

BUSH'S PLAN TO DESTROY OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

By Robert Rubinstein

(1440 words)

George W. Bush, contends that the “No Child Left Behind” law, based on Houston’s methods of holding schools responsible for student performance, would bring huge improvements in eliminating the gap between white and minority education progress. The mainstay of Bush’s claims rest on the improvement that it seemed superintendent, Rod Paige, cited in the Houston schools. Bush quickly installed Paige as the United States Secretary of Education.

The centerpiece for Bush’s strategy to begin the destruction of the public school system was in place.

However, television’s “Sixty Minutes” as well as NEW YORK TIMES (12/3/03) reporters investigated the claims made by Rod Paige’s Houston schools. They noted that the Texas Education Agency found that Houston school officials undercounted school dropouts, overstated how many high school graduates were college bound, failed to report violent crimes in schools to state authorities, and excluded most children with limited English from taking the national assessment test. Some 13,600 Houston eighth graders dwindled in 1998 to fewer than 8,000 high school graduates.

The gap between Houston whites and minorities remains huge: the ranking of the average white student was 36 points higher than that of the average black student in 1999. Rod Paige used apparently highly distorted statistics to show Houston schools’ low dropout rates and campus crime rates

Why is such a person like Rod Paige still the Secretary of Education? Why would this “No Child” law, based on such lies and deceit, be mandated for all students and all schools in our nation?

“NCLB forces states and school districts to waste scarce resources on more bureaucracy, paperwork, and even more standardized tests. . . . The fact is NCLB’s inherent absurdities have caught up with it. When some of the top high schools in New Jersey, and the best elementary schools in Michigan, including a school praised by the President of the United States, are warned that they have failed to achieve ‘adequate yearly progress’ under the federal law . . . when schools across the nation that have been rated ‘exceptional’ under their state assessment systems are labeled ‘in need of improvement’ under the federal law . . . when the Teacher of the Year in Montana does not meet the ‘highly qualified’ standards of the federal law, it becomes apparent

that there is something wrong with this law.” (The Tide Is Turning” – Reg Weaver, NEA TODAY, January 2004)

Money:

Bush proposed a federal budget that would cut – not add - \$200 million from education. He has cut \$39 million from federal money for public libraries and proposed that the program that gives free books to poor children, “The Reading is Fundamental Program,” be eliminated.

Bush cut \$35 million in funds that would support doctors working in pediatric care, reduced by 86% the poor people’s use of the Community Access Program for health care, cut \$200 million from the Childcare and Development grants for the welfare to work program, and cut \$15.7 million from child abuse and neglect programs.

Yet, the United States is number one in the world in the number of millionaires and billionaires, in military spending, use of energy and natural resources, consumption, and the production of hazardous wastes. The Pentagon spent \$250 billion in 2001-2002 of taxpayer money to build 2800 Joint Strike Fighter planes. This is more money than it would cost to provide tuition for every college student in the country. Over the next four years, the military budget will increase \$1.6 trillion. To modernize and repair every school in this country would cost only \$112 billion.

In this country, we would rather build warplanes than spend money to educate our children for the future.

Teachers and teaching

Teachers know and are frequently told that “You have the most important job in our society: teaching and preparing our young for our society’s future.” The words are nice; the reality isn’t. Nearly 50% of those who enter the teaching profession quit by the fifth year mainly because of working conditions..

The average college-educated, certified teacher in the United States receives a salary of \$43,351. The Congressman who dines with CEOs and lobbyists receives \$145,000.

Today, a teacher spends \$60,000 or more to earn a bachelors college degree and teaching credential. To earn a national credential will cost teachers additional money, time, and energy.

Bush also cut more than 20,000 teachers from professional training programs, despite Bush’s promise that teachers would get the training they require to raise educational standards.’ Some two million new teachers will be needed to teach our children in the coming decade. His proposals would eliminate training for teachers in computer technology and cut funds from AmeriCorps teachers who work in low income areas and in rural or inner city schools..

It should be noted that 127 corporations with assets of \$250 million or more each paid NO taxes and reported “no income” for 1995. General Motors not only didn’t pay any taxes, but received tax credits, and the government paid General Motors millions of dollars. Corporations pay less tax and receive more government benefits today.

Vouchers and Private Schools:

A voucher system would largely benefit the middle and upper-class “white” students and would, in turn, gut efforts to improve the public school system. Bush wanted Cheney as Vice President, a former congressman who had voted against funding for Head Start, against subsidizing school lunches and against federal aid for college students. He made Rod Paige Secretary of Education, despite the lies about Houston schools.

This year 26,000 of the nation’s 93,000 public schools failed to make “adequate yearly progress,” fueling the speculation that the federal law could eventually label nearly all schools as “failing.” In a 2001 poll conducted by the Pew Forum, eight out of ten people opposed public funding for religious organizations. Yet, Bush has pushed for funding, vouchers and tax exemptions for religious schools.

Studies show, including one in 2000 by the Brookings Institution, that students in most charter schools and private schools (except those supported by the very rich) score significantly below public school students in basic reading and math.

The private ownership of education must make profits in order to stay in business. Corporations and private groups – often with religious or political bents - sell private schools to the public, just as corporations have peddled tests to the schools that have netted these businesses millions of dollars

Students who are non-white, have physical - mental – emotional disabilities, low-income, low-achieving, behavior problems will remain in what’s left of the public schools. Students left in the public school shells will have fewer and fewer resources, quality programs, counselors and quality teachers. If these students are having a difficult time succeeding now, just think of how difficult and hopeless it will be if a voucher system is instituted with the siphoning off of more public school funds.

Students who have transferred out of their poorly performing schools are switching back to their former schools. “You are sending a child who is struggling in most cases to a school in which many children are on or above grade level, and there is no extra support, no one to tutor them after school, no reading intervention,” said Barbara Bengel, administers state and federal programs for Fresno, CA.

More students will drop out because they can't see themselves succeeding in school. If you don't have support and hope to succeed, why continue? Those who drop out have very little hope in finding jobs in today's economy. More young people with no hope or future will live on the streets. In turn, this means more crime, violence, and fear for all of us – and more expense for prisons and protection.

The four percent in this country who control 90 percent of the wealth and resources, and make national decisions, don't seem to or need to care about the effect of vouchers on our public schools and our children's futures.. Their children and grand-children can afford the few quality private schools and will pocket more money with a voucher system.

Ron Naso, the superintendent of the North Clackamas School District, said, 'It would take the intervention of God himself or herself, to get 100 percent of students meeting the highest standards. It's an impossible goal.'

Public education focuses on learning, freeing and developing the mind and heart of the child. Private voucher education focuses mainly on selectivity, control and profit.

We, who are the other 96% and who live in this democracy, do and will care – and will pay dearly in countless ways for this deterioration of our schools.

We are faced with the choice of a voucher system and potential corporation take-over of our schools that will gut the public school system, or seriously supporting and investing –financially, politically and personally -- in our public schools.