

Sounding the alarm on "Race to the Top"

April 25, 2010

How can we make neoliberalism's project to destroy public education, captured in the Obama/Duncan "Race to the Top" proposal, more understandable? The subject is complex, but bloggers in the US are taking up the challenge, as we see in Susan Ohanian's excellent report on my work. (Thanks to all who have picked up the debate with Ravitch.)

Still, we cannot can beat back this juggernaut alone. We in the US are conditioned to think that we have the answers. However, the rest of the world has been battling the neoliberal project far longer than we have, and we can learn from them.

One valuable resource is the website hosted by Mary Compton, co-editor of our book describing the neoliberal project and resistance to it. If we had the teacher union movement we need, Mary's website would be run by the conservative and bureaucratic Education International, the global federation of teacher unions.

Another is the Anti-Academies Alliance in the UK. "Academies" are UK charter schools, and the Alliance, supported by the National Union of Teachers, is doing grassroots organizing from which we can and should learn. The Alliance has developed questions to put to candidates in the general election. Just change the names of the operators of the schools and you have wonderful talking points.

1. Do you agree that state schools should be accountable to democratically elected representatives of the communities they serve and not to unaccountable private sponsors or providers?
2. Given their patchy performance and the high cost of establishing academies, do you agree with the independent think tank Civitas that there should be a freeze of the Academies programme while an evaluation is carried out of its successes and failures?
3. Do you agree that public funding of our schools should all be spent on educating our children rather than contributing to the profits of private educational providers like GEMS, Edison and Lilac Skies, paid to provide "outsourced" services to state schools?
4. If elected as an MP, do you promise that you will vote against any proposal to allow so-called "free" [translate: "alternative"] schools to be run for a profit?

We need to build an international movement. That means taking off the national blinders.