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### **Neoliberalism, Charter Schools and the Chicago Model**

In his first major speech on education since his election and swearing in as President, a speech made to an unscheduled meeting of the Council of Chief State School officers, held on March 10, 2009 in Washington D.C., Barack Obama repeated the claims heard from many quarters that the United States must drastically improve student achievement to regain lost international standing in the world. He called for tying teachers' pay to student performance (merit pay) and for expanding charter schools throughout the nation. In calling for merit pay for teachers, Obama argued:

“Too many supporters of my party have resisted the idea of rewarding excellence in teaching with extra pay, even though we know it can make a difference in the classroom.”

The president of the 3.2 million-member National Education Association (NEA), Dennis Van Roekel, weakly insisted that Obama's call for teacher performance pay did not necessarily signify raises or bonuses would be tied to student test scores under No Child Left Behind, as merit pay proponents have consistently called for. According to the NEA president, it could mean more pay for board-certified teachers or for those who work in high-poverty, hard-to-staff schools. However, much to the chagrin of the NEA president, administration officials later clarified the issue, saying that among other things, they most certainly do mean to tie higher teacher pay to student achievement on standardized tests. This clearly seems to signal that the No Child Left Behind standardized testing regime will continue unabated and the ‘average yearly progress’ will continue to serve as the metaphorical educational Dow Jones of ‘measureable outcomes’, not only for teachers and students, but as we discussed in previous chapters, eventually as benchmarks for the ‘charter school providers’ or EMOs themselves.

Besides the usual decades old call for more rigid educational standards on a state to state level and supporting No Child Left Behind, the “other things” the Obama administration alluded to in relation to educational performance have yet to be disclosed as of this writing, but one thing is for sure, Obama is clearly on record as a big time proponent of a national expansion of the charter school market. In fact, Obama is on record claiming “state limits on numbers of charter schools aren't good for our children, our economy or our country” (ibid), and he echoed in his speech that day the repeated, yet unsubstantiated claim, that many of the innovations in education today are happening in charter schools. Obama also indicated he wants kids to spend more day time hours in school, with longer school days, school weeks and school years, something KIPP charter schools currently require and a similar proposal that the National Council on Economic Education (NCEE) has called for in their report, *Tough Choices or Tough Times*. He also hinted he might even be convinced to support private vouchers.

It should be no surprise that Barack Obama supports charter schools. As the junior senator from Illinois he doubled the amount of charter schools in his state, despite reservations from teachers, community leaders and unions. In an interview conducted in Cleveland, Ohio in March of 2009, where Governor Strickland has called charter schools a drain on public expenditures and plans to introduce legislation to reduce state spending for them, Obama harped on the ‘charter schools as innovation’ theme once again and commented on his adamant support for charter schools, stating that the nation needs to:

“... create laboratories of innovation so that in the public school system, we are on a race to the top as opposed to stuck in the old ways of doing things. And so we've got to experiment with ways to provide a better education experience for our kids, and some

charters are doing outstanding jobs. So the bottom line is to try to create innovation within the public school system that can potentially be scaled up, but also to make sure that we are maintaining very high standards for any charter school that's created."

It seems Obama has latched on to the ideological rhetoric that charter schools are somehow engines of innovation that promise to raise all public schools' performance, even though, the real impetus behind charter schools is not about innovation and improving public schools but about privatizing public schools, replacing them with elaborate associations of state subsidized charter school networks, contract schools and public vouchers run by for-profit and non-profit providers. There simply is no state or national "educational innovation bank" that collects information on charter school curriculum and teaching practices and then disseminates it to traditional public schools.

Never mind that, it looks more and more like the Obama educational agenda is already beginning to shape itself into reality. On July 30, 2009 the U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee voted a \$40 million increase in funding for federal Charter School Programs (CSPs), bringing total funding to a whopping \$256 million for fiscal year 2010. Also included in the bill were significant educational reform investments strongly aligned with the Obama Administration's priorities, such as a focus on increasing the number of high quality charter schools, rewarding effective teachers, and turning around the nation's lowest performing public schools.

Perhaps the best way to understand President Obama's thinking on educational policies and public policy commitments to educational reform is to go beyond the rhetoric and examine his appointment of Arne Duncan as the Secretary of Education. Reflecting once again Obama's willingness to compromise with large business forces, Duncan, the former CEO of Chicago Public Schools was tapped, according to Bruce Fuller, a professor of education at the University of California, Berkeley, because "Duncan mirrors the President-elect's style of governing — get all sides around the table, listen carefully and experiment with meaningful reforms."

