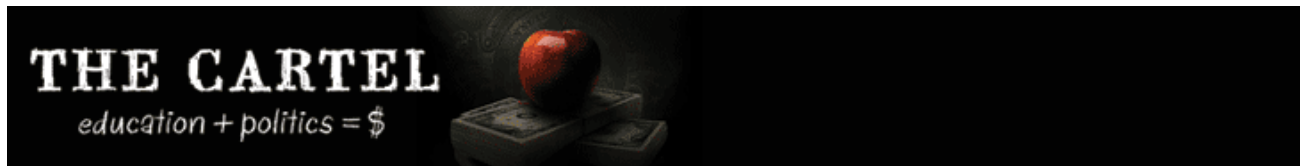


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## UPTON SINCLAIR AWARD WINNERS: 2010



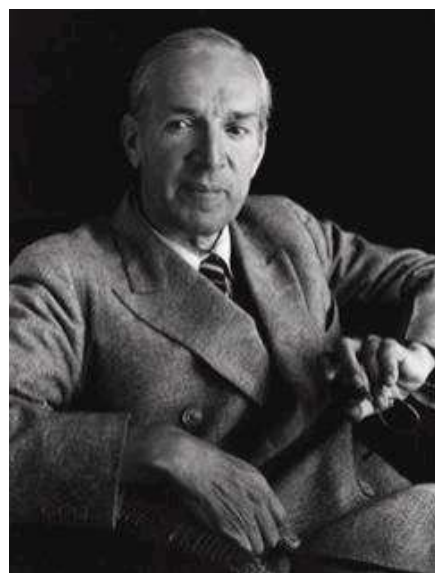
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SINCLAIR

UPTON

**Each year, we reflect back on a number of individuals who have made significant contributions to education.**

Delia Stafford  
Michael F. Shaughnessy

Each year, we reflect back on a number of individuals who have made significant contributions to education. Some of these leaders were "muckrakers" in the spirit of Upton Sinclair, others have led grass roots movements, others have been writers, scholars, researchers, and some have made contributions to policy.

The Webster's Dictionary defines "hero" as "one that is much admired or shows great courage." Upton Sinclair was, and still is, a mighty hero.

In the education world, we know that teaching the children and youth of America takes tremendous courage and solid commitment to ensure every child has the best opportunity to learn, grow, and become a productive citizen. They deserve nothing less. The children are the "clients" in the world of the schoolhouse and Mr. Sinclair would agree whole-hearted to that ideology!

The Upton Sinclair Award produced by EducationNews.org Editor, Jimmy Kilpatrick, is an innovative search for the unsung heroes of American and International education. Many winners are those recognized by their contributions to the literature for implementation. Our focus is always about "who is doing what" for the children and youth of America and around the world. We have honored education authors, doctors, athletes, reading czars, media stars and more, all of whom have contributed to children and youth in some significant way.

This award has been presented now to a number of individuals since 2005, and we hope to continue this acknowledgement and recognition of individuals who "fight the good fight" and who contribute to the education of our children. Certainly there are hundred upon thousands of teachers, counselors, principals and parents who fight for a better education, who espouse charter schools and private schools and school choice, and others who simply do a good job in the classroom or library or main office.

We have asked the community at large to e-mail us suggestions and we have investigated these individuals as well.

This year we solicited nominations for the Upton Sinclair Awards and the education world responded. Here are the 2010 Upton Sinclair heroes! Mr. Sinclair would be so very proud of each winner!

### 1) **Marlena Vaughn**

If ever there was a population of children and youth that deserved special attention it is those with disabilities, whether mild or severe and profound. This Upton Sinclair winner is beyond deserving. She has made her major goal in life to "help the helpless." Nothing more important for that population.

Marlena Vaughn is the founder of Parents of Students in Special Education (P.O.S.S.E., Inc.), a 501c(3) non-profit corporation that advocates for children with learning disabilities who are in need of special education services and empowers parents to become advocates for their children in the special educational maze. It is our company's goal to decrease the dropout rate of children with learning disabilities through early intervention and research-based programs that are effective so that each student graduates with a high school diploma and is college bound.

The grassroots of this organization arises from her son Michael's severe learning disabilities and the passion, dedication, time and commitment that it took to advocate for his educational services. She felt that no parent should struggle as blindly as she did for services and this led her to form P.O.S.S.E. Marlena realized that the only way to effectively advocate is through knowledge of the system, knowing your rights as parents, and being able to apply that knowledge in an effective comprehensive manner to get educational services for our children. So many parents could use her services because there are so many children lacking the professional services they need. In some cases it "boils down to a fight for their children" and some never win the fight!

Marlena has been in the legal field for over 30 years as a legal assistant. Her affiliation with the various organizations in the counties of San Diego, Riverside and LaMesa, enables her to stay abreast of programs and services available for the children with special needs.

