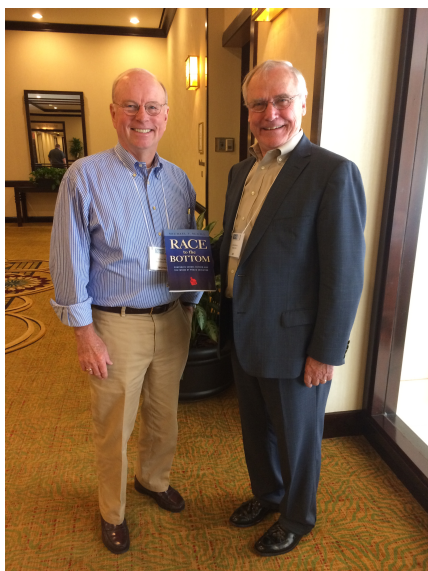


Roundtable News

School Privatization

Cui bono? (Who benefits?)



Michael McGill (l), former Scarsdale, NY superintendent, presents Roundtable executive director James Harvey with a signed copy of Race to the Bottom, McGill's 2015 volume on corporate reform (see p. 3).

behalf. Public School won the title the hard way, integrating immigrants into the American dream, building the most highly educated workforce in the world, and preparing a diverse population for democracy. Still, there's a question in my mind: Is the old champion still up to the task? I'm just telling it like it is.

"This is one of the most highly anticipated public policy matches of our time. Our referee today is the well-regarded Judicial Branch, who will be making sure the rules are followed and there's no punching below the belt."

While it's a long way from the brutality of the boxing ring to the elegant chambers of legislatures and courts where public school finance is debated and shaped, the two worlds have a lot in common in terms of the no-holds-barred nature of the contest and the passionate intensity with which supporters back their favorites. This edition of *Roundtable News* outlines the issues.

If the late Howard Cosell were still announcing prizefights, he'd have a heavyweight championship match on his hands when asked to cover the school privatization contest.

"In this corner," he'd declare in his nasal Brooklyn twang, "we have School Privatization, one of the most powerful punchers of the modern era. Backed by his cornermen from the Chicago School of Economics, his trash talk includes the claim he can do everything the public needs, he can do more of it, he can do it better, and he can do it at less cost. In the other corner, we have Public School, the aging champion who leaves the trash talking to others and rarely speaks up on his own

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Christine Maboney, East Granby, Connecticut superintendent, makes impassioned case against privatizing public schools.



CUI BONO? WHO BENEFITS?

The claim that operating schools for profit improves outcomes is a trivial one if the view of Donald Cohen, director of In The Public Interest, is correct. Privatization threatens to weaken American democracy, Cohen told the Roundtable during its Chicago meeting in July. The phrase often attributed to the Roman orator Cicero comes to mind: *Cui Bono?* Who stands to gain?



Donald Cohen runs through the shortcomings of too many privatization efforts

He argued contracts often codify private interests in the public sphere in a way that distorts the public interest in profound ways. "Many of these agreements," he said, "weaken democracy and the right of all Americans to participate equally in determining our common goals and finding solutions to our social, economic, and environmental problems."

Privatization Myths

Myth 1: Privatization saves money.

Truth: Often raises costs.

Myth 2: Private companies do a better job.

Truth: Many, many examples of service decline.

Myth 3: Privatization gives officials flexibility.

Truth: Often requires substantial resources to monitor and oversee.

Myth 4: Public maintains control.

Truth: Often binds hands of public officials.

Myth 5: Government can still make policy choices.

Truth: Policy choices often taken out of public hands.

Myth 6: When things go wrong, contract can be adjusted.

Truth: Reversing privatization involves huge costs and service breakdowns.

Myth 7: Vendors chosen on merit.

Truth: Operating for profit opens door for unscrupulous behavior on both sides of contract.

Source: In the Public Interest.

A Market Based View of World

Cohen described privatization as a symptom of 40 years of anti-government ideology based on a market-based view of the world and a sense that government is inefficient and serves someone else.

