



Common Core unifies foes

Charter schools real answer to ed woes

By Michael Graham, Wednesday, March 12, 2014

Who says the Obama administration can't bring people together?

Polls may show that America is more politically divided than ever (Obama's approval rating among Republicans hit a record-low 5 percent last week). But today in Worcester the lion will lie down with the lamb as Tea Party activists and teacher's union members team up to "welcome" Obama's secretary of education, Arne Duncan, with twin protests.

That's how much they both hate "Common Core."

Common Core is the latest federal education reform fad. Like "No Child Left Behind" before it, Common Core uses federal money to bribe local schools into using a federal measuring stick on student performance.

Tea Partiers hate it because it takes power away from local parents and school districts. The unions hate it because it uses student test scores as part of teacher evaluations.

And, I predict, taxpayers will soon hate it because the net result will be what we always get from "reforms" — spending more and getting less.

The track record of modern education reform is astonishingly consistent. From the Reagan administration's "A Nation At Risk" report in 1983 to Bill and Hillary Clinton's "It Takes A Village" approach to President Obama's "Race To The Top" spending push today, we have yet to move the needle in any meaningful way on student performance.

As Andrew J. Coulson of the Center for Educational Freedom testified to Congress, "We spent over \$151,000 per student sending the graduating class of 2009 through public schools. That is nearly three times as much as we spent on the graduating class of 1970, adjusting for inflation. Despite that massive real spending increase, overall achievement has stagnated or declined, depending on the subject."

Coulson used National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores for his evaluation. But he could have used our international test results as well.

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) tests show U.S. scores *falling* slightly from 2000 to today. We're spending an average of \$115,000 per student from the age 6 to 15 years, while Slovakia is getting the same test results for half the price.

And now Duncan is coming to town to tell parents that *this time* Washington really does know how to fix it.

And he's right. We do know what works: charter schools and choice. Oh, but which schools are under attack from liberal Democrats?

Exactly.

In New York City, Mayor Bill de Blasio is putting the kibosh on some of the state's most successful charter schools, denying them the same access to city facilities as their failing public school counterparts. One of those schools has the highest sixth-grade math scores in the *state*.

In Boston, there is constant resistance to charter schools from union-dependent Democrats. Yesterday the GOP's Charlie Baker called on the Democrats running for governor to join him and support lifting the cap on the number of charter schools allowed in underperforming districts.

Meanwhile liberals like state Rep. Alice Peisch and Sen. Sonia Chang-Diaz — co-chairwomen of the Education Committee — won't commit to letting more kids escape our worst schools.

There's a lot of misinformation on all sides about Common Core. That stems largely from the fact that the Obama administration has used its money and power to foist it on schools without input from local parents or teachers.

But why are we even debating the theories of Common Core when the realities of charter school performance are right in front of us?

Want to protest something, Mom and Dad? Head to Beacon Hill and tell them to lift the charter school cap now.

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