The reality is this she states, "a learning disability cannot be cured or fixed; it is a lifelong challenge". further she says "take heart in knowing that with appropriate support and intervention, children with learning disabilities can achieve in school and go on to successful, distinguished careers". Today, her son Michael is living proof of the importance of appropriate research-based interventions and the will to "never give up" . Michael is currently pursuing his music career and will be attending Berkley School of Music in Boston. In 2007, he registered to vote, stood next to his mother in the voting booth, and did so again in 2008.

Let nothing be added to this, her testimony. Marlena says it better than any writer could capture. The best of the best of educators! A true and dedicated leader of those who need her services the most! She is a 2010 Upton Sinclair winner !

### 2) **Tom Watkins**

Tom Watkins resident of Northville MI, is a business and education consultant in the U.S. and China. He served the citizens of Michigan as the state superintendent of schools, 2001-2005 and was the president and CEO of the Economic Council of Palm Beach County, Fla., 1996-2001. Mr. Watkins is a lifelong leader of educational innovative ideas for schools not only in Michigan, his home state, but internationally.

His international focus has been China. He served as China's business and education consultant to WWJ-TV's breakthrough special TV series "Building Bridges: From the Great Lakes to the Great Wall." He regularly appears on local radio and television programs talking about business and education issues. Tom is a prolific writer whose work appears in the Detroit Free Press, The Detroit News, The Michigan Chronicle, The Observer and Eccentric, The Oakland Press, The Ann Arbor News, The Grand Rapids Press, The Midland Daily News, The Dearborn Press and Guide, Oakland Business Review, EducationNews, as well as other newspapers and national education journals.

His work is centered around what can be accomplished for the children and youth of his home state, as well as the nation. His statement, "We need to promote the new 3 R's of Education: Restructure, Reform and Reinvent," shows his incites and ongoing lifelong interest in education both for now and into the coming years. His idea that any new money invested in our schools without restructuring, reform and reinvention is nothing short of "providing a lubricant to protect the status quo" should be noted on a national scale. His ideas, his constant vigil and commitment for schools regarding what is best for the children and youth of America and abroad is admirable and should be a consideration for all of the 15,000 school districts across the USA. Mr. Watkins is An Upton Sinclair "watchdog" personified. The best of the best indeed! ds

### 3) Susan Ohanian

Susan Ohanian was the 2003 N.C.T.E. winner of the George Orwell Award for Distinguished Contribution to Honesty and Clarity in Public Language

Ms. Ohanian's career has been one of participating in education as a classroom teacher, and then becoming a major advocate for children and classroom teachers in her writing of a dozen or so books, and many journal articles that have been published.

Her interest in educating the masses has now taken a direction parallel to that of Upton Sinclair. He warned of the dangers of the Chicago meatpacking industry. His purpose in 1906, was to expose the extant, terrible working conditions, but he stirred up the general public, including public officials as well, by reporting the filthy conditions under which the meat was being processed. A powerful statement from Mr. Sinclair, spurring the passage of the Pure Food and Drug Act and The Meat Inspection Act.

Ms Ohanian, in her own way, is warning of the United States "brain packing industry", which is condemning our children to an education far inferior to what we received as children, and far inferior to the education of people who put us in the number one place in the world. Today, shamefully we are now at the "bottom rung" in the world of education. Her vision is one that cannot be denied-bring America's youth back to the TOP! She continues to advocate for all children. Ohanian is ever vigilant, and has the knowledge and willingness to serve.

Her contributions to the education of the children and youth place her ideology at the top of the Upon Sinclair list of exemplary leaders.

### 4) Dr. Marion Blank

Given the fact that today in the national news, ABC.CBS.NBC, announced that American students are ranked 25th in reading achievement far below Japan, China and other foreign countries. All would agree that there is much to be done to correct this unfortunate statistic! Pointing fingers will not solve the problem. But there are solutions from individuals like Dr. Marion Blank, who has spent her lifelong career working on these very issues.

Marion Blank is a world-renowned authority on how children learn to read with over 40 years experience in the field. Among her many achievements, she has lectured extensively around the globe, served as a consultant to government bureaus in many different countries, authored the widely used Preschool Language Assessment Instrument (PLAI), developed an award-winning computer program that teaches reading, and written over sixty articles and six books on language and literacy. In her latest book, The Reading Remedy (Jossey Bass, 2006), she makes available to every parent in a clear and easy to read

format the ideas behind her amazing and comprehensive reading system - Phonics Plus Five.