It is by now so widespread that prisons, trash collection, and city services of all kinds have been put up for bid and controlled for profit, said Cohen. This might be understandable if it increased the efficiency with which services are offered or enhanced government flexibility. But that's fre-

quently not the case. When Chicago negotiated a 75-year lease for 36,000 parking meters, the Windy City found the lease blocked transportation plans, including hopes for bicycle lanes.

Inability to Monitor

At the same time, he complained, the inability to monitor CEO salaries, profits, and employee wages means public agencies can't monitor their own expenses.

Cohen highlighted private prisons as an example of the challenges, asserting that the prison industry complex is all about the bottom line. Many contracts require governments to guarantee that high percentages of prison beds will be filled, a powerful inducement to bend jurisprudence in the direction of profits in place of justice.

Similar lucrative business deals benefit for-profit management firms and charter schools, he said, with legal moves to block inquiries for information from charter schools on the grounds they are private entities.

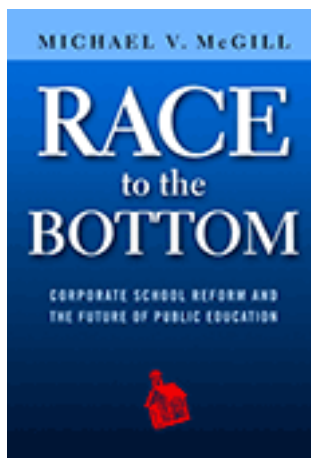


Private enterprise is not faster, better, or cheaper because money is not being delivered where it's needed, concluded Cohen.

CORPORATE REFORM AS A STRATEGY

K-12 education is a \$750 billion annual enterprise. It provides a very attractive target for private investors hoping to reduce costs and pocket the profits. Estimates vary about the extent of school privatization, but the best figures suggest:

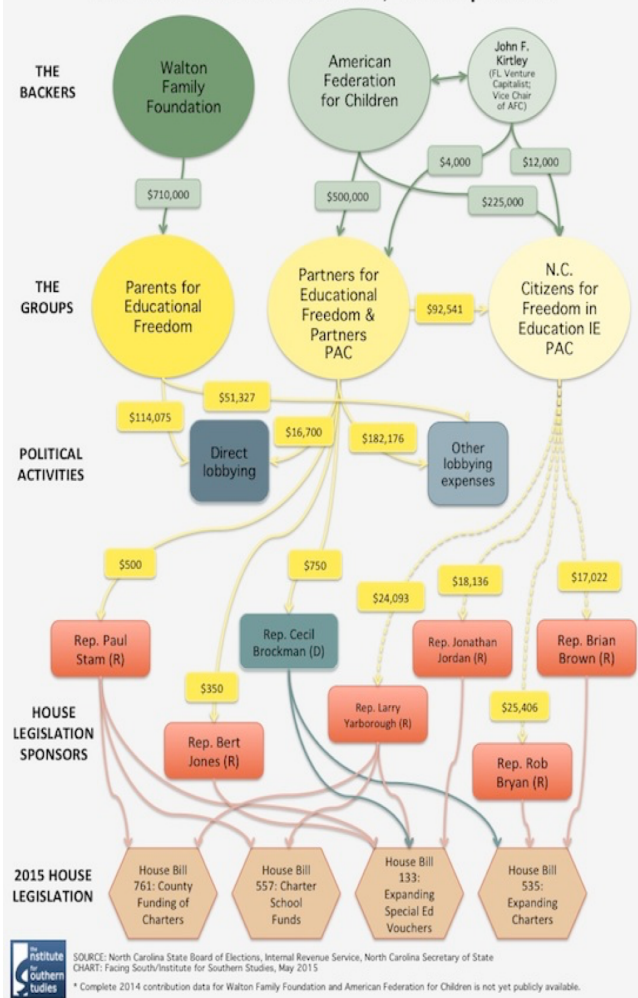
- Charter school legislation had been enacted in 42 states and the District of Columbia by 2013.
- The number of charters increased from 1,500 to 6,100 between 2000 and 2013, many managed by for-profit companies.
- Charter school enrollment increased from 0.3 million 2000 to 2.3 million in 2013.
- California enrolls the largest number of charter students, 471,000 (or 8 percent of enrollment). The District of Columbia, enrolls the largest proportion 42 percent (or 31,600 students).
- Fourteen states and the District of Columbia provide some form of vouchers.
- On-line schools such as K-12, Inc. enroll an estimated 300,000 full-time students. K-12 itself takes in more than \$900 million annually, in the form of per-student allocations for each student enrolled.
- Venture capital expenditures in schools jumped from \$13 million in 2005 to \$389 million in 2011.



