12/7/2011

Dear members of the OEIB,

I share Governor Kitzhaber's concerns that Oregon's school children will possibly be less educated than my generation.

They are also expected to have a shorter lifespan.

And that is no coincidence.

My siblings and I attended the University of Illinois in the 1970's as first generation college graduates. The tuition: $350 per semester. I had worked through high school and college and with minimal scholarship aid had no debt when I graduated.

The near-doubling of tuition for private medical school in1980 left me with sticker shock at the end of four years. Little did I know that political and market forces would also rapidly transform health care delivery.

An unhealthy society cannot consume enough resources to eliminate the destructive seeds sown three decades ago. Disaster capitalism thrives through unequal distribution of resources in an unhealthy society.

We cannot educate ourselves out of gross income inequality. I am struck by the failure of education technocrats to address this basic fact. In the Bush administration, Diane Ravitch was a believer in school transformation through No Child Left Behind. But over the past decade, she has been transformed by the politics of privatization and profiteering that have benefited reformers more than the children. "Miracles" are not what they seem to be.

We just need more efficiency, more motivated students and parents and more "effective" teachers!

Oregon's Quality Education Model is shortchanged by over $3 billion this biennium. At both ends of the spectrum, more slices from the shrunken K-12 pie will be served, including full day kindergarten and more spending on AP classes and dual enrollment in higher education. That's a good thing—if there was additional money in the coffers.

"Proficiency" is pushed to levels that defy normal development. I hope you read Joanne Yatvin's "Choking on the Common Core Standards," published online this weekend in the Washington Post.

Mathematicians have debunked "value added" modeling to interpret standardized test data. In May, the National Research Council concluded, "It is unreasonable to implement incentives tied to tests on a narrow range of content and then criticize teachers for narrowing their instruction to match the tests, said the committee." They

also cautioned that "it is important that research on and development of new incentive-based approaches does not displace investment in the development of other aspects of the education system – such as improvements in curricula and instructional methods -- that are important complements to the incentives themselves."

Yet Project Alder has already been set up to crunch our children as data entry points. Human capital with a "return on investment." Why rearrange the deck chairs with "achievement compacts" that continue to mortgage our children's future away with sub-prime education?

We don't need a crystal ball for "outcome-based" education. It's failed over and over again for the same reasons.

Poverty.

The strings attached to Arne Duncan's NCLB waiver would strengthen Oregon's dependency on failed federal policy. I believe Oregon must demand an unconditional waiver and I hope this Board looks to SJM 12, passed by the 2007 legislature, for guidance in this matter.

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