 1996, the local press has been both favorable to, [“Stand helps close homework gap for charter students”](#) and critical of, [“Is Stand buying the 2014 IPS school board election?”](#) SfC.

“A necessary history of Stand for Children” is the first in a series intended to reveal and analyze events surrounding the SfC organization from both a national and a local perspective. The SfC story is necessary because it is basically a narrative of money and power and not substance. SfC is a transactional group organized *for* parents of IPS school children, not *by* these parents. It’s the manipulation of [dark money](#) in particular, influencing local elections and “engineering” the opinions/behaviors of SfC parents—all while these same parents are being disenfranchised as they support charter and Innovation boards which are not democratically elected. And in cases where SfC members pay property taxes, which in Indiana are used to support charters or Innovations as public schools, these same parents or community members, since they cannot elect these boards, end up having no say so over who spends or how their taxes are spent. This is classical taxation without representation, which is tyranny.

Stand for Children’s comprehensive plot to privatize our public schools

Here’s how it works: Brought into school districts (e.g., Denver, Memphis) by other local non-profits which are established, that have money and power (e.g., Mind Trust), SfC goes about buying school boards seats--especially with [dark money](#) and politicians--who then vote in charters, that then let SfC staff into these schools to recruit parents, who are then schooled in a Stand University in privatization politics. At this point, popular figures like [John Legend](#) are brought in to gaslight the parents, who then go to school board meetings and state legislatures in their sky blue SfC t-shirts to promote SfC policies. Learn more about the scenario around just how SfC engineers the consent of parents: <https://nepc.colorado.edu/thinktank/review-turning-lightning-into-electricity>.

And it all started here in late 2011 with a big, impressive, and costly show at the Madam Walker Theater building. Here are my notes from that “What’s Possible” program:

Part I Prepared for college

*** Karega Rausch**

- Sand for Children activities will be directed at passing public policy legislation
- Children can receive an outstanding education, the public schools don't have the right tools
- Parents need information for quality choices

- Parents need empowered to change things
- We must have a community conversation
- There are four ways to make it happen

Dr. Michael L. Lomax Head of United Negro College Fund

- students must be prepared for college: must be college ready
- we need to do something very different in school
- we need to change
- this public school system did not serve my community
- we must prepare our students to compete for the best jobs
- a high school diploma is not enough
- we have an unequal & ineffective public school system
- public schools not doing enough
- IPS 43% are learning at grade level: what about the other the 57%?
- IPS 58% grad rate; what about the other 42%?
- we must judge the school's performance by the students performance
- this type of performance must be enforced by parents and children
- must change the way students are taught
- we must make kids college ready...
 - every kid may not end up in college,
 - but every kid must be able to aspire to college
- This every kid needs:
 1. a great teacher
 2. a challenging curriculum
 3. to work hard
- A college graduate will earn \$1 million more in a lifetime than a high school grad.
- We must prepare ourselves to:
 - get an education and the competitive
 - compete with China and India to
 - be able to be smart and talented workers every child gets an opportunity

Part II Tell the truth

- Karega noted his pastor told him, " Always tell the truth."
- 52% of IPS schools got D or F grade
- IPS parent Tamika Bennett called Tech HS in mini-prison
 - Testified her children didn't get help with tutoring they were supposed to get
- Tina Ahlgren math teacher at Howe: the system is to blame, not parents and teachers
 - Howe has had 5 principals and 3 name changes in the last 7 years
 - Howe students are being actively recruited to leave Howe and go to another school

Part III What's possible?

- Video by Lawrence Hemphill "Our public school system"
- Project Restore Arlington Wood #99
 - Tammy Laughner
 - no-nonsense approach to discipline: no child can interfere other children from learning
- **Patrick Jones Charles A. Tinley school math teacher
 - all children can and must achieve
 - boys like to compete
- Pastor Chas. Tripp endorsed Karega Rausch as local education leader

Part IV Stand for Children

- Ways improve education
 1. great schools with great teachers
 2. newly structured IPS school board
 3. state ed policy—lobby to affect legislation supporting Stand for Children agenda
 4. legislative races—find/elect politicians who support Stand for Children agenda

* Karega Rausch now has a Ph.D., is president/CEO of the National Association of Charter School Authorizers

** Patrick Jones is now Senior Vice President of Leadership and Equity at the Mind Trust

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For or Against Children: The problematic history of Stand for Children

Rethinking Schools Fall 2011

<https://rethinkingschools.org/articles/for-or-against-children/>

Last October, a friend of mine called with a question, “What do you know about Stand for Children?”

The advocacy organization, based in our hometown of Portland, Ore., was expanding into his state of Illinois, and he hoped to glean some insight into the kinds of reforms the group would support. Just two months later, Stand’s Illinois branch had amassed more than \$3 million in a political action committee and unveiled an aggressive teacher evaluation bill.