These corporate reform developments amount to a “race to the bottom,” asserts former Scarsdale superintendent Michael McGill, who asks how did the country that invented the modern public school end up weakening its greatest invention? The growth of charters, vouchers, and for-profit entities is no accident, but the consequence of well-orchestrated state-

by-state lobbying efforts by groups such as ALEC.

The Network Pushing Vouchers and Charter Schools in North Carolina, 2013-present



The flowchart above, developed by the Institute for Southern Studies, illustrates how more than \$1 million dollars snaked its way from market-oriented groups such as the Walton Foundation through various lobbying fronts to produce four separate bills supporting charters or vouchers in North Carolina's House of Representatives.

“Educators have become the enemy,” said McGill. “We suddenly learned that teachers were lazy and administrators self-serving,” McGill told his colleagues in the Roundtable. He wrote *Race to the Top* in part as therapy, he joked. (to p. 7)

THE PUBLIC SCHOOL ADVANTAGE

Acceptance of the corporate reform agenda and increased reliance on privatization might be understandable if clear evidence of the superiority of charter or private schools existed. It does not. It is very clear from a number of analyses from both pro- and anti- privatization groups that charters, on average, do not outperform public schools, and that voucher students typically do not outperform students in the schools they left behind.



Christopher Lubienski describes his initial disbelief at finding public schools outperform private schools. Above he signs copies of his book for Roundtable members.

Much of this agenda is driven by a belief that private schools outperform public schools. Of course, the belief rests on a comparison of apples and oranges. On balance, students enrolled in private instead of public schools are likely to be wealthier than their public school counterparts, while ex-



hibiting fewer needs for non-English language instruction or programs for students with disabilities.

A University of Illinois team of Christopher and Sarah Lubienski in 2014 found that, after accounting for socioeconomic status, race, and other demographic differences among students, public school math achievement equaled or outstripped math achievement at every type of private school in grades 4 and 8 on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). The Lubienskis also used NAEP data to conclude that regular public schools outperformed independently operated, publicly funded charter schools in 4th grade math and equaled them in 8th grade math.

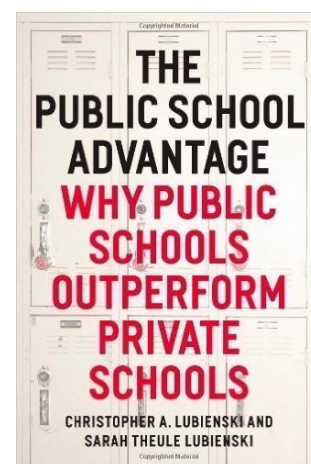
Christopher Lubienski told the Roundtable that he and his wife stumbled across these findings by accident. As math educators, they were looking for especially effective instructional practices in mathematics. But with all the data in hand, they began running various correlations, ex-

pecting to validate the superiority of private schools.

“We were so surprised by the results that we thought we must have done something wrong in the analysis,” said Lubienski earnestly. “But when we checked and ran the analysis again, the findings stood up.”

Lugienski’s anslis confirms there is nothing advantageous about charters or a voucher system. Internationally, he noted, Chile and Sweden operate voucher systems that have not yielded compelling results. In-

deed, said Lubienski, negative outcomes such as increased segregation and lower performance have been seen in both nations.



NEVADA: 50 SHADES OF RED

The 2014 election transformed Nevada state government, reported Silver City superintendent Robert Slaby. For the first time since 1929 all state offices and both legislative chambers were controlled by the GOP. The newly elected governor controlled the legislature and handpicked its leadership.