But the story is more complicated than simply sitting around the table and compromising with conciliatory business, unions and public leaders. Since his election, Obama has pledged \$100 billion dollars of federal money for a stimulus for public schools throughout the nation. But there's a hitch; in order to qualify for federal monies the states that apply for the stimulus money must remove any caps they have on the amount of charter schools that can be created in their states and those states that do not have charter school laws, of which there are currently ten, either will have to pass laws allowing the growth of charters or miss out on any stimulus funding. According to Duncan:

"States that don't have charter school laws, or put artificial caps on the growth of charter schools, will jeopardize their application for some \$5 billion in federal grant money. Simply put, they put themselves at a competitive disadvantage for the largest pool of discretionary dollars states have ever had access to." (The Wall Street Journal)

Duncan elaborated further:

"Maine is one of 10 states without a charter schools law, but the state legislature has tabled a bill to create one. Tennessee has not moved on a bill to lift enrollment restrictions. Indiana's legislature is considering putting a moratorium on new charter schools. These actions are restricting reform, not encouraging it." (ibid.)

What the Obama administration is doing, in tandem with the Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, is part and parcel of typical neo-liberal policy making: wielding federal stimulus funds as a financial weapon to force all states to increase the amount of charter schools they host as well as force those states that do not have them to pass legislation authorizing them. Through financial arm-twisting at a time of disastrous economic crisis, the Obama administration plans to use the

power of the federal government to create a much larger national market for charter school providers, be they for profit or non-profit, virtual charters, EMOs or single operators.

This is deeply troubling, for many states which do not want charter schools or have found the experiment to be less than adequate and in fact damaging to kids and funding, for traditional public schools will now be forced to choose stimulus money over policy, a form of economic extortion and increased federal and corporate control over decision making, especially at a time when many of these states are literally financial insolvent. This is another example of how disaster politics operates, only this time the disaster is not a natural disaster but an economic disaster that threatens public policies.

### **Ohio's Corrupt Charter Schools**

Public school advocates, specifically in the state of Ohio where charter school corruption is rampant, but elsewhere as well, say charter schools drain essential resources needed for public schools. Ohio's Governor Strickland has called them "a destructive influence" on public education for a number of reasons. Consequently, the Governor tried two years ago to restrict the growth of charter schools but failed. This time, however, through a formula in his current budget bill for 2009, he would cut their funding by about 20 per cent and would deny them the chance to get extra government money. Instead he would make this funding available to public schools in Ohio's poorest traditional public school districts. Virtual online charter schools, the fastest growing sector of the charter school market, would face much larger cuts under the Governor's proposed budget. When asked about Governor Strickland's position on cutting charter school funding as it pertains to his own, Obama responded by skirting the issues Strickland raised and alluded instead to the bad-apple analogy:

"I know that part of his concern was prompted by some bad experiences with charters in Ohio that weren't up to snuff."

Amanda Wurst, a spokesperson for the Ohio Governor, stated in response to Obama's support for charter schools:

"The president and governor agree that charter schools are at their best when they serve as centers of innovation and are held to the high level of accountability as the traditional public schools."

Wurst went on to note that the reason Governor Strickland wants to give extra money to public schools in poorer districts is to help them attract and retain teachers -- a problem charter schools don't have. However, with Duncan's plan to use federal stimulus monies as leverage to force states to both do away with caps on existing charter schools and allow for charter school legislation in the states where none exists, it could mean Governor Strickland is over an economic barrel and will not have much wiggle room for decision making as to the future of charter schools in Ohio -- not if he wants any part of the federal stimulus monies.

When the *Wall Street Journal* heard the news of Obama's educational plans to leverage federal money for greater charter school penetration into the market the newspaper could hardly contain its excitement and enthusiasm. The idea of using the federal government to force state governments to create financial opportunities and markets for the burgeoning souk in education by unleashing charter schools through state legislation was simply more than its editorial writers expected; and all this from a newspaper usually critical of any government intervention. In an editorial regarding Duncan's plans to withhold federal stimulus monies from those states deemed unfriendly to charter school legislation, the paper's editorial section commented:

"As a percentage of what the Obama Administration is spending on education, \$5 billion isn't much. But it does give the federal government some leverage, and the best way to use it is for Mr. Duncan to show states that he means what he says about charters."