“Have they always been like this?” he asked. The short answer: no.

Stand for Children was founded in the late 1990s as a way to advocate for the welfare of children. It grew out of a 1996 march by more than 250,000 people in Washington, D.C. The aim of the march was to highlight child poverty at a time when Congress and the Clinton administration were preparing to “end welfare as we know it.” Jonah Edelman, son of children’s and civil rights activist Marian Wright Edelman, co-founded the group and continues to serve as CEO. Stand’s first chapter was in Oregon, but the group now operates in eight additional states: Arizona, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Massachusetts, Tennessee, Texas, and Washington.

According to Susan Barrett, a parent volunteer who recently left Portland’s Stand chapter, Stand started with a genuine focus on improving the lives of poor children: [Stand] worked on smaller issues with positive impact, such as after-school program funding and emergency dental care for uninsured kids. Many parents like me who joined Stand a while back still remember how it was an organization fighting for the Portland Children’s Levy, which provided funds for early childhood education, foster care, child abuse prevention programs, and a variety of other programs centered on children.¹

Here is a snapshot of Stand’s agenda during that period:

- Health coverage for uninsured children
- Monitoring the impact of welfare reform
- More money for affordable, high-quality child care

- Safe and productive after-school activities
- Schools that have small classes, well-trained teachers, high standards, and involved parents.²

Fifteen years later, Stand seems to have morphed into something quite different. For Oregonians, the first public indications that Stand had made a striking 180-degree turn in its politics was its support for Race to the Top legislation and its active promotion of the antiunion, anti-public school film *Waiting for “Superman.”* Stand led a well-financed, intensive campaign for the film, organizing special invitation-only showings for various constituencies.

According to Barrett:

This past year, Oregon Stand staff wanted us to press our legislators to pass a “bipartisan education package,” which tied the release of much-needed school funding to the expansion of charters, online learning, and other so-called “reforms.” Stand also pushed to lower the capital gains tax.

For Tom Olson, another former Portland Stand member, the final straw was the appointment of a new executive director for the Oregon chapter:

We were appalled that [Sue Levin] had virtually no experience leading grassroots organizations. Instead, we were told that she had a truly impressive background as an “entrepreneur” (a phrase we began to hear [CEO Edelman] use quite frequently during [his] transformation during 2009–10). Levin had been the founder and CEO of a women’s apparel company, Lucy Inc. Prior to that, she had been a women’s sports apparel VP at Nike Inc. Grassroots leadership experience? Absolutely none. Connections with millionaires? A whole bunch.³

For Stand’s Portland chapter, where the organization is headquartered and one of the few places where it has a significant history of grassroots activism, the changes in Stand’s role have clearly been traumatic for parents and community members who had a very different image of the organization. This is clearly not a local phenomenon. As Stand has expanded, it has followed a similar pattern: In state after state, Stand has made the corporate-driven agenda of expanding charter schools and tying teacher pay and evaluations to student test scores their top priority.

To be sure, Stand has maintained some vestiges of its original focus on children. Stand recently supported bills in Colorado and Oregon that would allow undocumented students to pay in-state tuition at state colleges; in both states, conservative activists expressed hostility to these measures. The Colorado chapter opposed a proposition and two statewide amendments that would have gutted education funding. The Arizona chapter supported a temporary 1 percent tax increase that avoided significant cuts to public schools. The Tennessee chapter fought an English-only amendment that would have negatively affected schools and families, supported changes to suspension policies that hurt children, and pushed for more pre-K funds.

But, unfortunately, the dominant impact of Stand, everywhere it has a presence, is much more pro-business than pro-children. This was certainly the case in Illinois, where Stand for Children played a part in crafting what they are touting as their biggest victory yet: Senate Bill 7.

Standing Against Illinois Teachers

SB 7, which passed the Illinois Senate in a unanimous vote and the General Assembly with a single dissenter, undermines seniority as the basis of teacher job security and specifically singles out the Chicago Teachers Union by severely restricting its right to strike.

Chicago has become a testing ground for corporate education policy. Recent CEOs of Chicago Public Schools have included Paul Vallas (1995–2001), who later became the architect behind the union-busting and charterization plan in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina; and Arne Duncan (2001–08), who privatized Chicago public schools at a rate of about 10 per year before becoming Barack Obama’s education secretary. The policies pushed by these corporate reformers have been touted as “miraculous” by business leaders, but have created a horrendous environment for Chicago teachers.

