

# Taking Back Our *Public* Schools:

Escaping Market Myths  
and Doing What Works Best for  
Children, Democracy, and Our World

- *Karl F. Wheatley, Ph.D.*

**“We as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values.”**

- *Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.*

# Inconvenient truths about the educational reform movement...

- ▶ “While the rhetoric is highly effective, remarkably little good evidence exists that there's any educational substance behind the accountability and testing movement.”  
- *Peter Sachs, Standardized Minds*
- ▶ “People who haven't darkened the door of a public school in decades have no idea how “accountability” has robbed those institutions of vitality, of zest, and of the intangible elements that make children want to succeed. There's only so much brow-beating, only so much drilling, only so many test-prep worksheets a small mind can endure without zoning out.”  
- *John Young, Waco Tribune,*
- ▶ “There is a growing technology of testing that permits us now to do in nanoseconds things that we shouldn't be doing at all.”  
- *Gerald W. Bracey, renowned mythbuster*



# **Broad Effects of 12 Years of Market-Based Educational Policies**

- ▶ **Narrowed and dumbed-down curricula. Important disciplines neglected or ignored. Superior teaching methods driven out of classrooms. Endless test prep. Charters and vouchers appear to have done more harm than good.**
- ▶ **Squashing of democracy in education. Loss of teacher autonomy. Erosion of teacher status, pay, and job security. Overworked and burned-out teachers. Growing shortages of teachers, administrators.**
- ▶ **Unscientific testing and accountability methods. Misleading accountability “report cards.” Billions wasted on failed policies.**

# People's Most Cherished Dreams for Children by Age 18

- ▶ **Caring, love of learning, creativity, problem-solving, social skills, collaboration, independence, initiative, respect for themselves and others, character, risk-taking, life-long learning, critical thinking, confidence, persistence, good citizenship, strong work ethic, communication skills, adaptability, and to be well-rounded, happy, and healthy.**

Market-Based Policies Focus on...

▶ **TEST  
SCORES!!!**

# Effects of 14 Years of Increasingly Market-Based Education

- ▶ 1) MB policies emphasize self-interest, not caring: Bullying is a problem in many schools.
- ▶ 2) Intrinsic motivation and student engagement decline with every passing year in school.
- ▶ 3) Creativity was rising for decades but started declining at start of standards movement!
- ▶ 4) Everyone sure is working hard, but real citizenship isn't on the tests.
- ▶ 5) Goodbye “well-rounded”: Policies ignore many subjects and whole-child development.
- ▶ 6) Obesity/health crisis is a far greater threat to children and society than are our students' average test scores, yet we've canceled recess to do more test prep?!
- ▶ 7) Toxic stress, anxiety, and depression are reaching epidemic proportions.
- ▶ 8) NAEP '08-'12 long term trend scores for 17-year-olds were flat across the board.

# People Speaking Out About How Market-Based Policies Failed Children

- ▶ **“My son already hates school, and he's just halfway through kindergarten. . . . Now kindergarten is a 30-hour-a-week job. There's nightly homework; finger painting is a rare treat; and as for naps, there just isn't time.”** - *L.J. Williamson, LA Times*
- ▶ **“This law has turned my sweet, happy classroom into a test-prep mill.”**  
- *Monica Hart-Nolan, Half Moon Bay teacher*
- ▶ **“Standardized testing is the worst thing that could have happened. You're producing scientists that think every experiment has perfect answers.”**  
- *Reid Walker, Colorado biology teacher*
- ▶ **“We're training our children to be the most anxious, stressed-out, sleep-deprived, judged and tested, poorly nourished generation in history.”**  
- *Merilee Jones, former Dean of Admissions, MIT*

# *Why Running Education “More Like a Business” Does More Harm than Good*

- ▶ **1) Market ideology ignores two of the three critical purposes of education.**
- ▶ **2) Narrow focus on students as replaceable workers leads to ignoring whole-child goals and outcomes that are at the heart of healthy development and learning.**
- ▶ **3) Manufacturing principles directly conflict with developmental principles.**
- ▶ **4) Tight corporate style control is antithetical to the freedom and individualization that are cornerstones of quality education.**
- ▶ **5) Market ideology tends to promote increasing inequality, which is highly toxic.**
- ▶ **6) Market ideology is hostile to and attacks the founding principles of America.**
- ▶ **7) Thus, in apples to apples comparisons, kids from public schools learn as well or even better, but public education also better promotes intrinsic values and the core values and goals of our democracy (equal opportunity, freedoms, social mobility).**

# We Have Great Dreams for the World

- ▶ Good, secure jobs. Broad prosperity. Eliminate poverty and disease. Strong families. Safe neighborhoods. Healthy, happy kids. More time to do what you love to do. Caring communities. A trustworthy government that looks out for average people. Less racism, sexism, etc.. A cleaner planet and healthier ecosystems. A stable climate. End wars and terrorism and finally achieve peace on earth.

