The Takeover of Public Education in America

Literature Review

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In “The Takeover of Public Education in America,” Dr. A. Patrick Huff brilliantly explains how the U.S. education system has been hijacked by the U.S. government and how it has affected principals,, teachers, students and entire communities. Dr. Huff goes back in time, and with great detail, how government has quietly imposed its will and eroded away the very fabric of our education system. Not only does he put into context why our education system is in such dire straits, he also points out who benefits from these failures. With billions at stake, Dr. Huff unmasks who’s collecting huge profits as schools struggle to meet the required standards.

It all began back in 2002 with the creation of “No child left behind” (NCLB). With U.S. schools lagging behind other countries in all major curriculums, something had to be done to boost test scores. On the surface, it was a noble gesture…. A program set up to save struggling kids while raising test scores and morale. In reality” No Child Left Behind” has had the direct opposite effect. This program allowed the government to dictate to states a measure of accountability that has placed the school system under federal jurisdiction. Students were placed in various subgroups to track their performance each year. These groups included all students, white students, African American students, Hispanic students and economically disadvantaged students. Data showed that there was a disparity in passing percentage between some of the groups a No child left behind was the brainchild to narrow that margin. That has pretty much never happened.

The standards set for students to achieve initiated by No Child Left Behind has essentially hurt the very students it was designed to help because it never addressed the true issues of most of the struggling groups. The one size fits all approach did not take into account the economic and social condition disparity between the different groups in various regions around the country. That disparity is minimized, if not ignored all together. With that being said, all the people from the principal down to the students are in a difficult position while trying to reach these standards, the goal post are constantly moved. This is because the proficiency percentage increases each year. Teachers were put in a bind because their evaluations and promotions were tied to the test scores of their students and whether or not their schools passed the federal mandate. Teachers are now teaching students to test rather than the old traditional way. Some may argue that this has tied teacher’s hands and limited their teaching effectiveness to help the students who don’t catch on as quickly.

When the schools don’t meet the federal proficiency mandates, here’s what happens. Schools fail when the percentages within the groups are evaluated and deemed not passing or not close enough to the set passing percentage. If schools do fail they have (5) five options. They can replace most of the staff and Principal. They can enter into a contract with private management company with a record of effectiveness to operate the school. They can have the state take over. They could also impose another major restructuring of the school’s governance arrangement. Last but not least, they can reopen the school as a charter school.

Of course, with anything, money is always involved. Who stands to profit because of school closures? Majority of the money is directed to the charter schools nationwide. Charter schools are divided into two groups, Charter Management Organizations. Both CMO’s and EMO’s are private companies that function to assist an existing charter school in its operation and management, or to assist local school district with low performing schools. CMO’s are nonprofit charter school companies while EMO’s are for profit companies. Examples of CMO’s are KIPP Academies and Yes Preparatory. Examples of EMO’s would be Mosaic Education and National Heritage Academies.

So why are we, as educators, so intent on accomplishing an impossible task? Because not to put forth a sincere effort would be acknowledging defeat and a possible state take over. Dr. Huff gives an excellent second reason stating that many educators in leadership positions have been in education for many years and have come to believe that the profession is moving in the right direction with greater accountability. To think differently means educators have wasted their time and energy for the last fifty years. This mindset suggests that those educators fail to comprehend the conditions they are asked to work in.