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Hemphill: Slow progress toward education reform

By Allen Hemphill

At the risk of annoying my conservative friends, I intend to offer a paean to Democrats in general and President Obama in particular. The subject is education reform.



Allen Hemphill

When one researches the history of education reform, he or she finds that while education reform has been bi-partisan, the heavy lifting has been done by liberals and the heroes of the movement have been Democrats. The mechanisms for that education reform have been driven by graduates of Harvard and Yale, and by liberal individuals like Bill Gates. That they have been largely

unsuccessful is not for want of trying.

Perhaps it will lie to the Democrats to perform this needed reform, much as Nixon opened to China. The teachers' unions, the most powerful single force in politics, has its force field allayed against the conservatives and the Republicans, so perhaps only the Democrats can succeed.

When George Miller, a Democrat Congressman from San Francisco, became the chairman of the House Education Committee he was concerned about the quality of teaching.

I'll let Rep. Miller tell the story himself:

(1994) "I've focused my career in Washington on helping teachers and improving the teaching profession. In fact, I once proposed an amendment that would've required teachers in the classroom to have subject matter competency in the areas where they were teaching (and merit pay). I lost that vote 434-1."

It was President Clinton who had, as governor, successfully started reform in Arkansas and began the charter schools program in his presidency.

When Al Gore ran for president, his campaign, bowing to strong union pressure, ignored the education reformer on his staff, a Yale Law and Harvard Kennedy School of Government graduate, John Shnur, but John was picked up by the unlikely partnership of President George Bush and Senator Ted Kennedy, who collectively pushed through "No Child Left Behind." This was a rare moment of bipartisanship generated immediately after the 9-11 attack.


Building on parallel efforts of teachers like Michelle Rhee who were working at the lowest possible level to found groups like Teach For America, there were concerted movements to improve U.S. education.

President Obama told his education secretary to reform the system, "but don't poke the unions in the eye." (Impossible.)

To his credit, President Obama established "Race to the Top," which despite union opposition has had some reform success. It is designed to tie teacher effectiveness ratings to their students' success.

When the liberal Los Angeles Times took the bold step of rating teachers,

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looking at the standardized test scores of 11,500 elementary school teachers with an analysis of their success based on an algorithm that took into account the relative success of their students, it created a firestorm around the newspaper. The newspaper actually graded the teachers and posted their names – but was met with a boycott called by the 33,000-teacher Los Angeles union, and a demonstration.

The Times promised to rate middle- and high-school teachers within the next year, but it never did, bowing to the financial pressure of the teachers' union.

Progress is slow.

Reach Hemphill at ahemphill@cox.net.

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Fascinating report on Finnish education reform, and how they ranked # 1 in the world by eliminating competition, shortening length of schooling, eliminating privatized education and testing, and paying teachers a living wage. All that plus healthcare!

School of Fail: Finland: You're Doing it Right
<http://failblog.org/2012/03/25/homework-class-tes...>

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 Akamai · 19 weeks ago -1 [Like](#) [Reply](#)


Citing Failblog? Seriously?

Wikipedia lists Failblog as "Fail Blog (typeset as FAIL Blog) is a comedic blog website created in January 2008" and says it has won Webbie Awards for "Humor and wired."

Hey, that sounds like somewhere to go for serious discussions of a serious subject.


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 Amy Sandberg · 19 weeks ago +1 [Like](#) [Reply](#)

wow. that's quite the ad hominem argument. what about the validity of what the guy actually said? or the validity of the results finland has achieved? No, no, lets just make fun of the web site and ignore all the rest!

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 usna1957 59p · 19 weeks ago 0 [Like](#) [Reply](#)

Amy -- it is not a new site -- it is a humor site! It is to news what Bill Maher is to news! Hey, Amy, it isn't April 1 until tomorrow!




Now here is a REAL citation, from the Washington Post yesterday, saying that Democratic Party Mayors are taking on the teacher unions:
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/nat/education/democ...>

(Please note the use of an accepted liberal newspaper source.)



You should join the liberals in trying for education reform! As Biden recently noted, (Governors and Mayors) are people who actually must do things, as opposed to Senators and Congressmen.

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 **harveypoway** · -1p · 19 weeks ago -2  

Bad metrics. Of course it has great scores when they have this, "For starters, Finland has no standardized tests. The only exception is what's called the National Matriculation Exam, which everyone takes at the end of a voluntary upper-secondary school, roughly the equivalent of American high school."
<http://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2011/...>

It's the same as unemployment for them. If you lose your job and put into training status, you're not unemployed. LOL. The good thing about Finnish schools are the lack of people. Half a million might be in school (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_Finland) compared to America's 60 million or so kids (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_the_United_States). Finland doesn't have most of the same problems the US has.

Failblog is where I get my laughs, not my news.

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