# America & The World After 36 Years of Increasingly Market-Based Governance

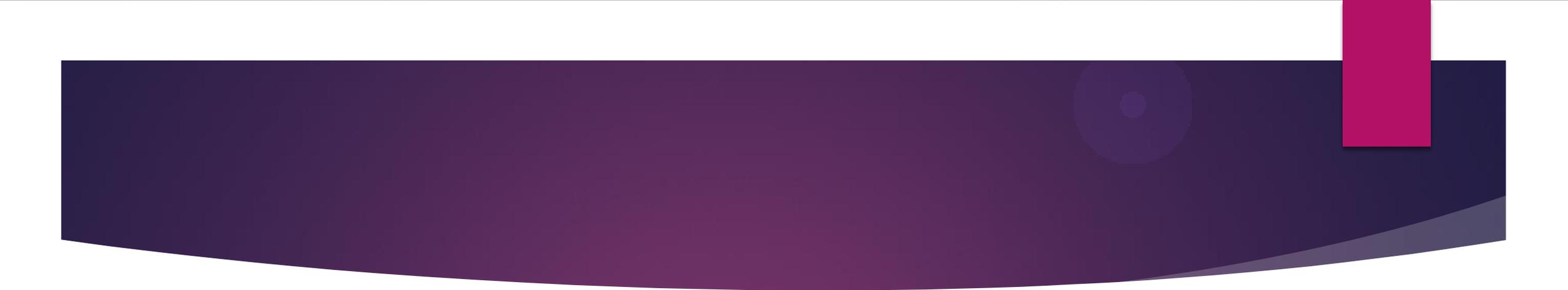
- ▶ Widespread poverty and hunger. Staggering & rising inequality. Fewer good jobs. Crushing personal debts. Struggling families. Exploited workers. Toxic stress. Anxiety and depression. Drug addictions. Suicides. Declining trust & social cohesion. Rampant chronic diseases. Superbugs.
- ▶ Corporate scandals. Corrupt and dysfunctional governments. National debt crises. Deeply-flawed candidates. Endless wars. Refugee crises. Terrorism. Poisoned farmland. Water shortages. Dying oceans. Global warming. Climate disruption. Epic storms.

# Why Market-Based Approaches So Often Do More Harm Than Good

- ▶ **Market ideology emphasizes extrinsic values, so intrinsic values/goals that are critical for individuals and a healthy civilization get neglected or intentionally trampled:**
- ▶ **Individualism crowds out the “*me-and-we*” focus a healthy civilization requires:**
- ▶ **Focus on competition crowds out the cooperation a healthy civilization requires:**
- ▶ **Market ideology ignores or is hostile to the founding values of America:**
- ▶ **Running society based on business principles makes inequality much worse (which reliably creates a wide array of social dysfunctions):**
- ▶ **Market approaches have extra costs built in, and are very wasteful:**
- ▶ **Workers, Families, Democracy, and the Environment are All Obstacles to \$\$\$ Goals:**

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▶ **Two paths diverged into a wood,  
and I...**

**I took the one less traveled by,  
..and that has made all the difference.”**

***-Robert Frost***

## *“Education is harder.”*

- ▶ “I spent 20 years in the computer industry before becoming a public-school teacher five years ago. I had risen to become vice president at one of the world's largest software companies. I know business. And I know something about education as well... Education is harder.

