

Cuts in Education: A Failing Choice

Aristotle got it right when he said, "All who have meditated on the art of governing mankind have been convinced that the fate of empires depends on the education of youth."

Once upon a time America professed to believe in a strong public education system—at least for some children. And we still talk about public education as the great equalizer and pathway out of poverty but continue to fall far short in assuring millions of poor children, especially those of color, upward mobility.

As if children and families were not suffering enough during this economic downturn, many states are choosing to balance budgets on the backs of children and to shift more costs away from government onto children and families who have fewer means to bear them. That is a shameful trend in public education today. Even when students are in school, they're getting less than they used to. Of the 46 states that publish data in a manner allowing historical comparisons, 37 are providing less funding per student to local school districts this school year than they provided last year, and



CHILD WATCH

Marian Wright Edelman

30 are providing less funding than they did four years ago. Seventeen states have cut per-student funding more than 10 percent from pre-recession levels, and four—South Carolina, Arizona, California, and Hawaii—have reduced per student funding for K-12 schools more than 20 percent.

These cuts have major effects on critical learning opportunities. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities has found funding cuts in Georgia will mean shortening the pre-kindergarten school year from 180 to 160 days for 86,000 four-year-olds. Since the start of the recession, Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Massachusetts, North Carolina, Texas, and other states have cut funding from early education programs to help close

budget shortfalls. New Jersey cut funding for afterschool programs. In a 2009 survey of California parents, 41 percent reported their child's school was cutting summer programs. Cuts limiting student learning time are likely to intensify in the coming year. An American Association of School Administrators survey reports 17 percent of respondents were considering shortening the school week to four days for the 2011-2012 school year and 40 percent

These education cuts come at a time when American education is in dire straits. The United States ranks 24th among 30 developed countries in overall educational achievement for 15-year-olds. A study of education systems in 60 countries ranks the United States 31st in math achievement and 23rd in science achievement for 15-year-olds. More than 60 percent of all fourth, eighth, and 12th grade public school students in every racial and income group are

by the Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT). Among applicants of color, the ineligibility rates are even higher: 29 percent of Hispanics and 39 percent of African Americans are ineligible based on their AFQT scores. Children should be getting more quality instructional time, not less, to prepare to compete in the rapidly globalizing economy. Instead they're being held back and provided less school days and hours by stopgap solutions to budget problems they didn't cause. Too many adults seem to lack a moral, common, and fiscal sense context for making decisions about what to cut and what to invest in. The Children's Defense Fund's first publication in 1974 was on Children Out of School in America. We documented two million children not enrolled in school, including hundreds of thousands of children with disabilities. As we went door to door interviewing thousands of families in 30 census tracts for that initial study, we never thought to ask the question, "Is your child home

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were considering eliminating summer school programs. Summer learning loss is a major contributor to the achievement gap between poor and nonpoor children. Districts across the country are beginning to cut extracurricular activities and to charge fees for supplies like biology safety goggles or printer ink.

reading or doing math below grade level. Nearly 80 percent or more of Black and Hispanic students in these grades are reading or doing math below grade level.

A recent report by the Education Trust notes more than one in five high school graduates don't meet the minimum standard required for Army enlistment as measured

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Deltas Attacked: Stop the Violence Against Women

The Fort Worth Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated held its annual Sisterhood Luncheon last Saturday, and I was privileged and honored to be the keynote speaker. A cloud hovered over the luncheon, though, and the media was there to talk about it. Four Delta women have been raped in the Dallas Fort Worth area in the last year by a serial rapist who appears to be targeting women in their 50s and 60s. The rapes have caused such alarm that the national President of our sorority, Cynthia Butler McIntyre, has issued an alert, suggesting caution in displaying Delta identification on automobiles, and in wearing identifying t-shirts and sweaters.

Every two minutes, someone is sexually assaulted. More than 200,000 people, mostly women, are sexually assaulted each year. But only one in sixteen rapists will spend even a moment in jail—more than 60 percent of all rapes are not reported to the police. Most rapes occur within a mile of a victim's home, or in her home, and almost two-thirds of all rapes are committed by someone the victim actually knows. Nearly 80 percent of all rapes are perpetrated on women under 30, so the Delta rapes are unusual in many respects. Still, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority has the opportunity to turn the pain of these rapes into an empowering moment by organizing to stop the violence against women.

The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) was authored by Vice-President Joe Biden when he was the senator from Delaware. It became law in 1994, and was reauthorized in 2000 and 2005. It is up for reauthorization again this year, and while it should face no trouble in Congress, who knows



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with this Congress? While there should be no resistance to this reauthorization, it is important for women to remind their congressional representatives that this critical legislation must be reauthorized.

Additionally, there is a federal agency that focuses on implementing VAWA by providing resources to organizations dedicated to preventing violence against women. The Office on Violence against Women (www.ovw.usdoj.gov) is part of the Department of Justice. Earlier this fall, they held a meeting of university chancellors and presidents to talk about campus safety and violence against women, since college-aged young people are more likely to be victims of such violence than others are. The office urges people needing assistance to reach out to the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE or the National Sexual Assault Hotline at 1-800-656-HOPE.

Although we are well into the twenty-first century, we still treat the crime of rape with nineteenth century sensibilities. Many women lack the courage that the Guinean victim of former World Bank President Dominique Strauss-Kahn (also known as DSK) showed. Yet her treatment is a cautionary tale about why so many victims are silent. After Naffissatou Diallo spoke up, we learned all her business— that she cleaned rooms for \$25 an hour in

New York, that she had an acquaintance or fiancé who may have been involved in drugs and was incarcerated in Arizona, that she may have lied on her immigration application, and that she may have earned income that she did not report. Before it was all said

and done, charges were dropped. Then DSK fled back to France where he spoke of an "inappropriate relationship" with Diallo. Give me a break! When does spilling your semen on someone you do not know constitute a relationship? I digress. The point is

that many women don't speak out because they don't want to be dragged through the media mud of scrutiny into their past lives. Even a prostitute can be raped, but the

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