Rob Slaby describes surprise announcement of universal vouchers in Sagebrush State.

Slaby described the state with a smile as “50 shades of red.” Still school leaders in the state were

surprised, he said, when the governor introduced legislation making a huge bet on school choice without consulting them.

As enacted, Senate Bill 302 allows parents to take approximately \$5,700 for each child and spend the money on public, private, on-line, or home-schooling services. Eligibility for the program requires only that a student have spent at least 100 consecutive days in a public school. Private school students or those who are home-schooled do not qualify. The new program is open to all 459,00 public school students in the state, with powerful consequences for Las Vegas and Reno, which between them enroll about 85% of the state’s students.

On one hand, freedom of choice sounds benevolent. Why be forced to send your child to a particular school? On the other hand, the

legislation initiates a free-for-all encouraging schools to compete against each other.

It would seem the plan’s prohibition against the participation of private and home-schooled students invites parents of such students to sign up at the local public school for a few months before putting in a request for \$5,700. The program also does nothing, said Slaby, to address the huge proportion of English as a second language population in Nevada, the highest in the U.S.

The outlook is not encouraging, he said, noting that 14 states now offer state-funded vouchers of one kind or another (often called scholarships) and 22 states encourage individuals to allocate part of their taxes to non-profits for scholarships.

SUPERINTENDENTS RESPOND

Offered the opportunity to comment on these presentations in small group discussions moderated by Frank Hewins and Christine Mahoney, Roundtable members were eloquent in describing the kind of engaged, individualized and focused education they wanted for their own children and for the students in their districts. But when bringing these concerns to policymakers, reported former Scarsdale school leader Mike McGill, “the response we get is consistently dismissive, arrogant, and unhelpful.” The counter-productive top-down reform movement, his colleagues agreed, has caused anxiety among both administrators and teachers.

At one table, Frank Hewins and his colleagues wondered about the perception of a “Golden Age” that once characterized American schools. It’s a rear-view mirror, suggested Hewins. His colleagues wondered how legally segregated schools that

refused services to students with disabilities and graduated fewer than 50% of 18-year-olds could be viewed through such rose-colored glasses. (to 6)



Roundtable Superintendents from Connecticut, California, Ohio, and Nevada discuss school privatization

Whatever the merits of the past, suggested Hewins, we need to step back from the infatuation of the way things were and address the challenges of the way things are.



Roundtable Superintendents focus on speakers at meetings

Providing Essential Resources

Children are coming to school hungry, homeless and from broken homes, and with many other factors that hinder their ability to learn, said Christine Mahoney of East Granby, Connecticut. It's important to ensure that schools and communities have the resources to provide a proper education. The issue of privatization severely impacts schools' ability to deal with these challenges, she said. When schools are seen as investment opportunities, she argued, the search for profits breeds a competitive environment that prevents cooperation and jeopardizes children's well-being. "Our children are not a commodity to be bought and sold."

It's important, the group agreed, to build a collective voice in the school community to raise public awareness and the Roundtable should seek out opportunities to collaborate in such efforts.

COMMON CORE BENCHMARKS

Roundtable director James Harvey ended the meeting with a presentation addressing the Common Core assessments, closely linked with NAEP's benchmarks.

Prior research funded by the U.S. Department of Education concluded that in eighth grade a majority of the students in just 5 nations were deemed to be "proficient" in mathematics, by NAEP's standard. In 8th-grade science, students in just a single country cleared NAEP's proficiency bar.

Results for 4th-grade reading are equally curious: While international assessments of reading at the 4th-grade level demonstrate superior performance by American 4th-graders, NCES continues to report that only about one-third of American students meet the NAEP proficiency benchmark.