Using the government to create market opportunities for business interests is at the heart of neoliberal economic policies and why market adherents both need and relish government; the role of the government being one of legislating and unleashing favorable public policies that benefit businesses' ability to maximize private capital, while socializing private costs to the public. This is essential for markets to function. Duncan knows this, which is why he was chosen by the Obama administration to head the Department of Education. Furthermore, as Kathleen Kingsbury pointed out in the *Time* magazine special on the appointment of Duncan:

"One other big plus: Duncan will be sure to have the President-elect's ear. They are personal friends and often play basketball together, most recently on Election Day. Like Obama, Duncan is Harvard-educated, and his Chicago roots run deep. The schools chief grew up in the city's Hyde Park neighborhood, where the Obamas have lived for several years. He went to the same private school the President-elect's daughters attended until recently."

But the real story and the prospects for the nation's future educational policy can be best revealed by Duncan's historical involvement as a technocrat with the neoliberal policies created in Chicago under the Renaissance 2010 project launched by Mayor Daley in 2004; here, Duncan was the darling of business elites and their public policy makers during his seven year tenure as CEO of Chicago Public Schools. Let's take a brief look at Renaissance 2010 and the role of the new Secretary of Education in this effort in Chicago to enhance our understanding of what the Obama administration's policies towards charter schools might look like.

Renaissance 2010 is a corporate project that was launched in 2004 to reform both the city and its public schools with the intent of creating schools and geographical spaces that would serve to attract the professionals believed to be needed in a 21st century 'global city'. It is basically a land use plan for housing and urban development aimed at increasing gentrification, with schools playing a predominant role in maintaining and assuring a healthy urban middle-class and attracting global visitors, tourists and Wall Street financial interests. The city wants to transform itself from a former industrial hub into a global corporate financial and tourism center and to do so the city needs government policies and legislation that are friendly to capital's goal of downtown land redevelopment and the gentrification of working class and low-income neighborhoods. As the educational authors Jitu Brown, Rico Gutstein and Pauline Lipman write:

"Quality schools (and attractive housing) are essential to draw high-paid, creative workers for business and finance. Schools are also anchors in gentrifying communities and signals to investors of the market potential of new development sites."

Renaissance 2010 places public schooling under the control of corporate leaders who aim to convert public schools to charter and contract schools, breaking the power of unions and handing over the administration of the newly created charter schools to 'providers' beholden to corporations, philanthropists, and business interests. Duncan, as the former CEO of the Chicago Public Schools (CPS), was an efficient technocrat or manager for the neo-liberal policies and legislative necessities dictated by the elite members of the Commercial Club and he helped to centralize decision-making power in the hands of corporations and their political representatives and then worked to carry out public policy favorable to the plans hatched by this same powerful *Commercial Club*.

Arne Duncan is part and parcel of an educational movement that we are increasingly witnessing in New York, Washington D.C., New Orleans and Chicago, Texas and elsewhere: a movement towards centralizing decision-making regarding public schools in the hands of an elite autocracy; this is often referred to as 'mayoral control'. Under this governance structure, a small group of policy makers are then tasked with the job of legitimizing corporate and financial actors to make crucial decisions about public education without the messy problem of public accountability, public transparency nor public input. This represents a neo-liberal turn that goes beyond issues regarding the private operation of individual charter schools and instead twists and turns its way right into the heart of privatizing the public urban sphere in entirety, while making the government simply a boardroom or 'secret parliament' for powerful corporate interests.

## Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and Renaissance 2010

The story of Renaissance 2010 and the role of Arne Duncan as administrator of educational policies designed to further the urban planning initiative begins in the city of Chicago, with the Commercial Club, established in the 1800s to promote the interests of Chicago's corporate and business elite. The business 'union' has long influenced Chicago's education policies. It was on June 24, 2004, that Andrew J. McKenna, Chairman of the Civic Committee of the Commercial Club, enthusiastically announced the plan in the Club's press release:

"Chicago is taking the lead across the nation in remaking urban education. No other major city has launched such an ambitious public school choice agenda." (*Civic Committee Press Release, 2004.*)

