

Reforming the Reformers

by Matt Carter

The clarion call for education reform is upon us. It's time for the bad teachers to go, and the good ones to be rewarded for their achievements, just like in the private sector. People in other professions will be offered the opportunity to teach for a while, show how it's really done out there. Thinking in terms of "human capital" and "value added". This will bring about a veritable renaissance in American education. Test scores will surge, dropout rates will fall. Our students will begin scoring at the top of the heap, rather than breaking even with developing countries. Charter schools and merit pay, mirroring the freedom and inherent fairness of the marketplace, will be the primary vehicles to reach this glorious new age of educational reform.

We hope. No one can argue with the idea of a great teacher in every classroom. A world class education for every student. An education system that prepares students for the 21st century and beyond. What we can argue about is how to get to this great world-class 21st century future we all want so badly for our children. When we are told it is through the mechanisms of charter schools and merit pay, I say where is the proof? Some individual studies have shown some gains, but others have shown losses. When the research is looked at as a whole, there is no discernable difference in student achieve-

ment when performance pay and privatization programs are implemented. You can show me an individual charter school that has bucked the odds of demographics and demonstrated

great success. But I can show you a dozen regular schools that have done the same without the need to be chartered. It's about leadership, teamwork and commitment, not privatization and competition.

Also, I often hear about opening up teaching jobs to people from other professions as a way to save our education system. Architects are often mentioned. First of all, there are just under 200,000 architects in the US. Even if all of them switched to teaching, that only covers a fraction of the 3.3 million teaching jobs. And second of all, why would an architect automatically make a good teacher? My wife plays on a soccer team composed mostly of architects. They are great and I love them, but they don't jump out at me as better teaching material than any other cross-section of the population that I come in contact with.

Now who has been calling most loudly for these kinds of untested reforms? Groups led by the Alliance for Education (also called the Alliance4Ed) are among the forefront. But who is the Alliance4Ed, and who do they represent? A quick look at their board of directors tells the story. Along with the former superintendent of Seattle Public Schools, and one of its school board members, we have an Audit Partner for KPMG, "a global network of



firms providing audit, tax and advisory services".

The Managing Partner of Ernst & Young LLP, a firm that "helps companies across the globe to identify and capitalize on business opportunities". A Member of Foster Pepper PLLC, providing "services for real estate, land use, municipal government and public finance."

The Managing Director of Investment Services for Metzler North America, "a boutique real estate investment bank providing advice to multiple international and domestic clients."

A Partner in Deloitte, a "major international accounting and consulting firm."

The Chief Operating Officer of Garvey Schubert Barer, a "business law firm representing established market leaders."

Then we have the Senior Vice President and Director of Acquisitions for Washington Real Estate Holdings.

The Vice President of Hotels for Kennedy Associates Real Estate Counsel, L.P.

The Regional President of Harris Private Bank.

You get the idea.

And really, these guys have done such a great job with the banks, Wall Street, and the mortgage in-

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dustry, I'm thinking to myself, why not turn the schools over to them too? Of course they are just thinking about the kids, what else?

The good news is that real reform is possible. There are real, time-tested, research proven educational reforms that increase academic achievement, lower dropout rates and improve teacher effectiveness and retention. They are not really available to a State that is 46th in the nation in per pupil funding, but they are out there. The most well known of these reforms is reduced class size. The positive academic outcomes from reduced class size (under 20) have been well documented.

Not only that, but it makes complete sense. The fewer students a teacher has, the more individual attention they each get. Also, in the quest to find higher quality teachers, there is another reform that has found traction in districts around the country.

It's called raising the pay scale. When the overall pay scale is increased to make teaching more competitive with other professions, measurable gains are made in test scores, dropout rates and teacher retention. This happens over time of course, not in time for the next election cycle.

We need long term solutions to the educational dilemmas of our state, not short term fixes.

And when they tell us there is no money, when they tell us times are tough and we have to face the realities of the current economic situa-

tion, I think about this. Leaving out bank bailouts and Bush's tax breaks for the wealthy, in Seattle next year we will pay a lot of taxes toward national defense, including the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars.

If we took just the money we will be spending next year on nuclear weapons programs and ballistic missile defense, we could put an additional ten teachers in every public school in Seattle. That would reduce class size in a typical K-5 school with 500 students from 28 students per class down to 18 students per class.

So really, the money is there. We're just spending it on the wrong things.

And in case you're curious, if we took all the money Seattle will be spending on national defense next year, class size would be down to an average of less than two students per class.

Social Equality Educators
is a growing caucus of the
Seattle Education Association.

We meet monthly

SEE's website:

<http://seattlesee.org/>

SEE listserv:

seattle-see@googlegroups.com

www.seattlesee.org

info@seattlesee.org

206-851-4963



Education News Websites:

Seattle Schools Blog

<http://savesseattleschools.blogspot.com/>

Seattle Education 2010

<http://seattleducation2010.wordpress.com/>

Upcoming Events:

**Achievement Gap
or
Opportunity Gap?
Fighting Racism in
Public Schools.**

Thursday May 19th, 2011

Mt. Zion Baptist Church

Featuring: James Bible, NAACP

Wayne Au, UW

Jesse Hagopian, SEE

Riki Malone

Gabriella Gutiérrez y Muhs, SU

Olga Addae, SEA

November 2011:

School Board Elections for seats held by

Steve Sundquist, Sherry Carr,

Harium Martin-Morris and Peter Maier.