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## A Layman's Guide to the Destroy Public Education Movement

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The destroy public education (DPE) movement is the fruit of a relatively small group of billionaires. The movement is financed by several large non-profit organizations. Nearly all of the money spent is free of taxation. Without this spending, there would be no wide-spread public school privatization.

It is generally recognized that the big three foundations driving DPE activities are The Bill and Melinda Gate Foundation (Assets in 2016 = \$41 billion), The Walton Family Foundation (Assets in 2016 = \$3.8 billion), and The Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation(Assets in 2016 = \$1.8 billion).

Last week, the Network for Public Education published “Hijacked by Billionaires: How the Super-Rich Buy Elections to Undermine Public Schools.” This interactive report lists the top ten billionaires spending to drive their DPE agenda with links to case studies for their spending.

### A Short Explanation of the Label DPE

The modern education reform apostate, Diane Ravitch, was Assistant Secretary of Education under Lamar Alexander from 1991-93. She was an academic who held many research positions including the Brown Chair in Education Studies at the Brookings Institution and served in multiple capacities in different federal education administrations. Like all of her closest allies, she believed in the power of accountability, incentives, and markets for reforming schools.

In 2010, Diane shocked her friends by publishing, *The Death and Life of the Great American School System; How Testing and Choice Are Undermining Education*. In chapter 1 she wrote,

*“Where once I had been hopeful, even enthusiastic about the potential benefits of testing, accountability, choice, and markets, I now found myself experiencing profound doubts about these same ideas. I was trying to sort through the evidence about what was working and what was not. I was trying to understand why I was increasingly skeptical about these reforms, reforms that I had supported enthusiastically.”*

*“The short answer is that my views changed as I saw how these ideas were working out in reality. The long answer is what will follow in the rest of this book.” (Ravitch 2)*

In the book, Ravitch wrote, *“I call it the corporate reform movement not because everyone who supports it is interested in profit but because its ideas derive from business concepts about competition and targets, rewards and punishments, and ‘return on investment.’ (Ravitch 251)*

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Ravitch labled modern education reform “corporate education reform” and the label stuck.

Last year, researchers from the University of Indiana Purdue University Indianapolis (UIPUI) led by professor Jim Scheurich, who coordinates the urban studies program there, perceived a pattern in the destruction of the public schools. That pattern became the “destroy public education” model. As Ravitch’s “corporate education reform” became more organized and ruthless, the Scheurich team’s DPE model became a better descriptor.

Ravitch posted the Indiana team’s DPE model on her blog. The model is outlined here with explanations.

**Business is the best model for schools.** Starting with the infamous Reagan era report, “A Nation at Risk,” the claim that “private business management is superior” has been a consistent theory of education reform promoted by corporate leaders like RJR Nabisco’s Louis Gerstner, Microsoft’s Bill Gates, Wal-Mart’s Walton family, and Sun America’s Eli Broad. It is a central tenant of both neoliberal and libertarian philosophy.

**Institute local-national collaboration between wealthy neoliberals and other conservatives to promote school privatization and the portfolio model of school management.** One example among many comes from Kansas City, Missouri. School Smart Kansas City does the local retail political activity, the \$2.1 billion Kaufman foundation provides the local money and various national organizations like The Charter School Growth Fund that is controlled by the Wal-Mart heirs provides the outside money.

**Direct large sums of money through advocacy organizations to recruit, train and finance pro-privatization school board candidates.** One such organization is Jonah Edelman’s Oregon based Stand for Children which functions as a conduit for outsiders to funnel money into local school board elections.

**Undermine and eliminate locally elected school boards.** The 1990 book by John E. Chubb and Terry M. Moe, Politics, Markets, and America’s Schools claimed that poor performance was “one of the prices Americans pay for choosing to exercise direct democratic control over their schools.” The book was hugely influential and its anti-democratic theory is a central ideology of DPE led reform.

**Institute a portfolio system of school district management that includes public schools, charter schools, and Innovation Schools.** School boards lose their oversight powers with both charter schools and Innovations schools. Portfolio theory posits closing the bottom 5 percent of schools based on standardized testing and reopening them as either charter schools or innovation schools. Standardized testing does not identify teaching or school quality but it does identify student poverty levels. This scheme guarantees that public schools in poor and minority communities will be privatized. While there is no evidence supporting this theory, there is evidence that it causes harm.

