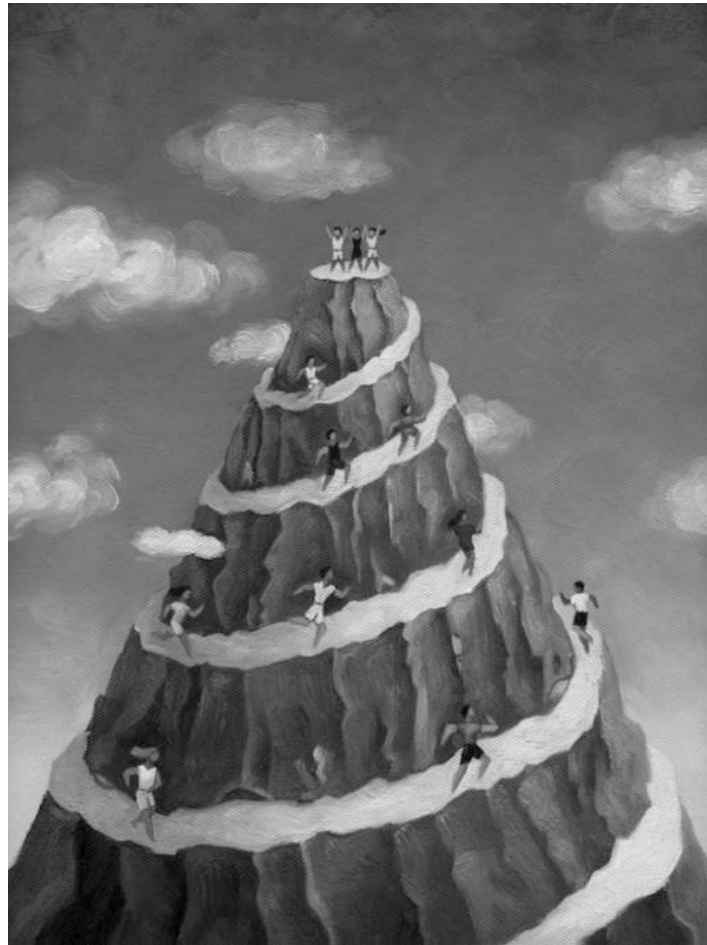


RHETORIC VS. REALITY

RACE TO THE TOP
BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT
8/25/09



DEMOCRATS
for **EDUCATION REFORM**

**RHETORIC VS. REALITY:
4 DECADES OF LIP SERVICE TO, AND UNDERMINING OF, REFORM**

The Big Picture

“I’m issuing a challenge to our nation’s governors, to school boards and principals and teachers, to businesses and non-for-profits, to parents and students: if you set and enforce rigorous and challenging standards and assessments; if you put outstanding teachers at the front of the classroom; if you turn around failing schools -- your state can win a Race to the Top grant that will not only help students outcompete workers around the world, but let them fulfill their God-given potential.”

“This competition will not be based on politics or ideology or the preferences of a particular interest group. Instead, it will be based on a simple principle -- whether a state is ready to do what works.”

“ We’re saying this is voluntary. If there are states that just don’t want to go in this direction, that’s their prerogative.

-- **President Barack Obama, Race to the Top Announcement, July 24, 2009**

“We cannot support yet another layer of federal mandates that have little or no research base of success and that usurp state and local government’s responsibilities for public education...ignoring states’ rights to enact their own laws and constitutions.”

-- **NEA President Dennis Van Roekel**, letter to Arne Duncan on Race to the Top, August 21, 2009

“Either the new presidents of the NEA and the AFT will lead with a bold vision, inspiring the next generation of local leaders to navigate the complicated education reform landscape and champion creative solutions to school improvement that speak to the concerns of the younger and the most accomplished teachers, or the unions will remain on the periphery of what is important to those members and to the public.”

-- **Mark Simon and Naomi Baden**, former NEA local reps, now Co-Directors of the Tom Mooney Institute, 2007

“The unions do everything possible to maintain the status quo...They invariably call for variations of the status quo, more of the same, rather than reforms that mean real changes...In the ongoing attempt to reform education the NEA and AFT consistently block or cripple any significant change, such as school choice and charter schools.

“They, of course, deny this and cite rhetoric stressing the need for change and their wish to bring it about. Anyone who has spent years within the movement knows that the charge is true and the rhetoric false.”