*—Robert Freeman, San Francisco Chronicle, 1/18/05*

# Essentials of Big-Picture Education

- ▶ Authentic Assessment & Trustworthy Research
- ▶ Real-World Curricula
- ▶ Whole-Child Teaching Methods
- ▶ Balanced Goals
- ▶ Safe Schools & Caring Communities
- ▶ Practicing Democracy in Classrooms and in School Governance
- ▶ **Prerequisites: 1) A Big-Picture Perspective, 2) Understanding Healthy Development & Learning, and 3) Ethical Professionalism**
- ▶ **Aim to develop well-rounded individuals, wise citizens, & skilled workforce**
- ▶ **Core Values: Caring for People and the Planet**
- ▶ **Most Formal Education is *Public* Education**

# The Values We Embrace Shape the Fate of Our Civilization

- ▶ ***Intrinsic Values:*** meaning, competence, relationships, autonomy, caring for others, contributing to one's community (balanced focus on me *and* we)
- ▶ ***Extrinsic Values/Goals:*** wealth, fame, beauty, competitive advantage over others, status/"looking good" (It's all about me, me, me)
- ▶ **We all pursue some mix of both types of values/goals,** but strongly valuing extrinsic goals crowds out caring for others, cooperating, and caring for the environment and results in a poorer sense of personal well-being.
- ▶ **When societies are organized around extremely individualistic market/extrinsic values,** public needs get neglected, democracy gets attacked/weakened, violence rises, and people and the planet suffer badly.

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# The Futility of Academics-Only Schooling: The Case of Emotions

- ▶ Learners' emotions affect their physical health, mental health, intrinsic motivation, initial learning, retention of learned material, attachments & relationships with classmates and teachers, creativity, problem-solving, good vs. poor behavior, sleep, concentration, etc.—and with many more secondary ripple effects resulting from those primary effects.
- ▶ **So why aren't emotion objectives front and center in curriculum planning?**

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# “Little-Picture” vs. “Big-Picture” Views on “What Works?": Nutrition

- ▶ Many very “scientific” but “little-picture” studies find that a specific fad diet reliably helps you lose lots of weight over 1-2 months. **“IT WORKS!”**
- ▶ A few well-designed but “big-picture” studies show that this same diet causes most people to regain all that weight over the long run, makes it harder for them to lose weight in the future, and when compared to healthier diets, promotes higher rates of obesity, diabetes, heart disease, strokes, cancers, digestive disorders, arthritis, dementia, chronic back pain, and yes, erectile dysfunction! **“IT BACKFIRES.”**

# “Little-Picture” vs. “Big-Picture” Views on “What Works?": Agriculture

- ▶ Many very “scientific” but “little-picture” (corporate) studies find that factory-style farming (e.g. “Round-Up ready” soybeans) causes greater increases in crop yield for the first 3 years and farmers use less herbicide. **“IT WORKS!”**
- ▶ A few well-designed but “big-picture” studies show that this farming approach causes no increase in crop yield over the long run but causes the development of superweeds and dramatic long-term increases in herbicide use, and when compared to healthier agriculture methods, causes more poisoning of the air, water, and soil, more health problems for farmworkers and plants and animals nearby, dead zones in waterways, poorer crop yield during droughts, more compacted soils that increase erosion and flooding and reduce the filtering of pollutants, plus a suspicious rise in allergies and digestive disorders in populations eating the crop in question. **“IT BACKFIRES.”**

# “Little-Picture” vs. “Big-Picture” Views on “What Works?": Learning to Read

- ▶ Many very “scientific” but “little-picture” studies find that systematic and intensive direct instruction (DI) in isolated reading sub-skills more rapidly boosts reading test scores in the short run than do more child centered approaches (whole language (WL) & free voluntary reading [FVR]). (see NRP, NELP reports)
- ▶ A set of well-designed but “big-picture” studies show that over the long run, WL and FVR yielded just as good or better reading comprehension than DI did, and the longer the studies go, the greater the advantages were **for FVR** over DI for reading comprehension. Furthermore, compared to DI, Whole Language was found to allow for a more comprehensive and enriching curriculum, and resulted in better writing and student attitudes towards books.



# Big-Picture Evidence About the Effectiveness of Big-Picture Education

- ▶ Kindergarten: German Study of 100 classrooms
- ▶ Play Research:
- ▶ Reading Research:
- ▶ Open Education & the Eight-Year Study:
- ▶ Learning & Forgetting Research:
- ▶ Project-Based Learning Research:
- ▶ Self-Determination Research:
- ▶ Research from Sudbury Schools:
- ▶ The Geese that Lay the Golden Eggs of Future Development and Learning: Making them Sick or Keeping them Healthy?

# Hacking at Leaves vs. Chopping Off Limbs and Chopping Out Roots of Corporate-Style Schooling

- ▶ **Key Failure**: Test score pay plans have failed to improve education nationwide.
- ▶ **Branch-hacking or rotten-fruit complaining** is just pointing out the plans failed.
- ▶ **Chopping off a main limb** of this unhealthy education paradigm is ...
- ▶ **Chopping out a root principle** of this unhealthy paradigm is ...