McKenna's jubilation was aimed, of course, at Major Daley's announcement of Renaissance 2010. The plan promised to radically transform public education in Chicago by introducing choice and markets into the Chicago educational arena, shifting control away from elected local school councils and toward the unelected Commercial Club while diminishing the power of the teacher's union. As part of the plan, the Commercial Club created New Schools for Chicago (NSC), which includes the chairs of the McDonald's Corporation and Northern Trust Bank, a partner in a leading corporate law firm, the CEO of Chicago Community Trust, the retired Chair of the Tribune Corporation and top Chicago Public School (CPS) officials. The bright side of the suggested educational reforms for the Chicago business community and one reason they are so excited over its prospects is that the new educational plan, with its matrix of non-union charter and contract schools, would also promise to substantially reduce the power of the CPS teachers' union (37,000 strong) as well as other school employees' unions (*ibid*)

The new arrangement had actually been in the embryo stage for some time, as a year earlier the Club's Civic Committee (the group's 'think tank') issued a report entitled *Left Behind*, which called for the future "creation of at least 100 public charter schools" in the city. The model that Chicago is embracing is the franchise model for charter schools, the Paul Hill's Diverse Provider Strategy imposed on New Orleans Public Schools and now managed by Paul Pastorek and Paul Vallas. The franchise, or educational retail charter school model under Renaissance 2010, is expected to have a privatized regional business center to provide services to administrators and teachers, replacing the central public education district office, and the new center will also be expected to handle the daily administrative functions of the retail franchise charter schools.

With the launching of Renaissance 2010, the Commercial Club began developing policies not only central to reforming the schools, but they also began to make key decisions, outside the purview of democratic decision making, regarding the CPS's day to day operations. According to Pauline Lipman, of the University of Chicago in Illinois, and David Hursh of the University of Rochester:

"Under Renaissance 2010, the Commercial Club gains control over Chicago's public schools through New Schools for Chicago, a board appointed by the Commercial Club and composed of leading corporate representatives and 'civic leaders' including the CPS's Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and the Chicago Board of Education President. Referred to in the press as a 'secret cabinet,' this unelected body not only participates in the selection and evaluation of new schools, but also distributes Commercial Club funds to those schools.

They go on further:

"The Commercial Club, representing the corporate and political elite, has been the central force behind Renaissance 2010. Further, while Renaissance introduces markets and competition into education, it increases state intervention as the Chicago Public Schools administration intervenes in the daily activities of educators by introducing corporate models of governance with standardized testing linked to rewards and punishments."

The central role Arne Duncan played in moving along the Renaissance 2010 mayoral corporate project is clear. Although he was not the conceptual author of the privatization policies promoted by mayoral control of the Chicago public school system and the effort of the *Commercial Club* at 'school reform', as an enthusiastic CEO and participant in the "secret cabinet", Duncan displayed a willingness to eagerly align himself with neoliberal policies and corporate interests and push for their implementation through educational policy initiatives. He adamantly supports privately run contract schools and charter schools and makes no bones about the fact that he would like to see these models proliferate throughout the nation.

Duncan is also known to not only be an ardent defender of corporate involvement in, and privatization of, public schools, but he personally oversaw the attempted closing of 20 Chicago public schools in low-income neighborhoods of color in 2004. And he did so with little or no community input – managing, at least for a time, to snub the meddlesome outsiders, like parents and their children, who might have raised objections to the CEO's plans for the schools, or at the very least offer suggestions in the spirit of community decision making.

During the first half of 2004 before details of any school reform plan under Renaissance 2010 had been announced by Duncan, Bronzeville community members, part of the Mid-South of Chicago, anxiously awaited the release of the Mid-South plan; the Mid-South plan was to be the first in the series of plans which were being hatched by the Commercial Club of Chicago as part of Mayor Daley's Renaissance 2010. Initially the community was told that a decision had been made by the "secret cabinet" to improve 20 schools between 31st and 47th Streets along the Dan Ryan Expressway east to Lake Michigan. The community and residents of Mid-South complained early and bitterly about being locked out of the decision making processes regarding the schools in their neighborhoods. Ken Calvin, a Bronzeville homeowner, went on the record against any decisions made for the community by the centralized CPS:

"It sounds like Chicago as usual. It was stunning to find out that the working groups consist of institutions that are outside of this community. So how are they included in the planning process but we aren't as residents and community leaders? That's a little bit nuts."

