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NEA is a union, not an association to help students

By DOMENICK MAGLIO

Neo Traditionalist

Published: October 1, 2010

The popular "Opportunity Scholarship Program," the school choice program for poor students in Washington, D.C. and headed by Michelle Rhee, was by all measures successful.

Students were academically more advanced than their counterparts in public school and had a significantly lower dropout rate. The amount of money spent on each scholarship child was \$7,500 as compared to \$17,000 for students in Washington, D.C. public schools. It was a savings of almost \$10,000 per pupil. This program has not been refunded.

The National Education Association (NEA) does not like experimenting to create a more effective and efficient educational system. They believe that the NEA has an inherent right to control the financing and administration of the funds for government schools for the union's self-interest. The NEA has no intention of giving up its power to improve student education.

Continually throwing money at education has been a dismal failure. Follow the money to understand public education. Money is power. Our nation has spent more than a trillion dollars since 1980 increasing teacher salaries, the number of teachers, and health and retirement benefits. Even though the amount of dollars devoted to government education has increased 123 percent since 1971, the quality of education has remained flat for the past 40 years. The ratio of staff to students has risen 70 percent since the 1970s, swelling the ranks of union teachers to about 4.5 million.

The USA still ranks in the middle of the world in the mastery of major subject areas. It is 21st in science and 25th in math out of 30 developed nations. It is not even one of the top 10 developed nations in literacy. The dropout rate in major cities is nearly 50 percent.

The union propaganda that our government schools need more money to effectively operate is a whopper of a lie. The LA Unified School District claims to spend \$10,000 per student per year. The Cato Institute has calculated that the true expenditure is more like \$29,700 per student. Low-balling the cost per student in public education is a common practice in the USA to maintain the union line that government schools are underfunded.

Contrary to Michelle Obama's speech on July 12 to the NAACP convention about poor school buildings, our public schools are more like community jewels. Los Angeles, Calif. has used its limited resources to build a new school costing \$578 million. This obscene extravagance of a half-billion wasted taxpayer dollars shows a blatant disregard of citizens in a state that is so in debt it pays its workers with IOUs.

The NEA contributed \$3 million to political campaigns, 97 percent to democrat candidates. President Obama and Arne Duncan, secretary of

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education, who both have their children in private schools, are aware that the democrat party's political fortune is beholden to the support of the NEA special interests.

The Obama Administration has recently allocated \$10 billion of the \$26 billion "No Name Bill," after previously passing legislation of billions of dollars for education to bail out state education budgets. The administration handout gives the strong appearance it is a quid pro quo protecting union members from being laid off. This bailout does not allow states the flexibility to target money to increase the quality of the state's education. The union siphons off resources that should be used in the classroom. Our enormous administrative budget should not be a slush fund for the union.

The reality is the NEA goal is to increase the organizational power, not to serve the interest of students or even teacher members. On the NEA website, Saul Alinsky's "Rules for Radicals," a revolutionary manifesto, is recommended reading. The bullet points of the book are highlighted to demonstrate how to optimize power to control institutions.

Union members learn tactics to dominate school districts. Elected school commissioners are indebted to union endorsements to win the positions. The union representative is often able to influence in-service training, hiring and firing policies, progressive sexual and social programs, assessment of student progress, and even the school calendar. The number of vacation and professional days are bones the union throws to the teachers. These additional days without students in the classroom create havoc for families but shows union dues at work.

Protection of teachers from being fired epitomizes the union's effort to increase their coffers but is a disincentive for improvement. Tenured teacher's use of classroom time to speak about their personal lives, to befriend students instead of focusing on academics or using the classroom computer for games or pornography are shielded from immediate dismissal. As a direct benefit of their membership, the union even protects deviant teachers. Teachers in New York City charged with inappropriate acts have been warehoused in "rubber rooms," keeping their bloated salaries. In most of the U.S., teachers charged with unethical or immoral behavior are put on administrative leave with pay. They do not perform any teaching responsibilities but still get paid.

Our district superintendents have become political positions with their administrative minions. Placating parents and controlling students through the latest fad approaches to learning have not worked to increase our academic standards on the world stage. Zero tolerance behavioral policies are not set up to find out the facts or teach mature social skills but to indiscriminately punish predator and innocent. The purpose of this approach is not to teach moral lessons but to instill fear of the power of the school administration.

The focus of government funding should change from financing and appeasing unions to improving education for all students. Academic excellence and character development to prepare the child for higher education should be the primary aim of our tax dollars. The emphasis should be on meeting the individual learner's needs instead of the teacher's.


This fundamental change in education will occur when parents are empowered to choose the best schools available for their children. They should be given back their money through tax credits or vouchers instead of it going to the union-controlled school boards. The parents will spend it more wisely than would the bureaucrats. The parents making the choices for their child's education will generate competition and improved results. Smaller and more manageable schools will emerge with greater efficiency. Principals and teachers who are effective will be rewarded while those unable to perform will be gone.

Teacher union control of public money and power will significantly diminish. In competitive education, union schools will exist although they will lose the monopoly in dictating the way our government schools operate. This would be a good thing for our American students.


Dr. Domenick J. Maglio is the author of "Invasion Within" and "Essential Parenting." He is a psychotherapist and the owner/director of Wider Horizons School. Visit: www.drmaglio.com.

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