

Let Our Kids Play!: The Struggle for Recess

Seattle is following a national trend in reducing recess time in primary grades as school districts obsess about raising test scores, writes guest columnist Jesse Hagopian (originally published in the Seattle Times op-ed page).



My 5-year-old is bursting at the seams with excitement with the start of kindergarten this year. He tells me he wants to learn to tell time, tie his shoes, learn a new language, play basketball and make new friends. He attends an increasingly rare school that allows a decent amount of time

for recess — something research has shown supports academics, healthy friendships and healthy bodies.

The average time Seattle students spend in recess has steadily declined over the past few years, according to a May KUOW investigative story. When the study tracking recess began four years ago, only one Seattle school reported an average recess time of 20 minutes or less per day. During the 2013-2014 school year, some 11 schools offered that sort of a recess.

What's worse, the schools with the shortest recess times enroll disproportionately more low-income students and students of color.

Unfortunately, Seattle is following a national trend in reducing recess time in primary grades as school districts obsess about raising test scores. This obsession is driven by the federal education policy of the No Child Left Behind Act and the Race to the Top Fund.

While students' ability to interact positively with one another or develop positive self-esteem may not be measured by the next test, these interpersonal skills are the foundation of a fulfilling life and should be the most important feature of our young children's education. As the American Academy of Pediatrics stated in 2007, "Play is essential to development because it contributes to the cognitive, physical, social, and emotional well-being of children and youth."

Controlled experiments by researchers Catherine Bohn-Gettler and Anthony Pellegrini show that recess improves children's attention to academic tasks. Moreover, recess is a critical factor in a student's social and emotional well-being. Recess facilitates children's social development by allowing for cooperation and conflict resolution during unstructured free play, critical for helping children develop the necessary qualities for strong friendships.

In addition to the social and emotional benefits, recess plays an important role in the physical health of children. With adequate adult staffing, recess can significantly contribute to increased physical activity to reduce obesity, according to the American Journal of Public Health.

Students of color and low-income students disproportionately miss out on the benefits of recess. Group Health pediatrician and childhood obesity researcher Paula Lozano recently said, "Those students are the ones we also now have higher rates of obesity, and for whom academic achievement in school is even more important. So we're doing this backwards."

The Seattle Public Schools is currently under federal investigation for disproportionate discipline practices that make African-American students more than four times as likely to be suspended as white students for the same infractions. The imbalance in recess allotment with regard to race is another indication Seattle Schools needs to more equitably serve our children.

However, the school district does not yet seem to be concerned. Lori Dunn, the physical education program manager for Seattle Schools, has said there are no plans in Seattle to require schools to provide a minimum amount of recess. She said, "Actually, I haven't been aware of the trend in data, but I could realize that it's true."

There are challenges to increasing recess time, partly because adults need to be present to keep rambunctious kids safe. As the state Supreme Court's McCleary ruling has demonstrated, school-funding levels are too low to provide an ample education for all the state's children.

It is vital the Seattle school district implement a plan for equitable access to unstructured play. Teachers get this. A Social Equality Educators motion to the June Representative Assembly of the Seattle Education Association supported this change.

As another school year gets under way, remember the words of Albert Einstein: "Play is the highest form of research." My 5-year-old is set to begin a grand research endeavor.

Let our kids play.

Jesse Hagopian teaches history and co-advises the Black Student Union at Garfield High School. He has edited the book "More Than a Score: The New Uprising Against High-Stakes Testing" (Haymarket, December).

Educators' Vision

Published By the Social Equality Educators (SEE)

Volume 5, Issue 2, October 2014

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SEE steering committee: Liza Campbell, Matt Carter, Jesse Hagopian, India Carlson, Peter Henry, Dan Troccoli, Marian Wagner.

Educators' Vision is a monthly newsletter of the Social Equality Educators

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Mission

Social Equality Educators (SEE) is a new rank-and-file organization of educators inside the Seattle Education Association that seeks to transform education in terms that empower students, teachers, and the communities that our public schools serve. As members of the SEA we understand that the educator's union has a vital role to play in creating an equitable education system. As educators we understand the importance of using culturally relevant and holistic curriculum to empower our students. We have come together to fight against the corporate reform of our schools and to organize for a socially just education system.

5 Books to Build a Movement for Education Justice

A former public school teacher and union organizer picks his favorites

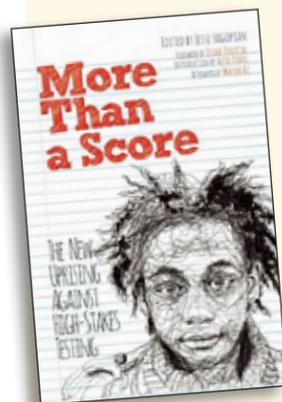
Kenzo Shibata

September 24, 2014 | This article appeared in the October 13, 2014 edition of The Nation.

Kenzo Shibata taught high-school English in Chicago's public-school system for nearly a decade and pioneered digital labor organizing as part of the 2012 Chicago Teachers Union strike. "People don't see that concrete organizing is the difference between a successful digital campaign and another piece of cyberjunk floating around the Internet," he says. Here, he recommends some gems in print.