Intensive and strategic organizing in the face of layoffs, increasing attacks on teachers, and school closings led to last year’s victory for the Caucus of Rank-and-File Educators (CORE), which swept the 2010 Chicago Teachers Union elections, winning every single seat. But CORE came to power in the context of an economic crisis in which workers are being forced to bear the brunt of economic sacrifice. The city’s elite became even more determined to break the teachers’ union.

Bruce Rainer, a Republican venture capitalist, recruited Edelman to come to Illinois and help with this task. Thanks to a speech caught on video and posted on YouTube, we now know the intimate details of how Stand for Children helped shape Illinois’ latest anti-teacher legislation. Speaking at the Aspen Ideas Festival, billionaire James Crown and Edelman caused an uproar with their ideas about SB 7.

Their panel discussion, titled “If It Can Happen There, It Can Happen Anywhere: Transformational Education Legislation in Illinois,” began with Crown painting a picture of an all-powerful teachers’ union that consistently blocks education reform and has a stranglehold on Illinois politics. Crown was particularly angry that teachers in Illinois had maintained their right to strike. “In 45 of the 50 states, there is no right to strike by teachers,” he protested. “So this was an incredibly strike-permissive environment with these other efforts by the unions, and so forth, that created an unsustainable structure in our school system.”

Following Crown, Edelman gave a step-by-step account of how Stand for Children worked to undermine teachers’ union rights in Illinois. After explaining how Stand essentially bought a handful of Illinois legislators with campaign contributions—most crucially, Democratic Assembly Speaker Michael Madigan—Edelman explained Stand’s strategy:

After the election, Advance Illinois and Stand had drafted a very bold proposal we called Performance Counts. It tied tenure and layoffs to performance. It let principals hire who they choose. It streamlined dismissal of ineffective tenured teachers substantially—from two-plus years and \$200,000 in legal fees, on average, to three to four months, with very little likelihood of legal recourse. And, most importantly, we called for the reform of collective bargaining throughout the state basically, proposing that school boards would be able to decide any disputed issue at impasse. So a bold proposal for Illinois, and one that six months earlier would have been unthinkable, undiscussable. . . .

We hired 11 lobbyists, including the four best insiders and seven of the best minority lobbyists, preventing the unions from hiring them. We enlisted a statewide public affairs firm. . . . We raised \$3 million for our political action committee between the election and the end of the year. That’s more money than either of the unions have in their political action committees.

And so essentially, what we did in a very short period of time was shift the balance of power. I can tell you there was a palpable sense of concern, if not shock, on the part of the teachers’ unions in Illinois that Speaker Madigan had changed allegiance, and that we had clear political capability to potentially jam this proposal down their throats, the same way the pension reform had been jammed down their throats six months earlier.

Edelman's comments produced outrage among union and education activists. He issued an apology, saying he regretted that he "left children mostly out of the equation," and that the speech "could cause viewers to wrongly conclude that I'm against unions."

For their part, the leaders of Illinois' 3 main education unions blasted Edelman in a joint statement:

We heard a lot from Jonah Edelman about power in politics, power over unions, and management power over teachers. Sadly, we didn't hear anything in that hour-long session about improving education. . . . What's worse is that these false claims clearly show an organizational agenda that has nothing to do with helping kids learn.

It's clear from Edelman's remarks that Stand's effectiveness is reliant on a public perception that it represents the interests of parents. But in fact, Stand's agenda is now closely aligned with those who call for privatization, charters, vouchers, and an end to teachers' unions.

This is true throughout the country. For example, Stand's most significant work in Colorado was their support of Senate Bill 191, a landmark piece of legislation that bases 50 percent of a teacher's evaluation on student achievement data. As Dana Goldstein explained in a recent *American Prospect* article, this may lead the state to test every student, in every grade, in every subject—including art, music, and PE. The poisonous debate around the bill vilified those in opposition and demoralized teachers across the state. One teacher, recalling the negotiations over the bill, told Goldstein, "I've chosen a profession that, in the public eyes, is worse than prostitution."

Stand's Colorado operations are funded in part by the Walton Family Foundation and the Daniels Fund, two right-wing philanthropies that have pushed for vouchers and charter schools.

Stand entered Texas in early 2011 as the state wrestled with a budget shortfall that could be as high as \$27 billion. The dramatic cuts to schools in the Lone Star state will undoubtedly harm children, yet Stand put their might behind a campaign to evaluate teachers. Texas Senate Bill 4 and the companion bill in the House call for basing from 30 to 50 percent of teacher evaluations on test score growth. In addition, Stand supported legislation that would aid Texas charter schools.

To further this agenda, Stand hired nine lobbyists with ties to the Republican Party, including three lobbyists from Delisi Communications. The firm's president, Ted Delisi, purchased Karl Rove's consulting and direct mail company when Rove joined the Bush presidential campaign in 1999, and ran the Bush/Cheney fundraising and mailer campaign the following year.