Harvey introduced Dr. Emre Gonulates of Michigan State, a statistician who will lead a Roundtable analysis linking the NAEP reading 4th-grade reading proficiency benchmark to international reading assessment results. Very preliminary analyses, said Harvey, suggest that a majority of students

A genuine problem said Gloria Davis, superintendent of a statewide Illinois program for students in custody, is that charter schools operate by a different set of rules. The issue in the public vs. private debate, suggested Charles Fowler of LeadSchools, with decades of experience as a superintendent in four different states, is one of control. States have an obligation to provide opportunity, he noted. They do so with statewide regulations, which are frequently inappropriate to local circumstances. Private schools and charters enjoy an opportunity for flexibility more fitted to community context.

across the English-speaking world are incapable of meeting NAEP's 4th-grade benchmark for proficiency. If Common Core assessment benchmarks rely on NAEP's, they may set the bar so high that most students throughout the world cannot clear it.



Wonderful meals are a staple to maintain energy at Roundtable meetings. Here William McCoy (Red Bluff, CA) and Matt Montgomery (Revere, OH) jump the line!

THE ICEBERG EFFECT



Janet Robinson, Stratford, Ct. at press conference releasing Iceberg Effect

As reported in the last issue of *Roundtable News*, the Roundtable in January released *School Performance in Context* (aka *The Iceberg Effect*), an important study developed collaboratively with the Ho-

race Mann League. It was issued with the assistance of the National School Public Relations Association at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. The report insists that student performance is just the tip of the iceberg and needs to be understood in the social and economic contexts in which national school systems find themselves.

The Iceberg Effect generated widespread discussion, with news accounts appearing in *Education Week*, *The Washington Post*, *Huffington Post* and numerous online postings, here and abroad. One estimate suggests 19 million potential readers were exposed to press ac-

counts of the report. Meanwhile presentations about the report at regional and national meetings have spread the word. The Roundtable is also associated with several groups such as the Broader, Bolder Approach to Education and the Safe, Healthy, and Ready to Learn Coalition to keep the issues raised in *The Iceberg Effect* in the public eye.

School Performance in Context: Indicators of School Inputs and Outputs in Nine Similar Nations



January 2015

The National School League

NSR

CORPORATE REFORM (FROM P. 3)

The top-down corporate strategy has failed, said McGill, yielding unimpressive results even by its own metrics. "But we can't just be against something, we have to propose some positive solutions." The question we need to ask ourselves, he said, is the question we ask of parents: What kind of education do you want for your children? Like parents, superintendents said they wanted children engaged in their learning, for schools to foster students' specific interests, and for students to know what they wanted to do on graduation.

This requires, Roundtable superintendents agreed: a clear vision of learning; consistent standards for a mobile population; sophisticated assessments that ask students to demonstrate what they know; curriculum adapted to a real and changing world; pedagogy that gives students the tools they need to access

knowledge in a digital age; and curriculum that is fluid, engages students, utilizes multiple media approaches, and goes far beyond the basics.

The Roundtable superintendents' vision is far different from that of the corporate reformers and their allies in government and foundations. But it is also much more demanding—because it matches the complexity of the challenges facing educators with an equally complex response.

(l to r below) Greg Thornton (Baltimore, MD) Talisa Dixon (University Heights, OH) & Gary Plano (Mercer Island, WA) frame a vision of schools of the future



HERE AND THERE

Superintendent's Fieldbook

The leadership guide every superintendent needs. Written by 4 Roundtable founders, the 2nd edition of a Corwin best-seller combines theory with practice about how to thrive on the job. Order: <http://tinyurl.com/mas26gn>

Best of Twitter, 2015

Here are a few of the Roundtable's more prominent tweets of 2015:

House leaves 'No Child' education law behind <https://t.co/JQCaxTx6bI>

The 20 Most Expensive Private High Schools in America
<https://t.co/TGHn7bwQQE>

States shortchanging nation's students.
<https://t.co/W1kol4hMRI>

WSJ: What do economists think of China statistics? "Only a fool would believe them" <https://t.co/fIZAWoYabu>

Gov. Cuomo to reverse course on using tests in teacher evaluation? <https://t.co/nIHmjKcdyJ>

New Members

We are delighted to welcome several new Roundtable members for 2016: John Ewald, Caroline Co., MD; Laura Kagy, Seneca, OH; Tammy Mangus, Monticello, NY; Thomas McMorran, Easton-Redding, CT; and Thomas Parker, Ecorse, MI.