Dr. Blank is currently the director of the A Light on Literacy program at Columbia University in New York. She also serves as a consultant to a wide range of school districts in New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut. In addition, Dr. Blank is an accomplished children's therapist with over thirty years of practical experience in helping children with reading and learning challenges. She obtained her Ph.D. in Medical Psychology from the University of Cambridge in England. While attending Albert Einstein College of Medicine she participated in a research unit on human behavioral development and directed the teaching program for a Interdisciplinary Training Program. Subsequently, as a Professor in the Department of Psychiatry at Rutgers Medical School she directed the research unit in reading disabilities. She has devoted her life to helping children learn to read, and used her innovative methods to help literally thousands of kids. Today, with her groundbreaking new reading program, Phonics Plus Five, she is making her system available to every parent.

Perhaps our 15,000 school districts here in America should , "Stop, Look, Listen", like the readers of long ago suggested! You remember Spot, Sally and Dick and Jane don't you! Marion Blank represents our unsung heroes that are working diligently to ensure every child learns to read! Reading is most critical to a great education. If you can read, you can learn almost anything! If you can't read life can be very stressful.....Mr. Sinclair would welcome her ideas! So do we!

Upton Sinclair would advocate adding to the list the unsung heroes and honorable mentions in the world of education. That would include; school nurses, food services, schoolhouse workers keeping buildings clean , cross walk keepers, schoolhouse sweepers, safety leaders and aids for teachers, track stars, baseball players, football heroes and jumping cheer leaders, bands that play and march with drummers drumming, choirs that sing, with principals humming, teachers too..and you know who!

#### **5) Neal McCluskey:**

Neal McCluskey is the associate director of Cato's [Center for Educational Freedom](#). Prior to arriving at Cato, McCluskey served in the U.S. Army, taught high school English, and was a freelance reporter covering municipal government and education in suburban New Jersey. More recently, he was a policy analyst at the Center for Education Reform. McCluskey is the author of the book [Feds in the Classroom: How Big Government Corrupts, Cripples, and Compromises American Education](#), and his writings have appeared in such publications as the Wall Street Journal, Baltimore Sun, and Forbes. In addition to his written work, McCluskey has appeared on C-SPAN, CNN, the Fox News Channel, and numerous radio programs. McCluskey holds a master's degree in political science from Rutgers University. The above is taken from his web site. Neal is one of those quiet individuals who continually seems to do good work in terms of examining issues, exploring the issues and communicating about the issues.

#### **6) Ernest Boyer ( Posthumously )**

Ernest Boyer held a number of positions related to education, but was best known for his insistence that teaching at the college or university level was of critical importance and should not take a back seat to research and publication.

Boyer helped to shape American education, was Chancellor of the State University of New York. He served as United States Commissioner of Education and also as President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching

He was the author of a series of reports and papers for the Carnegie Foundation, which is a nonprofit policy study center in Princeton. This organization has often spoken out about the nation's education agenda.

In 1987, he indicated that one of the major problems in higher education was that research was taking precedence over

teaching, he wrote "College: The Undergraduate Experience in America" published by Harper & Row, and he indicated "at every research university, teaching should be valued as highly as research."

This book discussed the concern that the then present college/university arena was taking time, effort and energy away from the primary function of professors which he held to be teaching, mentoring, and interacting with students.

He died recently at his home in Princeton, New Jersey at the age of 67.

## 7) Mrs. Arshiya Ahmed

Mrs. Arshiya Ahmed is an Educator, Advisor, and an Independent Education Researcher who has continued to further her education at prestigious educational institutions, and now has dedicated time and energy to help develop a new entity to help those who are the less fortunate; Start World Organization, which works with deprived individuals internationally.

There are two major roles of SWO: The organization heals children who have autism, down syndrome, ADD (attention deficit disorder), and dyslexia by way of art communication. In the UAE, there are many art development programs for these children and young adults that provide them a variety of resourceful opportunities such as the development of their art skills, emotions communicated through their drawings, etc. The other role of SWO is to support the children who have become the victims of natural or manmade disasters. The main support is from the funding of developed test projects in Palestine and Lebanon, however, the organization gets involved in fund raising events such as the Dubai Marathon 2010 to help the victims of these countries as well as other parts of the world.

Start World Organization is an Al Madad Foundation project and an Al Madad/Art Dubai joint project. Both Al Madad and Art Dubai are the founders of Start and working side by side. The information about the upcoming events at Start is provided by them other than through radio, websites, and publications since the organization is a constant programme of art education in order to improve the on-going skills and form long-term relations among different societies. A gradual network between START and the international community is being built, where inter-cultural communication, awareness and understanding is growing.

Mrs. Ahmed is an accomplished writer and has much to offer in the international community. Her background in education, knowledge and skills provide her opportunities to work personally with the autistic children. For example, she encountered difficulty with regards to interacting with a few children who would either become hyper or cry out of frustration. In cases like these, one cannot even hug them as they become aggressive. So, one of her approaches (that has worked well) was to use her visual expressions as a form of communication and then talk to them softly until they would calm down.