The details of the Mid-South plan as it was known among elite policy making circles, was leaked to the press on July 24, 2009. But the plan leaked to the press didn't call for any improvements of the public schools in the area as citizens had been falsely led to believe; instead it called for the closure of 20 of the 22 public schools in the community, a decision Arne Duncan as CEO of the Chicago Public Schools was to implement. Even more outrageous was the fact that parents of the children involved in the school closings did not receive any notice of the plan until the final day of school in 2004). This lack of democratic decision-making resulted in angry demonstrations, testimonies at School Board meetings, vocal community hearings and the development of a resistant group called Citywide Action to Revitalize Education or CARE, made up of several community organizations including the SEIU. Bronzeville resident, Brenda Perry, who in July 2004 spoke at a community meeting of local school council members and parents, once the details of the plan to close the 20 schools was revealed by the "secret cabinet, was furious and she blasted the local school council, stating: "You ignored us for years while scores dropped. Now you want to use us for a social experiment. It's wrong."

The community members argued that the plan was concocted and put into place by Duncan to rid the community of its residents in order to further gentrification plans for the new urban land reforms. The evidence for their claims, they said, was the fact that the closing of the schools would mean their children would have to transfer to schools located outside the community, meaning transportation problems which, when added to the lack of affordable housing as a result of public housing demolition and high property taxes, meant that they were being simply pushed out of their communities. Things did not go as planned, due to the volatile and well organized resistance to the 20 school closures the plans for the Mid-South project were scrapped and Duncan and the CPS unhappily bowed to community demands. All this was handled under Arne Duncan's watch.

But as Brown, Gutstein and Lipman wrote , in all fairness to Arne Duncan:

“..... Chicago Public Schools (CPS) policies are not really about Duncan or his successor. The biggest threat to finally achieving equitable and quality education in Chicago's low-income African American and Latino/a schools is not the individual who carries out the policy but a system of mayoral control and corporate power that locks out democracy. The impact of those policies includes thousands of children displaced by school closings, spiked violence as they transferred to other schools, and the deterioration of public education in many neighborhoods into a crisis situation.”

Progressive educators see as Duncan as having enthusiastically carried water for the corporate constituencies and privatized interests seeking to gentrify communities. Their goal is a “business ethos” in schools designed to undermine unions, parent involvement and democratic decision-making, full public disclosure, accountability, transparency and community involvement. As Brown, Gutstein and Lipman write, regarding Chicago Public Schools and the autocratic decisions made by Arne Duncan when CEO of CPS:

“In a democracy there must be opportunities to impact decision-making. CPS has refined sham hearings to a twisted art form. When schools are slated to close, CPS is supposed to hold public hearings (which Duncan never attended) so that a hearing officer and board members (who almost never attend) can engage the school community and listen to their rationale as to why the school should not be closed, or other alternatives should be explored. In virtually every case, parents, students, teachers, and community pour out their hearts. In many cases, they document how their school has been drastically underserved by CPS or that their school has consistently improved. Tears are shed out of fear for their children's safety or the destruction of a family atmosphere in a school building; yet the CPS Board—on Duncan's recommendation—consistently votes unanimously to close the school. This has prompted a revitalized effort by community members and organizations to remove the mayor's authority to appoint the CEO and the school board and move towards an elected school board.”

However, the controversy over Duncan's policies does not stop with his support for Renaissance 2010. Duncan has also been a strong proponent of school choice when it comes to military schools. He was quoted in the November 2, 2007, issue of *USA Today* saying: "These are positive learning environments. I love the sense of leadership. I love the sense of discipline."

In fact, rapid increases in military programs in Chicago public schools actually did occur largely under Duncan's tenure as CEO of CPS. According to Lipman: Chicago Public Schools has five military high schools, more than any city in the nation, and 21 "middle school cadet corps" programs. The military high schools teach military history and have military-style discipline. Students wear military uniforms, do military drills, and participate in summer boot camps. The hierarchical authority structure mirrors the Army, Navy, and Marines, with new students ("cadets") under the command of senior students who work their way up and require obedience from those in "lower ranks." All but one of the military high schools are in African American communities, and all the middle school cadet programs are in overwhelmingly black or Latina/o schools., and CPS plans additional ones in the future (ibid).

Before Arne Duncan was CEO of CPS, there were procedures in place whereby schools could be put on probation if they had performance problems and they could even be forced to forge alliances with external partners, like mentors, in order to improve their performance. No more; under Arne Duncan's rule, all this was phased out and now schools that underperformed on standardized tests were to be closed, or "turned around" by private 'providers' and 'turn around artists' (many of them funded by the ubiquitous deep pockets of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation or the Wal-Mart family fortune). In the turn-around model, the new autocratic accountability regime headed by Duncan drastically increased pressure on teachers and students to perform higher on standardized tests, in accordance of course with NCLB, while at the same time they suspended or in some cases completely did away with extra-curricular activities like art,

physical education and recess (Aug. 25, 2008, *Chicago Sun Times* cited in Brown, Gutstein and Lipman, 2009).