Stand set up shop in Indiana in early 2011 and began advocating for changes to teacher evaluations as Gov. Mitch Daniels and the Republican-controlled legislature passed the most expansive state voucher program in U.S. history, expanded charter schools, restricted collective bargaining, and made serious changes to teacher evaluations. Stand's advocacy for test-based teacher evaluations included statements that were blatantly false, including: "Studies show that a teacher's influence on student achievement is 20 times greater than any other variable, including class size or poverty."

How Did This Happen?

What happened? How did Stand morph from an organization with a focus on children's health issues, nonschool factors, and research-based school improvements to an organization that pushes core elements of the corporate destruction of public education?

Stand has seen an enormous influx of corporate cash. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation began by offering a relatively modest two-year grant of \$80,000 in 2005. In 2007, Stand for Children received a \$682,565 grant. In 2009, the point at which Stand's drastically different political agenda became obvious, Gates awarded a \$971,280 grant to support "common policy priorities" and in 2010, a \$3,476,300 grant.

Though the Gates Foundation remains the biggest donor to Stand for Children, other players in the world of corporate education reform have also begun to see Stand as an effective vehicle to push their agenda.

New Profit Inc. has funded Stand since 2008—to the tune of \$1,458,500. According to its website, New Profit is a "national venture philanthropy fund that seeks to harness America's spirit of innovation and entrepreneurship to help solve the country's biggest social problems."

The Walton Family Foundation made a 2010 grant of \$1,378,527. Several other major funders are tied to Bain Capital, a private equity and venture capital firm founded by Mitt Romney.

In a similar time frame, Stand's National Board of Directors has seen dramatic changes. Lauene Powell Jobs joined the board of Stand for Children in 2006. She also serves on the board of Teach for America. Both Powell Jobs and Julie Mikuta, who joined the Stand board in 2007, are integrally involved with the NewSchools Venture Fund. NewSchools is a venture philanthropy firm, started by Silicon Valley entrepreneurs and financed by many of the same donors who give to Stand for Children—Bill Gates, the Walton Family—as well as Eli Broad and Gap founder Donald Fisher. NewSchools Venture Fund pours money into charter schools and "human capital" projects with the aim of using market models and corporate management to drastically reshape the education system.

In 2010, Emma Bloomberg, daughter of billionaire New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, became the newest member of Stand's national board. Emma Bloomberg is a program officer at the Robin Hood Foundation, another venture philanthropy organization, whose board of directors is dominated by corporate titans like General Electric CEO Jeffery Immelt and JP Morgan CEO Jes Staley.

Marian Wright Edelman is no longer a board member. In fact, 11 of the 14 board members of Stand for Children and the Stand for Children Leadership Center have joined the organization since 2006.

The education policy environment has changed significantly during the past 10 years. Particularly since the onset of the economic crisis, teachers have increasingly been blamed for "failing public schools." Major foundations have spent millions in efforts to tie teacher evaluations to student test scores, make it easier to hire and fire teachers, and restrict teachers' rights to due process and to strike. Co-opting organizations like Stand for Children Reshapes the public face of corporate education reform and helps make anti-union and privatization schemes more palatable to liberals and progressives. It's clear that conservative foundations and corporate-backed operatives recognize that organizing parents is a promising way to further their agendas (see David Bacon's ["Trigger Laws: Does Signing a Petition Give Parents a Voice?"](#)).

Conclusion

There is a legitimate concern for teacher quality, how layoffs are handled, and the need for greater parent and community involvement in teacher contract negotiations. These are serious issues for low-income families and other marginalized communities, but Stand's approach fails to bring parents, teachers, and communities together, and instead embraces policies favored by historic opponents of public schools and teachers' unions.

As Susan Barrett explains:

My fear is that unwitting parents and community members will join Stand because they want to rectify the problems they see every day in their children’s public schools, such as underfunding, lack of arts programs, large class sizes and cuts to the school year, only to find that they get roped into very different goals. . . I worry we will lose a truly democratic discussion and action on education weighted in favor of corporate reforms.

We agree. There is a need for a parent- and community-driven organization that is not directly tied to teachers unions. An organization that pushes for quality early childhood education, adequate funding for the public education system, and attention to childhood health issues would certainly represent a kid-first agenda. It is even possible to critique teacher training, hiring, and firing in such a broad agenda. But putting kids first is no longer the focus of Stand for Children.

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“Trampling the Grassroots A sharp right turn in Massachusetts”

August 2009: It was an emergency. The Massachusetts Stand for Children director said a decision must be made immediately—that very day.

