



## Survey

with each newsletter, SEE will run an online survey for SEA members

The current Survey asks about your experience with the **New Evaluation System**

<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/B2X7J52>

Welcome. You've heard about how our education system is in crisis. You've heard about low test scores, and the so-called achievement gap, framed as a gap between white and non-white students. And you've read *Whatever It Takes*, about Geoffrey Canada's startlingly new take on educating children inside one of the country's most famous endemic poverty zones.

Tonight, we're here as teachers, as parents, and as taxpayers to offer our own perspective on the new Education reform movement that's gained momentum under the leadership of President Barack Obama and his Secretary of Education, ARNE Duncan. You're going to hear us talk about an OPPORTUNITY Gap, not an achievement gap. You're going to hear us insist that the house is not on FIRE, as the ed-reformers would claim, and we'll make the case that crying "FIRE" is an attempt to panic the public into accepting widespread systemic changes that will go a long way towards dismantling the institution of free public education in this country.

We'll show that the push for charter schools, with Geoffrey Canada as its shining propaganda angel, is managed in large part by a small oligarchy of private, unelected multimillionaires such as Bill Gates and Eli Broad. We'll show how the push for "accountability" here in Seattle public schools led to the purchase of a multimillion dollar contract for an experimental testing program for children and teachers. We'll show how that contract for the notorious MAP test, presently under litigation was sole-sourced to a company on whose board the Superintendent of Seattle Public Schools sat, undisclosed to her employers, the School Board, and Seattle taxpayers. And we'll show how Geoffrey Canada's fancy high-profile boutique charter school has created fabulous business opportunities for hedge fund managers to dismantle public education into a charter school flea market while skimming off families, getting tax breaks, and running real estate scams.

In short, we're going to try to show you all the chess pieces on the move in this complicated Ed-Reform game, so that we're sure to not just focus on Geoffrey Canada, the shining King, the tallest piece on the board, but like the King, not the most important piece in the game. You've read *Whatever It Takes*, so let's talk about Geoffrey Canada. Or rather, let's talk about his project, the Harlem Children's Zone. I'm willing to accept the premise for now that he's a perfectly wonderful individual with great intentions, but the point isn't how well he comes

off on the Oprah Winfrey show, but rather, his great HCZ project.

The great idea of the HCZ, in my opinion, is the 24/7 health care and social services provided to students and their families. Tremendous. Brilliant. Expensive. 2009 per student spending in Washington state was \$7688. 45th in the US. That's below Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana. HCZ spends at least \$16,000 per student per year in the classroom. That does not include the costs of a 4 p.m.-to-6 p.m. after-school program, rewards for student performance, a chef who prepares healthy meals, central administration and most building costs, and some of the expense of the students' free health and dental care.

In 2009, more than 24,000 children in Washington (about 2%) were homeless. Among them, close to 11,000 are under six years old, about 9,500 are between kindergarten and eighth grade, and over 4,000 are in high school. Fifty-eight percent of Washington's homeless children are white, 28 percent are Hispanic, and ten percent are black. Food security is very low for one in 26 of Washington's households.

16% (approximately 226,000) of Washington's children under 18 live below the federal poverty level, \$21,200/year. The 226,000 children living in poverty would form a continuous line along the entire length of I-5 in Washington from Canada to Oregon.

While poverty is concentrated in densely populated urban areas, rural children are disproportionately affected by poverty. 21% percent of rural children in Washington live in poverty compared to 13% of urban children.

Do all kids need a HCZ-like safety net? Absolutely. Do they have it? The Washington State legislature is looking at slashing even The state-funded Basic Health Plan, which insures 56,000 working-poor people — and has a waiting list of more than twice that number that grows by 300 people a day.

Which schools bear a disproportionate load of the pathologies of poverty? Public or Private? I'm not making excuses here, I'm just explaining the problem. It's not an achievement gap, it's a poverty gap, an opportunity gap.

Let's switch topics, and get to what I don't like about the HCZ.

An entire class gets "fired" because they're not meeting expectations. Where do those kids go? Well, back to public school, but of course, defeated. New Orleans now has more than 50 % of its kids in charter schools. Guess which kids are in the public schools? The expensive ones. The ones with pathologies. Charter schools don't have to take all comers.