The Obama education policy differs little from the Bush administration's policy of hitching student and teacher performance to what many in the educational community and beyond call inauthentic assessments that actually force teachers to teach to the test and do little to encourage critical thinking or collaborative problem solving. Nor does the Obama policy seem to differ much in setting goals for the rapid expansion of charter school networks and non-profit and for-profit 'providers' to run them.

Where it is more far-reaching than the Bush educational plan, however, is in its commitment to expand the charter school market by forcing all the states in the nation to pass legislation for the creation of charter schools. It also goes further down the road of 'choice' by requiring all states to remove all caps on charter start-ups, and then have them unleash some variation of the Diverse Provider Strategy model, a network of retail charter and contract schools accountable and wedded to a system of 'measurable outcomes' derived from standardized tests mandated under No Child Left Behind. Add to all of this the fact that Obama has said he might be in favor of private vouchers, his adamant commitment to merit pay based on performance on standardized tests, his suspicion of tenure and seniority and one would think that teacher's unions would be aghast.

Many are and on July 13, 2009 in San Diego about 2,000 public school teachers gathered at a Washington hotel for the American Federation of Teachers conference to let the Obama administration know it. Present at the AFT conference was the new U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan. Duncan urged the union to join the Obama administration's push to build support for a new wave of school reform as Congress prepares to reauthorize the 2002 No Child Left Behind law. Seated at the convention on a stool on a stage alongside Duncan was Randi Weingarten, president of the AFT; both of them sported a button on their shirts with the words, "Trust us; we'll work with you". Duncan challenged educators to be open to linking pay to student performance on standardized tests and to experiments that could reduce job tenure protections and seniority. He was met with boos by many members. It will be interesting to see how Duncan's proposals, all of which run contrary to teacher union concerns, will be met in the future when they become actual policy proposals under the Obama administration.

Randi Weingarten made the union's position on charter schools clear at the San Diego convention in her response to the Obama administration plans for expanding the charter school market:

"Successful charter schools should be applauded and should share their lessons; troubled charter schools that fail their students should be held accountable and closed; and charter school teachers should be supported and given the right to union membership and voice ." (AFT, 2009)

Weingarten also cautioned elected leaders not to walk away from their responsibility to help all public schools succeed "by turning entire public school systems into charter schools".

Many in the educational community are unhappy with the Obama administration's commitment to NCLB standardized tests. Diane Ravitch, a Research Professor of Education at New York University and a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution in Washington, D.C., writes a blog for EdWeek where she dialogues with Deborah Meier, a leading progressive educational leader. In early 2009, in a letter posted to Deborah Meier at EdWeek, Ravitch candidly expressed her dismay over the Obama administration's devotion to NCLB and the direction Arne Duncan was taking the department of education:

"I have been watching and listening to our new secretary of education, trying to understand his views on the most important issues facing our schools and the nation's children. I wanted to believe candidate Barack Obama when he said that he would introduce real change and restore hope. Surely, I thought, he understood that the deadening influence of No Child Left Behind has produced an era of number-crunching that has very little to do with improving education or raising academic standards.



We truly need change and hope. I thought he understood. He chose to keep his own children far from NCLB. He decided to send them to a private school in Washington, D.C., that shuns the principles and practices of NCLB. However, based on what I have seen to date, I conclude that Obama has given President George W. Bush a third term in education policy and that Arne Duncan is the male version of Margaret Spellings. Maybe he really is Margaret Spellings without the glasses and wearing very high heels. We all know that Secretary Spellings greeted Duncan's appointment with glee. She wrote him an open letter in which she praised him as "a fellow reformer" who supports NCLB and anticipated that he would continue the work of the Bush administration. Recall, Deborah, that the media today defines an education reformer as someone who endorses Republican principles of choice and accountability.

Although Obama has said that teachers should not be forced to spend the academic year preparing students to "fill in bubbles on standardized tests" (Weinstein, 2009) it certainly seems that under an Obama administration, save effective organized opposition, NCLB is here to stay.

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