She was pressing the two dozen local leaders holding their statewide meeting to get on board with Massachusetts Gov. Deval Patrick’s education “reform” bill, which called for more charter schools and the use of test scores to evaluate teachers. That would be a big shift. Until then, Stand had been all about getting more money for schools. In previous years, the group had brought as many as 2,000 parents and other activists to the Statehouse to lobby for more money for children in the budget.

The staff had also taught Stand chapters how to run funding campaigns in their own communities. “They helped us divvy up call lists and organize meetings to get the city to adopt an optional meals tax,” says Sharon Guzik, a former Stand activist in the Boston suburb of Medford. “We were very new and very grateful.”

But at the August meeting, the state director said Stand must change, and fast.

Why the rush? Gov. Patrick was trying to win a huge federal Race to the Top grant, working on a tight schedule. His “reform” bill was the key to the money. If Stand helped, it would get a seat at the table.

There was no mention of the big bucks that corporate foundations were starting to pour into the Stand national organization that year as it swung around to match the corporate agenda all across the country.

Some chapter leaders at the meeting refused to go along. They had been battling proposed charter schools in their communities that would suck money from their school budgets.

But the majority deferred to the staff. “Most of the people there were newbies,” recalls Roger Garberg from the town of Gloucester, where an intense charter school fight was under way. In the end, he and

his allies were outvoted.

After the meeting, Stand lobbyists worked hard to pass the governor's bill, but some members continued to resist. Tracy Novick, an activist in Worcester, got parents together to write their legislators, as Stand members, in opposition.

"Well, that blew the top off," she says. "We had the statewide chair out for meetings, it was a circus."

Not a fun circus—friendships broke up as the Worcester chapter fell apart.

Garberg is still angry, but he understands why some Stand leaders and staff wanted to change course. Before, he says, "year after year, after budget season, we [Stand leaders] would put the budget under a microscope to identify our successes. You have to have a story that tells members their efforts were worthwhile. But it was becoming harder and harder."

"A seat at the table" must have been very alluring, especially combined with the prospect of serious money for the organization. "That made it easy to adopt a rhetoric with a civil rights cast to it about closing achievement gaps," he says. "The problem is, the rhetoric and reality were completely at odds."

For Worcester, Gloucester, Medford, and other big Stand chapters, the organization's turnabout was the end of the line. Within a few months, they folded, unwilling to toe the new line.

But flush with funding and new staff, Stand is very much alive in Massachusetts. The group is building chapters in Boston and other communities, including a new one in Worcester.

Recently, the state commissioner of education publicly thanked Stand for supporting his new teacher evaluation formula, which includes student test scores.

Now, Stand is pushing out ahead of Gov. Patrick with its corporate agenda. It supported a business-backed bill that will supposedly "save" municipalities \$100 million by restricting bargaining on health benefits for teachers and other public employees. Patrick softened the bill before he agreed to sign it. And Stand announced it will push for a statewide ballot initiative to put teacher "effectiveness" ahead of seniority in determining layoffs or transfers. Patrick's education secretary immediately said it's too soon to talk about doing that because the state's brand-new teacher evaluation system has yet to prove itself.

But with plenty of corporate money to pay signature gatherers, there's little doubt that Stand will get its petition onto the 2012 ballot, setting off a battle that will pit this formerly progressive group against many of its own ex-leaders and supporters.

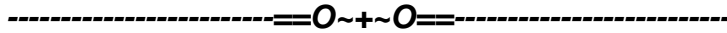
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January 13, 2010 Who's Pulling the Milwaukee Public Schools Takeover Strings? Wall Street hedge fund managers find a toehold in Wisconsin

By Lisa Kaiser 01.13.10 *Milwaukee Express*

National pro-privatization organizations led by former Milwaukee Journal Sentinel education reporter Joe Williams and backed by **Wall Street hedge fund managers** are emerging as a driving force behind the mayoral takeover of the Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS).

Williams is the executive director of the affiliated groups named **Democrats for Education Reform (DFER)** and Education Reform Now (ERN), based in New York City. ERN has a nine-month-old chapter in Wisconsin, and DFER has branches in WI, CO, MI, MO, and NJ.

The Wisconsin state director of both groups, Katy Venskus, has been lobbying in support of the pro-mayoral takeover Senate Bill 405, authored by state Sen. Lena Taylor and state Rep. Pedro Colon.

Venskus also has organized a group of Milwaukee business leaders—including Julia Taylor of the Greater Milwaukee Committee, Tim Sheehy of the Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce and Tim Sullivan of Bucyrus International—to push for a mayor-appointed superintendent of MPS with enhanced executive powers.

But behind the public lobbying is a national network of pro-privatization elites working to radically change—some would say destroy—public education as we know it. While the pro-privatizers traditionally have been conservative Republicans and religious school supporters who back taxpayer-funded voucher schools, this group of pro-privatizers is made up mainly of conservative Democrats who see an enhanced role for the free market in public education in the form of vouchers, charter schools and mayor-led districts.