I don't like that the entire narrative

arc is about testing. Many chapters end with a cliffhanger: how will the kids do on the upcoming test? Is that all there is to growing up? Is that all there is to learning? This kind of high stakes all-eggs in one basket inevitably leads to a narrowing of curriculum, a narrowing definition of what kids are exposed to, in the name of "achievement". Get rid of arts, music, PE, anything but what's on the test. When you hear Teach for America talk about how they work relentlessly to "close the achievement gap," you should hear that they work "relentlessly to narrow curriculum and reduce students' experience to a very tiny subset of the skills we'd like kids to acquire on their way to becoming adults."

High-stakes testing usually leads at some point to cheating by adults. Do the research. This even happened in our Superintendent's former Charleston, SC district, by one of her star "closing the achievement gap by having test scores go up amazingly" principals.

You'll hear more about the super-profitable and pervasive multizillion dollar testing industry. I won't even touch on it now, other than to say, buy stock.

I wonder why we like to propose one set of solutions for poor kids, and another different set for other kids. HCZ: rigid rules, drill, drill drill, uniforms, shorter recess, cut curriculum. Public schools, any schools in affluent zip codes have a completely different model. Where would YOU like to go? Where would you discover a passion and enthusiasm for learning? Where would you want to send your kids?

Much is made in the book about research that demonstrates intellectual and cognitive deficits of poor children starting at the earliest ages at which it's possible to make measurements. We warn the casual reader that the history of studying human intellectual differences among peoples is fraught with research designed to confirm preconceived agendas. Studies as crude as studying brain capacity by measuring skull volumes by filling skulls with

### Social Equality Educators

*is a growing caucus of the*

**Seattle Education Association.**

Views expressed by SEE members are not necessarily representative of official SEA, WEA, or NEA positions.

SEE's website:

<http://seattlesee.org/>

SEE listserve:

[seattle-see@googlegroups.com](mailto:seattle-see@googlegroups.com)

Issue #1



## Upcoming Events:

*Achievement Gap or Opportunity Gap? Fighting Racism in the Public Schools.*

**Thursday May 19th, 2011** Mt. Zion Baptist Church

Featuring: James Bible, NAACP Wayne Au, UW

Jesse Hagopian, SEE Riki Malone Gabriella Gutiérrez y Muhs, SU

November 2011: School Board Elections for seats held by  
Steve Sundquist, Sherry Carr, Harium Martin-Morris and Peter Maier.

beans, carefully shaking and packing every last bean into a white man's skull, while sloppily filling the skull of the African man, have been used throughout science to confirm that the other, whatever the other is for you, is coming up short. Short by whose measure?

Each culture has its own ways of knowing. Standardized tests are notoriously majority culture referenced. The child who can sing 30 songs at age 3, the child who can recite orally a long narrative with multiple characters: are their skills getting measured on a standardized test? How much of the so-called "achievement gap" is for real, and how much is a result of the instrument used to measure this gap?

In Seattle, kindergartners take a version of the MAP test. It's on the computer, so they have to sit quietly at a computer, move a mouse, read, select answers. Which kids are going to do better on this? What is this really measuring? Wouldn't it just be cheaper and quicker to ask each student whether their parent has computers at home? Or in what zip code they live?

In summary, we have huge problems with poverty and school funding here in Washington. We can't or won't fund education or social services at anything like the fantasy levels of the HCZ. And even if we did, we'd still have intensely difficult challenges in leaving no child behind. This is tough work, and there are no easy solutions. And testing more often and with harsher consequences doesn't solve anything. In fact, it robs resources.

Bold tough-talk headline-chasing panaceas like closing schools, firing students, and scapegoating teachers are lauded by Arne Duncan. It's really time to go beyond those sturdities and close the opportunity gap.

### Next steps

Teachers and their unions aren't the problem here. Sure, there are some bad teachers. We've all had and remember our worst teachers. Nobody wants them in the classroom. Teachers don't want to work with teachers that aren't carrying the load – it makes it harder on everyone.