# Hacking at the Leaves vs. Chopping the Roots & Limbs of High-Stakes Testing

- ▶ **Key Failure**: Some specific high-stakes test does more harm than good.
- ▶ **Branch-hacking or rotten-fruit complaining** are just ...
- ▶ **Chopping at...** the main *educational goals* limb is ...  
the main *assessment* limb is ...
- ▶ **Chopping at *the trunk* /*the paradigm*** itself is ...
- ▶ **Chopping at a *root principle*** of this unhealthy paradigm is ...
- ▶ **Crushing a seed** of this unhealthy paradigm is ...
- ▶ **Growing *the roots*** of the healthy Big-Picture educational paradigm is ...
- ▶ **Planting *the seeds*** of the healthy Big-Picture educational paradigm is ...

Let's take back our *public* schools!

▶ *"Hope has two beautiful daughters. Their names are anger and courage; anger at the way things are, and courage to see that they do not remain the way they are."*

*- St. Augustine of Hippo*



# And Still More Quotes for Educators’ Declaration of Independence

- ▶ “Public education serves much broader and deeper **purposes** than simply getting a job, making money, running a business, or growing the economy.” - *Karl Wheatley*
- ▶ “**Standardization** of our educational systems is apt to stamp out individualism and defeat the very ends of education.” - *Harvey Cushing, American scientist*
- ▶ “**Measurable outcomes** may be the least significant results of education.” - *Linda McNeil, educational researcher*
- ▶ “The last thing the public schools need is advice from CEOs hungry to impose their own **style of power.**” - *Marc Fisher, Washington Post columnist*
- ▶ "It's crystal clear to everyone, right, that the point is **privatization**? Having lost several voucher referenda, they're sneaking in through the back door.” - *Susan Harman, principal*

# Our Drunken Obsession: Key Problems with so-called “Measurable Objectives”

- ▶ **There is no such thing as real “measurement” in education. Honest. Myths are a lousy foundation for schooling.**
- ▶ **Focusing on lists of so-called “measurable objectives”...**
  - **reliably narrows and dumbs-down the curriculum**
  - **leads to ignoring or undermining goals that matter more to us,**
  - **chops up learning in ways that undermine development**
  - **drives out superior teaching methods, and**
  - **steals ownership of education from students & teachers.**

# The **REAL** “Basics”: Foundations of Healthy Development and Learning

- ▶ All domains of development matter, are interconnected, and affect each other
- ▶ Meeting Kids’ Basic Physical Needs & Good Physical Health
- ▶ Meeting Kids’ Basic Psychological Needs & Good Mental Health
- ▶ Positive Emotions
- ▶ Healthy Motivations (Intrinsic motivation, growth mindset, autonomous self-regulation, learning/mastery goals, flow)
- ▶ Positive Social Relationships
- ▶ Positive Identity Development

# How Market-Based Thinking *Inherently* Conflicts with Quality Education

- ▶ 1) Emphasis on \$\$ goals ...
- ▶ 2) Emphasis on measurable/testable objectives ...
- ▶ 3) Focus on self-centered individualism ...
- ▶ 4) Standardization ...
- ▶ 5) Coercive control ...
- ▶ 6) Emphasis on competition ...
- ▶ 7) Focus on short-term efficiency ...
- ▶ 8) Privatization ...

# Before and After the Market-Based Takeover of U.S. Government & Society

	<u>1960s-70s</u>	<u>Now</u>
▶ Poverty (All / Kids)	11% / 15%	15% / 21%
▶ Inequality	Broad prosperity All economic groups making gains	Vast inequality / Stagnant wages Almost all gains go to richest 1%
▶ Jobs	Lots of good, secure, middle-class jobs with good benefits & pensions	Far fewer good jobs with less security & much weaker benefits
▶ Gov't	Often responded to average people Dems/GOP moderate. Debt/GDP= 37%	Responds to 1% & big corporations Extremist policies. Debt/GDP=105%
▶ People	Stronger, more secure families. Much lower rates of anxiety & depression	Weaker, struggling families. Much more anxiety & depression
▶ Planet	On wrong track but cleaner air, water & soil. More species. Fewer toxins in us.	Increasing poisoning, extinctions, climate disruption, shortages (H2O).