Teacher Bob Peterson, an editor of *Rethinking Schools* and a leader in the 28-member Coalition to Stop the MPS Takeover, said it's "really frightening" that the pro-privatization forces have gained power within the Democratic Party.

"Democrats for Education Reform obviously have lined up with what I would call a market approach to solving social problems," Peterson said. "As a teacher, I know that the marketplace hasn't treated my kids very well in terms of their parents' jobs and housing and health care. For me to think that the marketplace is going to have these solutions for education—I'm extremely skeptical."

Milwaukee state Rep. Tamara Grigsby, who with state Sen. Spencer Coggs has authored an alternative MPS reform bill, said she is concerned that groups such as DFER and ERN are putting private interests ahead of the public good.

"Unfortunately, these so-called education reform groups are simply a veiled attempt at continuing the privatization of public education in Milwaukee," Grigsby said. "In truth, these groups spent more time talking about the 'corporate role in education,' rather than ways to improve public education itself."

Wall Street's Link to Education Reforms While Wisconsinites may not be aware of the Wall Street link to a local issue like mayoral control of MPS, the New York press has begun to examine the links between hedge fund managers and Williams' groups.

The boards of directors of both DFER and ERN are flush with Wall Street hedge fund managers who are affiliated with the New York charter school movement.

The four-person Education Reform Now board is made up of businessmen from the hedge funds Hawkshaw Capital, Gotham Capital, SAC Capital and Maverick Capital.

The board of Democrats for Education Reform also shows links between the charter school movement and “hedge fund heavies,” as The New York Times put it. Five of the seven board members are investors who serve on the boards of charter schools in New York. One of the charter schools, KIPP Academy, is a national network of 82 public schools in 19 states. The majority of DFER’s PAC donors are private investors.

As Williams gushed about charter schools to The New York Times, “If you’re at a hedge fund, this is definitely the hot cause.”

Lobbying for Mayoral Takeover and Voucher Schools But Williams’ hedge-fund-friendly groups aren’t just focused on New York charter schools and the Mayor Michael Bloomberg-led public schools. The groups also are involved in the push to change the governance of MPS and the survival of the taxpayer-backed school voucher program.

Lobbyist Venskus, the Wisconsin state director of Education Reform Now Advocacy and the Democrats for Education Reform Wisconsin, is a former staffer to pro-voucher state Sen. Jeff Plale (D-South Milwaukee). Venskus is based in Oconomowoc and says she splits her time between Milwaukee and Madison.

“We don’t actually have an office,” Venskus said. “It’s just me right now.”

Indeed—its Dec. 16, 2009, letter to legislators backing the pro-takeover bill authored by state Sen. Lena Taylor and state Rep. Pedro Colon, features no address or phone number, just the ERN logo. Venskus herself signed the letter, identifying herself as “Democrats for Education Reform Wisconsin” without disclosing that she is a paid lobbyist for ERN, which sent the letter.

But ERN has also gotten involved in voucher school reforms. Prior to its efforts to build support for the takeover, ERN lobbied on the portions of the state budget that deal with voucher and charter schools. ERN spent \$30,600 on those efforts, according to the GAB’s Web site, representing 222 hours of work on the matter. Venskus was also employed by Susan Mitchell’s pro-voucher organization, School Choice Wisconsin, to work on voucher and charter issues in the budget.

Venskus said that ERN “worked closely” with Marquette University’s Howard Fuller on the budget items. (Voucher champion Fuller has donated to the Democrats for Education Reform PAC, and serves on the board of the Education Equality Project with ex-Milwaukeean Williams.)

Stop the MPS Takeover’s Peterson said he had expected the voucher supporters to back takeover.

“It’s clear that the voucher people are not interested in a democratically elected school board,” Peterson said. “They know that the majority sentiment in the city is for supporting the public schools. People are critical of public schools, but they know that it’s an established institution that can serve kids and there’s some public accountability.”

Rep. Grigsby was skeptical of ERN’s true motivations. “The same special interests lobbying for Education Reform Now are those with strong ties to School Choice Wisconsin and MMAC,” she said. “I do not mean to paint all voucher advocates with the same brush, but if improving Milwaukee Public Schools was such a priority, then they should have worked with those of us committed to doing just that in the state budget. Instead, these groups were completely silent on MPS until the potential mayoral takeover became an issue.”

More Charters In the City? Venskus said that the ERN Milwaukee coalition that signed the December letter to legislators has not taken a stand on issues such as charters/vouchers, although the national organization supports them.