**Implement a unified enrollment system.** Over the past 200 years, public schools in America have become a widely respected governmental institution. By forcing them to include charter schools in their enrollment system, the charter schools are provided an unearned equivalency. Charters are not publicly governed nor must they accept any student who applies in their area.

**Hire minimally trained teachers from Teach for America (TFA) or other instant-teacher-certification programs.** By undermining the teaching profession, costs can be reduced; however, general teacher quality will also be reduced. In 2007, Los Angeles Mayor, Anthony Villaraigosa, selected the Green Dot Charter Schools' CEO, Marshall Tuck, to lead 18 schools in an experiment called the Partnership for LA. With millions of dollars to supplement the schools, Tuck failed to produce any real improvements. His error was hiring a significant number of untrained TFA teachers which more than offset his funding advantages.

**Use groups like Teach Plus and TNTP to provide teacher professional development.** The most effective opponents of the destruction of public education have been teachers. By controlling teacher training, new pro-privatization attitudes can be fostered.

**Create teacher fellowships that develop teacher support for the privatization agenda.** In Indiana, on a yearly basis, the \$11 billion Lilly Foundation gives out many \$12,000 Teacher Creativity Fellowships. In Oakland California, the DPE organization GO Oakland gives nearly 20 Fellowships a year.

**Institute networks of local organizations or affiliates that collaborate on the agenda.** The newest national organization designed to develop these networks launched in July. It is called The City Fund. John Arnold, ex-Enron executive, and Reed Hastings, CEO of Netflix, each invested \$100 million to start this donor directed fund. Bill Gates has already sent them \$10 million to spend toward privatizing Oakland, California's schools.

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In densely populated areas, the DPE agenda invariably is coherent with an urban renewal effort often derisively labeled "gentrification." Too often urban renewal has been accomplished by pushing the poorest citizens out without making any provisions for them. When the renewal is only about economic advantage, it further harms already traumatized citizens.

### **Five Disparate Groups are United in Destroying Public Education**

#### **A) People who oppose public education on religious grounds and seek taxpayers supported religious schools.**

In 2001, when Dick and Betsy DeVos answered questions for the Gathering, Dick opined that church has retreated from its central role in communities and has been replaced by the public school.

At the same time that Dick and Betsy were speaking to the Gathering, Jay Sekulow, who is now a lawyer in the Trump administration, was in the process of successfully undermining the separation of church and state before the Supreme Court.

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When the evangelical Christian movement gained prominence with Jerry Falwell's moral majority and Pat Robertson's 700-Club, they generated huge sums of money. A significant portion of that money was spent on legal activism.

In 1990, Pat Robertson brought Sekulow together with a few other lawyers to form the American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ). The even more radical Alliance Defense Fund (ADF) which declares it is out to defeat “the homosexual agenda” joined the ACLJ in the attack on the separation of church and state. In her important book, *The Good News Club, The Christian Right’s Stealth Assault on America’s Children*, Katherine Stewart described their ultimate triumph,

*“An alien visitor to planet First Amendment could be forgiven for summarizing the entire story thus: Clarence Thomas and Antonin Scalia, together with a few fellow travelers on the Supreme Court and their friends in the ADF and ACLJ, got together and ordered that the United States should establish a nationwide network of evangelical churches housed in taxpayer-financed school facilities.” (Stewart 123/4)*

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### **B) People who want segregated schools where their children will not have to attend school with “those people.”**

A typical example from San Diego is The Old Town Academy (OTA). It is like a private school financed with public school dollars. A *Voice of San Diego* report noted, “*Chris Celentino, OTA’s current board chair and one of the school’s founding members, said when the school opened with a class of 180 students, half came from families that would otherwise send their kids to private schools.*”

In 1955, Milton Friedman published “The Role Of Government in Education” which called for privatizing public schools. Mercedes Schneider writes of the reality of this theory in her book *School Choice; The End of Public Education?*,

*“Even as Friedman published his 1955 essay, school choice was being exploited in the South, and state and local governments were complicit in the act. It took the federal government and district courts decades to successfully curb the southern, white-supremacist intention to offer choice to preserve racial segregation.” (Schneider 28)*

The AP reported in 2017,

*“National enrollment data shows that charters are vastly over-represented among schools where minorities study in the most extreme racial isolation. As of school year 2014-2015, more than 1,000 of the nation’s 6,747 charter schools had minority enrollment of at least 99 percent, and the number has been rising steadily.”*

### **C) Entrepreneurs profiting from school management and school real estate deals.**

This spring, In The Public Interest (ITPI), published “Fraud and Waste in California’s Charter Schools.” The report documents \$149,000,000 fraudulently purloined by factions of the California charter-school industry. The total stealing stated is a summation of cases cited in media reports. The actual amount stolen is much larger.