Welcome All!

Calendar & Contact

San Francisco, July 15-17

Working with units of local government to meet needs

Washington, DC, Oct. 7-9

Getting the school governance act together

Study mission to Cuba

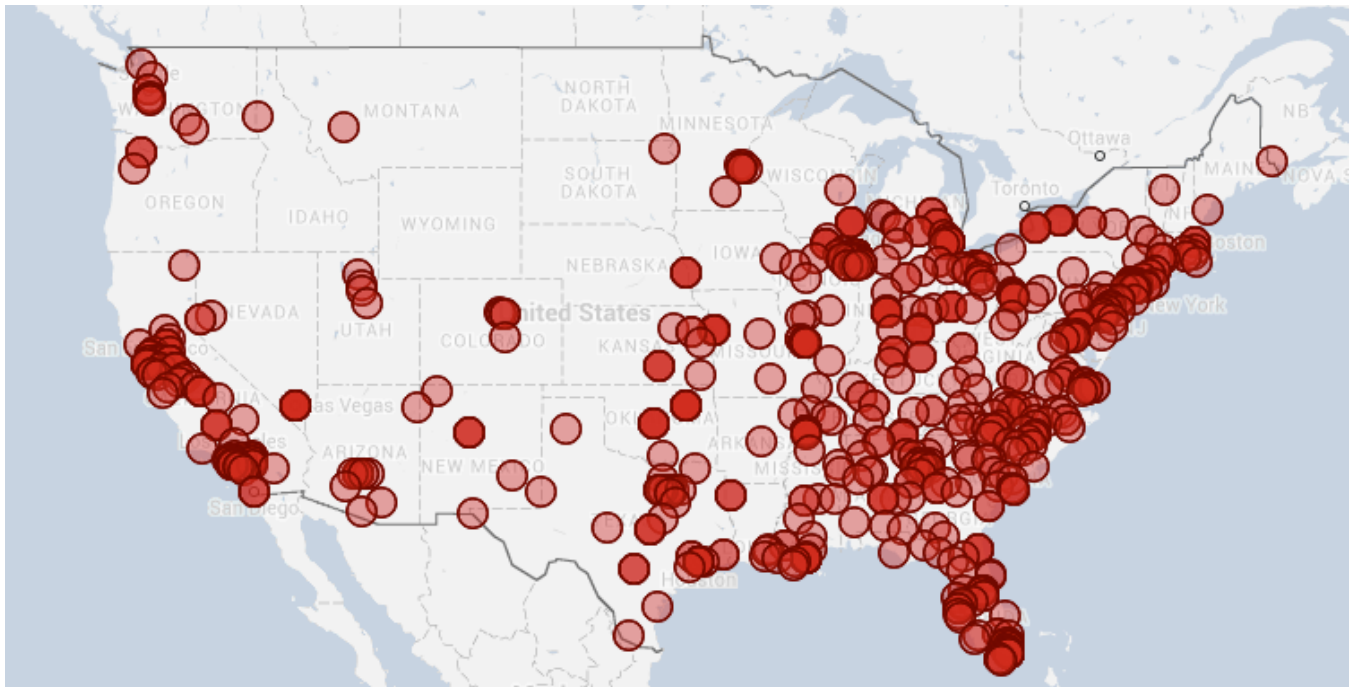
Under consideration

The Roundtable

National Superintendents Roundtable
9425 35th Avenue, NE, Suite E
Seattle, WA 98115
206-526-5336
www.superintendentsforum.org

MASS SHOOTINGS IN U.S. SINCE SANDY HOOK SCHOOL SLAUGHTER

In the 1,066 days following December 14, 2012, when a gunman murdered 20 elementary school students and 6 school staff at Sandy Hook Elementary in Stratford, Connecticut, there were 1,052 mass shootings in the United States, about one a day. The figure below charts them. Congress shrugged.



Source: Mass Shooting Tracker, 2015