“I do think there is a possibility to increase the number of high-quality charters in the city of Milwaukee with the governance change,” Venskus said. “One of the things we hope will happen is that the city will get more aggressive about seeking top-notch charter operators, finding them locally, but also recruiting from the national operators who do a good job. There are lots of folks who have looked at coming to Wisconsin, but our charter climate, particularly for independent charters, is not welcoming.”

When asked if charter allies on the board of DFER would have a financial stake in mayoral MPS takeover, Venskus responded, “It’s sort of an extrapolation... That’s not why we’re pursuing it.”

Venskus said she can’t predict how the competing reform measures will fare in the state Legislature.

“If we can get everyone to get off of their political soapboxes and get in a room and figure out how to do this, I think we can get something done,” Venskus said.

And is Venskus herself on a soapbox? “Umm... I’d rather not try to answer that,” she said.

COMMENTS

Anonymous So what you are saying is that the Mayor was in on this too, if I understand correctly. This has to tarnish his run for governor, if you want to even call it that. If Barrett is being bought out in his current position, one can only imagine what he would be willing to do as governor. We need to clean things up in Wisconsin politics. Walker for governor!

Anonymous Walker wants this too, (he may be a Reagan clone, and is just a duplicitous), privatization and neo-liberalization of MPS means more liberated capital from the public sector for hedge fund managers to speculate on, more contracts and fees from public coffers from incompetent, sycophantic private consultants doing shoddy work for over a \$100/hr, and overpaid principals/new democrat operatives making \$300K a year funnel campaign contributions back to their bosses who put them there, while student performance and grad rates plummet. Hey, if the Dems/Republicans can give Wall Street ludicrous profits through privatization and deregulation while main street suffers, why can't Arne Duncan, MMAC, hedge fund managers, and other private school advocacy groups give charters/choice schools big profits while public schools/students perish?

Anonymous We're one of the worst urban school districts in the country. Let's keep it that way! Don't change a thing! Last year 41% of MPS tenth graders were rated proficient in reading and 28% in math; 75% of HS students have chronic truancy problems; of 17 urban school districts only Detroit's 8th graders scored lower in math. No one can do a better job than MPS the way it is currently structured. Keep our democratically elected school board leaders. You go, MPS! We're still better than Detroit.

Maria Rosa, SDA Both of these groups came to Buffalo , N.Y to influence the Board of Education elections on May 4, 2010. Democrats for Education Reform and Education Reform Now were in town sending out slick political literature, canvassing neighborhoods, paying volunteers a good hourly wage, telephone calling, and participating in local fund raising events. Estimates that they spend \$50,000 in Buffalo alone. They underestimated Buffalo because DEF and ERN only succeeded to get one candidate on the school board, a bartender who missed all the events in the community. So Democrats for Education Reform and Education Reform Now lost in the City of Buffalo.

The alternative press here such as Artvoice and the blogs like <http://theinsurgentteacher.blogspot.com>, Buffalo rising in conjunction with the mainstream Buffalo News paper provide great coverage. Artvoice article on the group Education Reform Now the best in explaining the motives behind this group. What happened in Buffalo should be an example to others in similar situation around the country. I don't think the group is coming back to Buffalo at least not in the same way, treating residents like a bunch of bumpkins. Yet, it's a concern these groups can enter any city in the nation to attempt to influence policy for their advantage.

January 27, 2011 Stand for Children shows up with big bucks

By Rich Miller *Illinois Times*

An out-of-state education reform group raised a whopping \$2.8 million in the days leading up to historic state caps on campaign contributions.

All of the money raised by **Stand for Children's Illinois PAC** came in five- or six-figure contributions from some very major Chicago-area business types.

- Members of the famed billionaire Pritzker family kicked in a total of \$250,000 on Dec. 29, two days before the end of the old campaign finance system, which allowed for unlimited contributions to groups like Stand for Children's PAC.
- Ken Griffin, the CEO of the Citadel Group, contributed \$500,000 on Dec. 15. Griffin gave hundreds of thousands of dollars last year to Illinois House Republicans and GOP gubernatorial nominee Bill Brady's campaign.
- Sam Zell, the owner of Tribune Co., contributed \$100,000 on Dec. 20. Members of the Henry Crown family kicked in \$400,000.
- And Paul Finnegan, the co-CEO of Madison Dearborn Partners LLC, contributed \$500,000.

The group's political action committee made history last year with the single largest non-leadership contribution in modern Illinois times – a \$175,000 check to Republican state House candidate Ryan Higgins, who ended up losing his race. The PAC contributed a total of \$610,000 during the fall campaign to legislative candidates in both parties.

That money did not go unnoticed at the Statehouse. During the post-election legislative session, House Speaker Michael Madigan tried to push through education reforms supported by Stand for Children which were deemed overtly hostile by the teachers' unions. Among the reforms was an all-but-total ban on strikes by Chicago teachers. The teachers unions refused to contribute to Madigan and many of his candidates last year after he pushed through public employee pension reforms.