-- **David W. Kirkpatrick**, former top officer and staff member of affiliates of the NEA and the AFT, in *Government Union Review*, 2000

“The NEA has been the single biggest obstacle to education reform in this country. We know because we worked for the NEA.”

-- **Billy Boyton and John Lloyd**, former top officers respectively of the **Nebraska and Kansas NEA**, 1994

“Let me be clear on my perspective as an NEA member and as an observer of political processes: ... You don't submit a manifesto that covers up any potential for effectiveness with what amounts to political poison. And you don't submit a manifesto that undermines your credibility.”

-- **Sherman Dorn**, blogger, **Professor of Education at USF**, on the NEA comments to draft regulations on *Race to the Top*, August 23, 2009

Education As A Civil Right

“Instead of focusing on strengthening enforcement of civil rights laws to promote access and opportunity for students, the Administration has chosen the path of a series of top-down directives that may discourage rather than encourage productive innovation in classrooms and schools across the country.”

-- **NEA President Dennis Van Roekel**, letter to Arne Duncan on Race to the Top, August 21, 2009

“Research on the impact of block grants has shown that increased local control of funding has a negative impact on states with large numbers of children in poverty and on minority children. If...federal control is turned over to states, there is no guarantee funds will reach poor children for whom they were originally intended, as there is no effective enforcement of civil rights at the state level.”

-- **The Civil Rights Project**, UCLA, “Title I: Better Schooling for Educationally Deprived Students,”1999.

“The unions have battled against the principle that schools and education agencies should be held accountable for the academic progress of their students. They have sought to water down the standards adopted by states to reflect what students should know and be able to do. They have attacked assessments designed to measure the progress of schools, seeking to localize decisions about test content so that the performance of students in one school or community cannot be compared with others.”

-- **William L. Taylor, Chair, Citizens’ Commission on Civil Rights**, July 5, 2009

“We find this top-down approach disturbing; we have been down that road before with the failures of No Child Left Behind, and we cannot support yet another layer of federal mandates that have little or no research base of success and that usurp state and local government’s responsibilities for public education.”

-- **NEA President Dennis Van Roekel**, letter to Arne Duncan on Race to the Top, August 21, 2009

“The Leadership Conference on Civil Rights believes that NCLB is a civil rights law, and that some of the requirements of NCLB constitute, in essence, the rights of children to obtain a quality education.

-- **Wade Henderson, President, and Nancy Zirkin, CEO Executive Vice President**, Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, the largest civil rights coalition

in the country, June 18, 2008. LCCR, along with NAACP, MALDEF, NCLR, and others were responding to the NEA/NSBA effort to suspend NCLB law until reauthorization.

“We reject the secretary of education's effort to force millions of dollars in state and local spending in violation of the law's clear guarantee against unfunded mandates. We also ask for our day in court without having to forfeit or risk sacrificing hundreds of millions of dollars in federal funding.”

-- **Richard Blumenthal, Connecticut State Attorney General**, upon filing Connecticut v. Spellings, a legal attempt to suspend NCLB, December 23, 2005.

“Connecticut is taking a brave stand today. Parents in communities where school districts are financially strained were promised that this law would close the achievement gap. Instead, their tax dollars are being used to cover unpaid bills sent from Washington for costly regulations that do not help improve education.”

-- **NEA President Reg Weaver** on Blumenthal's filing of the NCLB lawsuit.

“Connecticut currently has the worst gap in achievement between poor and non-poor children, according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress. Moreover, the State has not yet satisfactorily addressed the Connecticut Supreme Court's order to reduce the extreme racial and ethnic isolation and unequal educational opportunities outlined in the Sheff vs. O'Neill case. The time has come for Connecticut to cease speaking about supporting the goals of NCLB, to start complying in good faith with its obligations and to get down to the hard work of eliminating educational inequality.”

-- Connecticut State Conference Of NAACP Branches, *Scot X. Esdaile, President, January 30, 2006*

“The term [states rights] still appears on occasion in political speech, in some cases as code language indicating support of discriminatory practices...as a result, its use is often met with skepticism or suspicion by the public at large.”