MORE THAN A SCORE

The New Uprising Against High-Stakes Testing



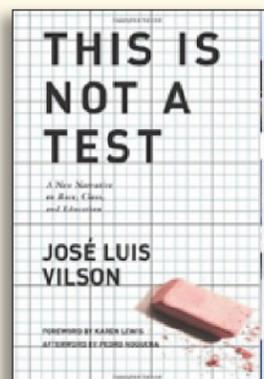
their friends in the testing industry, seem to win most battles. More Than a Score collects narratives from teachers, parents, students, academics and elected union leaders describing the growing grassroots resistance to testing gone mad. Editor Hagopian was a teacher leader in the successful Seattle MAP Test Boycott of 2013.

THIS IS NOT A TEST

A New Narrative on Race, Class, and Education

by José Vilson

I recommend this memoir whenever someone asks me what urban teaching is really like. Vilson, who is a key leader of #Educolor—a rising movement of educators looking critically at race in education—uses hip-hop, poetry and some extremely humbling anecdotes to describe the dramatic highs and lows of teaching in New York City.

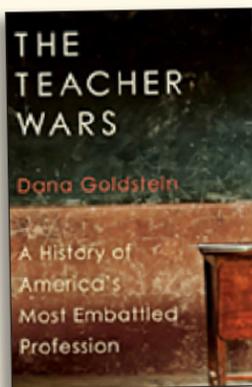


THE TEACHER WARS

A History of America's Most Embattled Profession

by Dana Goldstein

The Teacher Wars, much like the Shipp's book, doesn't take a side in its depiction of nearly two centuries of education reform. For someone very opinionated about the issues (e.g., me), this can make for a frustrating read at times, but Goldstein manages to cram in volumes of untold history that provide crucial background to the fights today between teachers and self-styled reformers.



STRIKE FOR AMERICA

Chicago Teachers Against Austerity

by Micah Uetricht

Uetricht's first book, part of the Verso/Jacobin magazine imprint, dives into one of the most intense periods of my own life—the 2012 Chicago Teachers Union strike. The book doesn't go into granular detail about events before and after the historic strike. Instead, this pamphlet-sized book offers brilliant political analysis, providing context for the nine days when Chicago teachers took on neoliberalism and the unequal school system it would create.



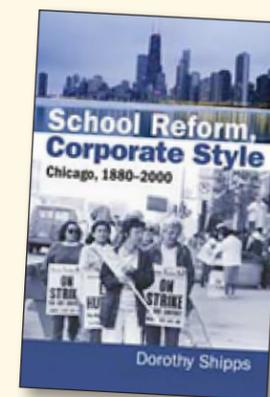
SCHOOL REFORM, CORPORATE STYLE

Chicago, 1880–2000

by Dorothy Shipp

The city of Chicago is often described as the public-policy lab of the nation. Ideas are hatched, tested on residents, and then shipped out to a city near you. Anyone following the corporate education-reform movement should keep an eye on what happens here.

Shipp covers more than a century's worth of school shake-ups, led mostly by business groups—none of which led to any substantive improvements for children educated in Chicago schools.



You Are Invited!

What: Jesse Hagopian will be holding a book reading for his forthcoming book, *More Than a Score: The New Uprising Against High-Stakes Testing* at Elliot Bay Books.

When: Tuesday December 2nd, 2014

Where: Elliot Bay Books, 1521 Tenth Avenue Seattle WA 98122



Proposition 1B: Someone needs to get their story straight

By Dora Taylor

Proposition 1B, the "trust me" prop

Someone told me that during the endorsement proceedings at the Metropolitan Democratic Club of Seattle held on September 24th, Councilmember Tim Burgess stated that students in his Preschool for All program would not be assessed using a "bubble test".

Well that's good because it's really hard for a three or four-year old to hold a #2 pencil and fill in a tiny little circle.

The week before, someone on the Levy Oversight Committee who is pro-1B, stated in an endorsement meeting that I attended as an Education Committee member with the League of Women Voters (LWV), that there would be one test given at the end of the school year, a standardized state test, to evaluate the students and the program. The name of the test was not specified.

Which is it, or is it either?

I'm still standing by my prediction that preschoolers will be tested just as they have been in another preschool program that is being overseen by the Levy Oversight Committee. See #1 in the 11 Reasons why Seattle's Preschool for All Proposition 1B is a bad idea post, and those scores will determine the amount of funding received by the preschool. Unfortunately the subsidies will directly correlate to test scores. The lower the overall assessments, the less money the program will receive.

By the way, according to the proponent of 1B who spoke to the LWV Seattle Education Committee, the Preschool for All program is to have eight committee members, four from the Levy Oversight Committee and four mayoral appointments.

Proposition 1B is a "trust me" proposition where all of the details will be worked out if it is approved, and will be developed into an Implementation Plan under the auspices of two hired consultants, one of them being Ellen Frede who is Senior Vice President of Education and Research for Acelero, a for-profit venture that has taken over Head Start programs in four cities so far. See A for-profit approach to Head Start and Seattle PreSchool for All Proposition 1B: Acelero, the fox watching over the hen house.