The ITPI report also reveals how in California fortunes are created by gaining control of publicly financed assets. The report discloses,

*“..., schools constructed with tax-exempt conduit bonds become the private property of the charter operator. Even if the charter is revoked, neither the state nor a local school district can take control of this property.”*

*Huge wealth is being generated from taxpayers with little oversight.*

Recently Steven Singer, a well-known teacher activist from Pennsylvania wrote, *“Thanks to some Clinton-era tax breaks, an investor in a charter school can double the original investment in just seven years!”*

Singer also addressed the profiteering by administrators: *“New York City Schools Chancellor, Richard Carranza is paid \$345,000 to oversee 135,000 employees and 1.1 million students. CEO of Success Academy charter school chain, Eva Moskowitz handles a mere 9,000 students, for which she is paid \$782,175.”*

It is the same story in California. Charter school administrators are lining their non-profit pockets with huge salaries. In 2015, San Diego’s Mary Bixby, CEO of the Altus schools (34 mostly mall store learning centers) paid herself \$340,810 and her daughter Tiffany Yandell \$135,947. Up in Los Angeles in 2016, CEO of the 22 school Green Dot organization, Cristina de Jesus, was paid \$326,242 while the CEO of the five schools Camino Nuevo Charter Academy was compensated \$193,585. That same year in Oakland the CEO of the three schools Envision Education took in \$229,127.

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#### **D) The technology industry is using wealth and lobbying power to place products into public schools and heaping praise on technology-driven charter schools.**

*“The Silicon Valley assault must be turned away, not because they’re bad people but because they are peddling snake oil,”* wrote veteran education writer, John Merrow. In the last 10 years, titans of the tech industry have dominated K-street. Hi-tech now spends twice as much as the banking industry on lobbying lawmakers.

*“Tech’s push to teach coding isn’t about kids’ success – it’s about cutting wages.”*

They fund think tanks to promote their agendas like coding in every public school in America or one to one initiatives (a digital device for every student) or digital learning. Researchers working in think tanks like the New America Foundation will be disciplined if they upset a corporate leader like Google’s Eric Schmidt. Barry Lynn was sent packing for being honest.

Writing for the *Guardian* Ben Tarnoff reports, *“Tech’s push to teach coding isn’t about kids’ success – it’s about cutting wages.”* The premise is that coding is *“a skill so widely demanded that anyone who acquires it can command a livable, even lucrative, wage.”*

The flaw here is that there is no need for a flood of new programmers. It will only drive down wages, which have already stagnated, and that is the point. A 2013 Economic Policy Institute research paper stated, *“For every two students that U.S. colleges graduate with STEM degrees, only one is hired into a STEM job.”*

#### **E) Ideologues who fervently believe that market-based solutions are always superior.**

Some representatives of this group are Charles and David Koch, inheritors of Koch Industries. They are fervent libertarians who have established and support many organizations that work to privatize public education. The world's richest family is also in this group. They are the heirs of Wal-Mart founder, Sam Walton. Like the Koch brothers, they too are determined to privatize public education.

*The innovation schools that remove elected school board control are a product of ALEC model legislation.*

Jane Mayer, writing in the New Yorker about a legal struggle to control the Cato Institute stated, "*Cato was co-founded by Edward Crane and Charles Koch, in the nineteen-seventies, with Koch's money; the lawsuit notes that the original corporate name was the Charles Koch Foundation, Inc.*" For many years, one of the stars supported by the Cato Institute was Milton Friedman, the father of vouchers. The Walton Family Foundation contributes regularly to the Cato Institute and spent significant money promoting voucher legislation in many US states.

The Koch brothers are a major force behind the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC). ALEC writes model legislation which in some conservative states is written into law with little debate and no changes. The innovation schools that remove elected school board control are a product of ALEC model legislation.

### **The DPE Movement is Real, Well Financed and Determined**

While growing up in America, I had a great belief in democracy instilled in me. Almost all of the education reform initiatives coming from the DPE forces are bunkum, but their hostility to democracy convinces me they prefer a plutocracy or even an oligarchy to democracy.

The idea that America's education system was ever a failure is and always has been an illusion. It is by far the best education system in the world plus it is the foundation of American democracy. If you believe in American ideals, protect our public schools.