-- **D. Jonathan White, Encyclopedia of Alabama**, University of Alabama, August, 2009

On School Turnarounds and Charter Schools

“Now, there is no silver bullet when it comes to turning these schools around. We know that many of these schools are in very tough neighborhoods, and kids are coming to school already with some significant problems. And the most effective and innovative approaches will be developed outside of Washington in communities across this country.”

-- President Barack Obama, Race to the Top Announcement, July 24, 2009

“States need to have a plan to turn around their lowest-performing schools. I’m an advocate of using whatever model works for children and I want charter schools to join that work. But they won’t be able to get into the turnaround business in states that restrict the growth of charters.

“I’m not a fan of charters. I’m a fan of good charters.”

-- Education Secretary Arne Duncan, remarks to National Alliance of Public Charter Schools, June 25, 2009

“Despite growing evidence to the contrary, it appears that the Administration has decided that charter schools are the only answer to what ails America’s public schools—urban, suburban, exurban, and rural—and all must comply with that silver bullet.”

-- NEA President Dennis Van Roekel, letter to Arne Duncan on Race to the Top, August 21, 2009

“I’m just tired of it. We’re losing kids.”

-- Thomas Menino, Mayor, Boston, July 16, 2009. Formerly a charter-school critic, Menino said he is fed up with opposition to charter schools from the Boston Teachers Union.

Standards, Assessments, and Accountability

“Arguing for allowing school districts and schools to adopt differing assessment systems makes comparisons between schools difficult, if not impossible.

The bottom line is that the NEA would permit different standards for different children, a system that was prevalent during the days of racial segregation in schools.”

-- **William L. Taylor, Chair, Citizens’ Commission on Civil Rights**, July 5, 2009

“Can scores on one test be made interpretable in terms of scores on other tests? Can we have more uniform data about student performance from our healthy hodgepodge of state and local programs?”

“After deliberation that lasted nine months, involving intensive review of the technical literature and consideration of every possible methodological nuance, the [National Academies of Sciences’] committee’s answer was a blunt ‘no’”

-- **Micheal Feuer, Executive Director of the Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education**, National Research Council, National Academies of Sciences, in “Moderating the Debate,” Harvard Education Press, 2006.

“The American Federation of Teachers believes that the success of school reforms in the states depends in large part on the quality of the academic standards states set for children and on how seriously those standards are taken by everyone connected with the schools.”

-- **AFT**, “Making Standards Matter, 1995

“The late Al Shanker, the influential former president of the AFT, was nearly indistinguishable from right-wing union bashers on pedagogical issues. He demanded more punitive discipline, more testing, more tracking of students, more tracking of students, more use of incentives, and a more structured curriculum emphasizing ‘error free’ student work.”

-- **Alfie Kohn**, author, *The Schools Our Children Deserve*, 1999.

Teacher Evaluation and Performance Pay

“This bill addresses [our] concerns by providing teachers the tools and resources they need to be successful. The TEACH Act creates commonsense incentives to attract qualified individuals to the teaching profession and to keep teachers in the classroom.”

-- **Reg Weaver, then-President of NEA**, on the Kennedy-Miller TEACH act, which would have allowed student test scores, *in conjunction with* other indicators, to be used for teacher evaluation and performance pay, May, 2007.

“NEA cannot support federal programs—voluntary or not—that mandate pay for test scores *as an element* of any federal program.”

-- **Reg Weaver, then-President of NEA**, Hearing on ESEA reauthorization, September 10, 2007

“You can dance around it all you want. You supported the [TEACH Act] language.”

-- **Congressman George Miller, D-California**, Chair of House Education Committee, Hearing on ESEA reauthorization, September 10, 2007.

“We must do everything possible to place a highly qualified teacher in every classroom by providing financial incentives to teachers in the most difficult schools and expanding professional development opportunities.”

-- **Reg Weaver, President of the National Education Association**, as quoted in the Washington Post September 10, 2007.

“The NEA made a deal on merit pay last year, then not only reneged on the deal but denied, in public, through their President, making the deal to the Chairman with whom they made the deal despite clear documentation that shows the President was mistaken.”

-- **Charles Barone**, former education aide to House Ed Committee Chair George Miller, now DFER Director of Federal Policy, September 11, 2007.

“Shanker courageously proposed a form of merit pay – the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards – that allowed greater pay for teachers who passed rigorous examinations.”

