

Meet the enemy

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One of the most amazing aspects of the current political landscape is the brazenness with which elites destroying public education, while claiming they are saving children, announce their strategy to the world. They have no fear of being stopped. Take a look at the "Guidebook for a New Landscape," for example. As Joanne Barkan's article in Dissent explains, the non-profit/pro-profit reformers like the Gates Foundation and Democrats for Education Reform, who aim to privatize public education, destroy teachers unions, and reduce every child (except their own) to a standardized test score, are shifting resources into state and local political campaigns. They can't buy the schools outright, at least not yet. The Constitution makes education the responsibility of the states, and the states mostly fund schools through local property taxes, adding revenue from the state coffers. To control schooling more completely, the reformers are shifting to the states, relying on ALEC, the American Legislative Exchange Council, a non-partisan (I'll get to that later), membership association of corporations and right-wing donors, like the Koch brothers and more recently, the Gates Foundation. ALEC pushes conservative policies in state legislatures. Education reform of the sort Gates et al want now joins anti-immigrant policy in ALEC's agenda. ALEC can be non-partisan because Democrats and the Republicans vary mainly in their stridency not in the substance of their educational policy. And while Barkan is correct in pointing out the links between the privatizers and Republicans, it's also essential to see that Democrats for Education Reform and the Obama administration are no friends to public education. Barkan could take some lessons from researchers like Ken Saltman, who have exposed the complicity of both parties in the corporate hijacking of public education. Though his writing is more academic than Barkan's, Saltman's "talking points" cut to the quick: We have to talk about capitalism to explain the rapaciousness of these attacks. We can't turn back the attacks on the state level by ignoring the support of Democratic governors and legislators to the testing, de-funding, and teacher-bashing. Building a powerful movement, which is what Barkan says she wants, means taking on the enemy, which includes the Democratic Party.