The group's December fundraising push left it with almost \$2.9 million in the bank as of the end of the 2010, when contributions to state PACs were capped at \$10,000 for individuals and \$20,000 for corporations per calendar year. None of the group's \$2.8 million in December contributions would have fallen under those caps.

To put this in perspective, the Illinois State Medical Society, which is one of the most powerful lobbying forces at the Statehouse, had \$1.8 million in its political action committee account by the end of the year. The Illinois Hospital Association and the pro-choice juggernaut Personal PAC ended the year with about \$1.4 million each. Stand for Children beat them all by a lot.

Jonah Edelman, Stand's national founder, said last week that the December contributions represented the "significant generosity of Illinoisans." He refused to say whether the group planned to spend the war chest in the coming campaign or use it as a long-term fund. He did say his organization was now focused on passing the education reform bill which was backed by Speaker Madigan, Chicago Mayor Daley, Chicago mayoral candidate Rahm Emanuel and others during the lame duck session. **Emanuel took in hundreds of thousands of dollars from Stand's contributors.**

The group's legislation ran into a brick wall in the Senate, where Education Reform Committee chairperson Sen. Kimberly Lightford resisted a move to rush through any reforms and insisted that

the teachers unions play a role in the negotiations.

Sen. Lightford has received high marks from both Stand for Children and the teachers unions for running fair-minded, well-organized meetings. One longtime teachers union lobbyist said this month that Lightford's meetings were some of the best-run he's attended during his entire career. Stand for Children's legislative person comes from the Senate Democratic staff, so she has a long relationship with Lightford and offered up her own high praise. A Lightford meeting is scheduled for this week.

It's not that legislators and their leaders slavishly bow deeply to anybody with a fat wallet. But they most certainly take lots of notice when somebody comes out of nowhere and antes up with \$2.9M.

And Stand for Children's lobbying stable includes some of the biggest contract lobbyists at the Statehouse. They've basically run the board, with heavy-hitting lobbyists tied to both parties and the Black and Latino caucuses.

Stand for Children has gone from nowhere to one of the biggest, and potentially one of the more successful players in the building within just a few short months, all without attracting significant media attention. It's truly an amazing story.

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September 15, 2012 Democracy for \$ale, Buying School Board Elections: Will what happened in Denver in 2011 happen in Indianapolis in 2012?

By John Harris Loflin Education-Community Action Team, Indianapolis

Review of finances in Denver Public Schools 2011 school board race

Last November, the Denver Public Schools (DPS) had a school board election. Much national attention was paid to the race because the campaign contributions were said to be some of the most significant in the history of the district.

Three seats were up for grabs. An ad hoc group of "Happy" Hayes (District-wide), Anne Rowe (Dist. 1), and Draper Carson (Dist. 5) became an unofficial "pro-reform" slate backing privatization.

Many of the campaign contributions to "pro-reform" candidates came from the oil and gas industries and investment bankers, which caused speculation that Denver's "high rollers" were trying to weigh in with their ideological bent towards a more conservative direction for DPS.

Let's look at the numbers and see what all the fuss was about: Haynes, raised \$230,037 over the course of the race. \$31,000 was from **Stand for Children**. Haynes' 4 opponents combined raised a mere \$27,532: John Daniels \$244, Frank Deserino \$16,790 (\$15,500 of his own) Roger Kilgore \$8,464, and Jacqui Shumway \$2,034

Dist. 1 winner Anne Rowe raised \$196,845 (\$15,477 in-kind from **Stand for Children**). David Sirota raised less than half of Rowe's campaign with \$87,293. Dist. 5 loser Draper Carson raised a total of \$177,440. In contrast, incumbent Arturo Jimenez raised \$68,073.

Jimenez faced an ad by **Latinos for Education Reform** accusing him and fellow board member Andrea Merida **of being against reform**. Jimenez, the only one who won against the so-called pro-reform slate noted: "**It's just an attack by folks who aren't in this district and can't vote here and are trying to influence the vote in northwest Denver.**" He also said, "This election was a close,

hard-fought race **against big money from out-of-district and out-of-state interest groups**, with your help we overcame."

Jimenez was referring mostly to the involvement of **Stand for Children**, a Portland, Ore.-based education reform organization that **helped the "pro-reform slate" candidates with thousands of dollars for canvassing operations.**

See the whole "Democracy for \$ale" story on the 2011 Denver school board election here: <https://vorcreatex.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Democracy-for-Sale-What-happened-in-Denver-in-2011-will-happen-in-Indianapolis-in-2012.pdf>.

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