-- **Richard Kahlenberg**, author of *Tough Liberal: Albert Shanker and the Battles Over Schools, Unions, Race, and Democracy*, 2007.

“Proponents of performance incentives are reframing their argument: *instead of using punitive terms like “accountability,”* they are using terms like “teacher recognition” or “pay for contribution”—*labels which are challenging for the Association to oppose from a public relations standpoint.*”

“Despite sparse evidence to support “merit pay” and “pay for performance,” *many educators, researchers, and policymakers continue to support experimenting with performance incentives.* The Association needs to carefully craft a message that recognizes this strong support, while continuing to promote salary structures that are consistent with sound compensation theory and *NEA policy.* [emphases added].”

-- **NEA Teacher Quality, Department Report**, “Alternative Compensation Models and Our Members,” *Voices from the Field: Stories from Six districts.* Internal Report, July, 2009.

“One of the more interesting aspects of this presumably top secret case study report was that there was little or no discussion of student achievement or teacher effectiveness.”

-- **Van Schoales, Schools for Tomorrow Blog**, Denver, Colorado (one of six districts surveyed in the NEA report).

“We can’t talk about education. We can’t discuss when it is failing our members’ (children) in public schools in urban areas. You know, we’re the experiment... I’m tired of hearing if we just pay teachers more, you know, life will be terrific. It’s a huge problem.”

-- **Andrew Stern, president of the 1.6 million-member Service Employees Union International (SEIU)**, the largest union in the AFL-CIO, 2004 Democratic Convention, 2004. Stern’s remarks were widely circulated because he suggested the Democratic Party might be better off in the long run if Kerry were defeated.

Teacher Qualification Criteria

“Although no state will allow a person to fix plumbing, guard swimming pools, style hair, write wills, design a building, or practice medicine without completing training and passing an examination, more than 40 states allow school districts to hire teachers on emergency licenses who have not met these basic requirements.”

-- **Linda Darling-Hammond (Executive Director)** “What Matters Most: Teaching for America’s Future,” 1996

“[The undersigned endorse] A dramatic departure from the status quo—one that creates a new infrastructure for professional learning and an accountability system that ensures attention to standards for educators as well as students at every level—national, state, local school district, school, and classroom.”

-- **NEA President Keith Geiger and AFT President Al Shanker** (among others), Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, 1996.

“A lot of people who have been hired as teachers are basically not competent.”

-- **AFT President, Al Shanker**, in “Tough Liberal: **Albert Shanker** and the Battles Over Schools, Unions, Race, and Democracy.” 2007 (quote circa 1990).

“I cannot claim to be a good teacher simply because I have a master's in education, two licenses and eight years of experience. I can claim to be a good teacher only if the data demonstrate that my students have learned.”

-- **Jason Kamras, 2005 National Teacher of the Year**, Washington Post, September 10, 2007.

“Teachers hired under the old rules [pre-NCLB, which did not require teacher licensure or subject matter expertise] *should get all the financial support and time they need to re-qualify under the new ones.*” [emphasis added]

-- **Tom Blanford, associate director of, NEA Teacher Quality**, 2005, as quoted in Taylor, 2009.

“I thought the union was going to focus on how to improve our skills. But they're more interested in politics than kids.”

-- **Jaime Escalante, teacher, Garfield High, East L.A.**, who was harassed by his

union for accepting all students who wanted his classes, resulting in class sizes of more than 70. Escalante was portrayed by Edward James Olmos in "Stand and Deliver," 1988.

“They also almost uniformly call for the spending of more money and the creation of more teaching positions which, of course, result in an increase in union membership, union income and union power.”

-- David W. Kirkpatrick, Government Union Review, 2000

The Role of Research in Education Reform

“We certainly recognize the need for more school funding, but calling lawmakers into a special session to rewrite state education law just so the state can apply for (this) grant funding - really seems like a knee-jerk reaction.”

“The changes outlined by [Governor Schwarzenegger], such as merit-based pay and charter school expansions, ‘just don’t work.’”

-- **California Teachers Association Vice President Dean Vogel**, Sacramento Bee, August 23, 2009.

“About the only time research is seriously raised is to block change. When an innovation is suggested, there is a sudden interest in what research...has to say about it...when the system is threatened, the ceremonial rain dances pick up speed.”

-- **Clarence Faust, 1964** (in the book “Student, School & Society”)