There's no such thing as "tenure" in public education, in the sense that university professors understand tenure. Teachers (well, really, everybody that works at a job) ought to have a right to due process. If you're accused of some problem on your job, there should be a fair hearing to look at reasonable evidence. Teachers are in an especially precarious position, because, well, they work with children, whose agendas and veracity are often questionable.

Teachers can be fired. All of us have

seen it done, and our schools were the better for it. All it takes is a principal willing to do the work of collecting evidence and supplying documentation. That's it. All a union does in this case is ensure that due process is followed, that an employee can't and shouldn't be fired due to an arbitrary and capricious supervisor or clients.

Let's look at this some other ways. Let's suppose the problem with US education is the teachers. Let's fire the worst 10%, or even the worst 50%. Does anyone here seriously imagine that's going to fix the problems of endemic poverty, of homeless children, of the opportunity gap? Really?

Superintendent Goodloe-Johnson last summer floated a plan to use the results of the infamous MAP test, mentioned earlier, to evaluate teachers. This is in our new contract, albeit in a somewhat less high stakes, call it middle-stakes methodology. Students aren't accountable for their own scores on the MAP – it's not part of their grade, their transcript for college, their graduation requirements. We're going to identify teachers to fire based on this? Students (or administrators) could even organize to game the test to help get an unpopular teacher fired.

Scapegoating teachers as a class for problems in compulsory education makes just as much sense as blaming crime on police. "Well, we've had police now for 200 years, but we still have crime. I guess they're not very good, are they?" Or we could wonder why the Army still is fighting wars, if they're so good, shouldn't they have won by now? Firefighters? Doctors? Dentists?

Successes in education come in small battles. Look to Everett School District, where, instead of spending millions on testing, they hire adults, not teachers, but paraprofessionals, to look after kids, particularly ones in danger of not graduating high school. Any experienced teacher can identify those students at the end of the first week of school. Graduation rates went up dramatically. It's individual relationships that make the difference, not in counting the beans of the MAP test. Personal relationships, opportunities, and each kid is different. One size does not fit all. One test does not fit all.

What's next? As you've heard, our district is on the ed-reform bandwagon. The Superintendent comes for the Broad Foundation, was trained by the Broad Foundation, has trained for the Broad Foundation, and we can safely assume, speaks for the Broad Foundation, and they speak through her. The Broad Foundation is first and foremost, about charter schools.

What can smooth the path to charter schools in Seattle? We've got standardized testing, we've got Teach for America, we've lost alternative school options, we've lost school choice, we've lost the ability for schools to choose curriculum most appropriate for their students. Class sizes have increased while the size of the central administration has grown and grown.

Make no mistake, the fix is in for charter schools in Washington. Be afraid, be very very afraid. You've heard the mechanics of the whole business.

We need to send these carpetbaggers back to New York, and reassert local control of our schools.

What to do? We propose, first and foremost, that parents and teachers need to work together. We want the same things for our students and children: choice, opportunity, passion, safety, and growth. Teacher's working conditions are exactly children's learning conditions.

I would propose that we stop scapegoating teachers as a class. All of us. Including teachers. Teachers need to stop internalizing personal responsibility for the pathologies of the rising tide of endemic poverty in this country. We're in the front lines. We're dealing with this every day, 60 hours a week. And we're not doing enough? Really? Who's doing more?

Read and research, so you can call bullshit when you smell it.

Ask who stands to profit. And who stands to pay. Follow the money trails. Who funds the League of Education Voters? The Alliance for Education? Stand for Children? State Legislators' campaigns? Teach for America? Broad & Gates. Really. The connections are there. They're deep, they're incredibly pervasive and ubiquitous. Who put a few zillionaires in charge?

School Board elections are in November. Let's elect some folks who will listen to teachers and parents, who answer locally, rather than to the Broad Foundation.

*excerpted from a SEE talk at Seattle University, 1/2011*

### Education News Websites:

Seattle Schools Blog

<http://saveattleschools.blogspot.com/>

Seattle Education 2010

<http://seattleeducation2010.wordpress.com/>