



“Challenging People to Shape a Better Future Now”

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Schools: A Failing Grade in Chicago

Last week, emboldened educators in Chicago who are members of the American Federation of Teachers finally euphemistically said enough is enough and put their collective feet down on the streets by striking against the city of Chicago, and the so-called reform of national education favored by the White House and United States Department of Education.

Beyond mischaracterizations by the corporate-owned media teachers in Chicago are not looking for a free ride on the reform bus, but are challenging the very structure of American education. In short, the chalk board is divided into two sides: One that enhances and sustains public educators—from pay to preparation, to pensions, and another that would privatize the \$600 million American education system to the highest bidder for profit.

The question to be answered is whether public education should be privatized? Unfortunately, it seems that Mayor Rahm Emanuel, current Chicago Mayor and former White House Chief of Staff is on the wrong side of the issue. The Chicago teachers have the right answer.

A review of American public educational history is useful. In 1853, against the will of the wealthy and corporate barons, the United States established a public school system for all students (in theory). Prior to that, only White children of the rich and resourced were privileged to be educated until high school or college. Following the American Civil War,



BLACK LEADERSHIP

Gary Flowers

the federal government launched the Reconstruction in which public school for Black and White students—albeit separate and unequal—existed. In 1896, The United States Supreme Court ruled

1960s such “leaders” realized that their public taxes were going to schools in which Black children were being educated. Thus, the first of education voucher ideas appeared to allow White parents to opt to send their kids to virtually all-White public schools in addition to their private schools. By the 1970s, courts instituted mandatory busing to public schools to enforce the “all deliberate speed” phrase included in the Brown case.

In the 1990s, the concept of pub-

by the federal government and support for public unions that represent public teachers.

Currently, the federal government only contributes 9 percent of public school funding. The other 91 percent is allotted by state and local educational entities. In many cities Public Charter Schools are used as an alternative threat to public teachers should their test scores not rise. In effect, the White House’s “Race to the Top” educational program forces teachers and school districts to compete for funding. Predictably, teaching the tests to students, and cheating on tests has resulted. Enter Chicago teachers.

By standing up to give the right answer Chicago teachers are challenging the entire public school and public union debate. In a revealing sense, the fight that public unions fought in Wisconsin against a right-wing Republican governor last year is playing out in Chicago against a Democratic Mayor, and by silence the Democratic White House. Hmmm!

If American public school students are to compete with their counterparts around the world, our nation must declare public education a matter of national security. As such, teachers need to be paid well with livable pensions, public teacher unions need to be supported, facilities need to be upgraded to 21st century standards, and the White House and Congress should support legislation rewards—not punishes—public educators.

The problem was never the public schools and public teacher unions, but rather the lack of full funding by the federal government and support for public unions that represent public teachers

in the Plessey v Ferguson case that a racially separate national school system was constitutional. By the 1930s Charles Hamilton Houston and Black civil rights lawyers challenged the racially separate and unequal national education system that culminated in the seminal Supreme Court case of Brown v. Board of Education, in 1954.

After Brown, the idea of privatization began by White parents who did not want the children to attend public schools with Black children. White business leaders and clergy aligned to establish all-White, private academies. In the

public charter schools was developed across the country. The idea was to use public funds to create private schools with private sector money and private investors. Yes, “Public Charter” schools have private investors who seek financial dividends. Public education should be an American right and not a private privilege. In the name of “reform,” Charter schools arose as the public school system and its teachers were vilified as failing to educate students. The problem was never the public schools and public teacher unions, but rather the lack of full funding

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Double Whammy: Poverty, Unemployment

Last week, we learned that African American unemployment rates stayed level last month, with an absurdly high official unemployment rate of 14.1 percent. Unemployment rates for African American men fell, while those for African American women rose. These rates are way too high and understate the extent of pain that exists in the African American community.

The philosopher Albert Camus wrote, “Without work all life is rotten,” because so many people value and define themselves by the work they do. Indeed, at many professional social gatherings the first, second, or third question is: “What do you do?” Work seems to anchor us to stability, and to the world. Too many African American people have no anchor.

While President Obama, Vice President Biden and other key Democrats have acknowledged that unemployment rates are not falling quickly enough, few deal with the psychic effects that unemployment has on the person. For many, it causes a malaise and a sense of absolute disconnection. Others feel disillusioned and depressed, although others use their own talent at entrepreneurship to create work where there is none, using skills to offer goods and services to their neighbors.

We don’t need government data to validate the pain that many in



BENNETT COLLEGE

Julianne Malveaux

the African American community experience, far more pain than experienced in other communi-

We don’t need government data to validate the pain that many in the African American community experience, far more pain than experienced in other communities

ties. The overall unemployment rate dropped from 8.3 to 8.1 percent with African American unemployment staying level, means some are enjoying our tepid economic recovery, while others are waiting for gains to trickle down.

Unemployment data were released on September 7, and the poverty data released on September 12. That’s a double whammy for African Americans. Not only is the employment situation stagnant, with “real” unemployment rising as high as 25 percent, but

15.1 percent. This means that nearly one in six Americans experience poverty, while one in four African Americans and Hispanics experience poverty.

Incomes have dropped by more than 8 percent in 2007, and again African Americans have lost more. While household incomes fell by 1.5 percent between 2010 and 2011, African Americans incomes fell by 2.7 percent, the largest drop of any racial or ethnic group. I don’t mean to underestimate anyone’s pain. All incomes fell, but African American incomes fell most. African Amer-

ican incomes hit their peak in 1999 at \$38,700. Today, with dollars adjusted, the amount is \$32,200, the lowest level since 1997. At the top or at the bottom, African Americans lost ground.

In the face of this double whammy, how do we answer the Reagan question: “Are you better off than you were four years ago?” Economists have described the “misery index” as the sum of unemployment rates and poverty rates, and using that index, all of America has seen erosion in status.

Still, legislation to improve both poverty and unemployment rates has been stuck in legislative gridlock because House Republicans would rather see people suffer than to see President Obama appear successful. But for the obduracy of House Majority Leader John Boehner (R-OH) and his posse, including Vice Presidential candidate Paul Ryan (R-WI), we might see lower unemployment and poverty rates.

More importantly, the Congressional Budget Office says that extreme spending cuts and lower tax rates for the wealthy will plunge us into recession in six months or so. As President Barack Obama says, we have choices; we are at a fork in the road. The double whammy of poverty and unemployment is a body blow. Spending and tax cuts will take African Americans from the hospital into the emergency room.