Occasionally, she shows them different pictures and makes the sounds of the items seen in the pictures (such as a plane or a cat); She stated "an activity like this one is usually used since the children laugh and repeat the sounds of the items. "Moreover" she said, " I am amazed by their aptitude of picking up the sounds of each item correctly". "Sometimes children would sit and stare at the ceiling but have no output." In cases like these, "I lay the colours out for them to choose and tap on each colour until I receive their nod in some form."

Mrs. Ahmed has begun a career that will impact the international community with her background, speaking engagements, along with Start World Organization. She is to be commended for her efforts. We look forward to hearing more about her work. She is truly an Upton Sinclair International winner!

8) Mr. Pierre Fignole was nominated for the 2010 Upton Sinclair Award by Jamie Sanderson.

We would like to include the information from the person who nominated him below:

Mr. Fignole is a music teacher at Maryville Elementary School in Georgetown County, South Carolina. His e-mail address is [fignole@sccoast.net](mailto:fignole@sccoast.net) and [pfignole@me.gcsd.k12.sc.us](mailto:pfignole@me.gcsd.k12.sc.us).

Mr. Fignole is a childhood hero of mine. I am now 33 years old. He taught me at Kensington Elementary School in the same county when I was little. He was my biggest influence in regards to music. He was passionate then and is passionate now about teaching music to young children. During Christmas of last year, he put on an excellent show with the children that received a standing ovation. And you know what? There's always a smile on his face, even if something may get him down. He never lets you in on it. He is always positive.

Mr. Fignole is a dying breed. He is a career teacher. He's been with children almost his whole life. He's provides hope, encouragement and a spark for children to light the fire. He did with me. This is why I nominate Mr. Pierre Fignole for the 2010 Upton Sinclair Award. Thank you.

The above is from Jamie Sanderson who nominated Mr. Fignole

**9) Chris Woodhead** at one point was responsible for the leadership of Ofsted (Office of Standards in Education) in England. He has dealt with the schools, the public, the press, the legislators in the House of Lords and Commons, the teachers unions and various and sundry other bodies. He led Ofsted from 1994 to 2000 before his difficulties with the upper echelons. Like any leader, he has had his share of scorn, criticism, and pressure. He has written two books of note- *Class War: The State of British Education* ( 2002) and *A Desolation of Learning : Is this the Education Our Children Deserve* ( 2009 ) which reviewed just about two decades of educational reform , policy and initiative. He is currently Chairman of Cognita which is dedicated to fostering private education.

**10) Diane Ravitch, Ph.D.**, historian of education at New York University has written extensively on many aspects of education, educational policy and philosophy. Her books include " *The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choice are Undermining Education*", *The Language Police : How Pressure Groups Restrict What Student Learn*; *Left Back A Century of Battles Over School Reform*., *The Troubled Crusade: American Education*; *The Great School Wars : A history of the New York City Public Schools*; *The English Reader: What Every Literate Person needs to Know*; *The American Reader: Words that Moved a Nation*; *National Standards In American Education: A Citizen's Guide* ; *The Schools We Deserve: Reflections of the Educational Crises of Our Times*; *The Revisionists Revised: A Critique of the Radical Attack on the Schools*; and with J. Wesley Null- *Forgotten Heroes of American Education : The Great Tradition of Teaching Teachers*. While not everyone agrees with her positions, and her changes on various topics, her writing continues to compel and clarify many educational issues and concerns.

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#### **PREVIOUS UPTON SINCLAIR AWARD WINNERS**

2005: Gerald Bracey, Nicholas Colangelo, Elaine Garan, Martin Haberman, Jonathan Kozol, Peter and Pam Wright, Reid Lyon; 2006: John Stossel, Jan and Bob Davidson, Peyton Wolcott, red Baughman, M.D., Will Fitzhugh, Joel Turtel, Bernard Gassaway, Ned Davis, Her Highness Sheikah Mozah Bint Nasser Al Missned, "All the Children of the World"; 2007: Sean Hannity, Don Meyer, Ron Clark, Frank Wang, Tracey McGrady, Dr. Eldo W. Bergman, Queen Rania of Jordan, Celeste

Roseberry-McKibbin, Ph.D., G. Gbaanador, MD, FACS, FICS, Bill Cecil, Here's to the Upton School Principals of America;  
2008: Harold V. House, Kathleen Chamberlain, Dee Alpert, Kevin Donnelly, Dona Matthews, Ph.D., Aisha Ussery, Collin  
Hannaford, Andrew Rotherham, Jim Zellmer., JoAnn Collins; 2009: E.D. Hirsch, Jay Mathews, John Goodlad, Billy Reagan,  
Geoffrey Canada, Frerick Hess Jay Hartling