

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

PRESS RELEASE 667#

Worldwide public education is up for Sale

From the U.K. to Liberia, the school privatization movement gathers steam.

The following article by [Diane Ravitch](#) indicates that Australia's public education systems, like those in the UK and the United States are under pressure from billionaires and hedge funds in search of profits.

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For the past three decades, critics of public education in the [United States](#) have assailed it and used its flaws to promote publicly funded privatization. Corporate and political interests have attacked the very concept of public education, claiming that the private sector is invariably superior to the public sector.

These developments are by no means limited to the U.S.; the same movement to privatize public schools is occurring in the [United Kingdom](#), Africa and other regions – with troubling implications.

In the U.K., the Conservative Party government wants to turn all public schools into private academies, funded by taxpayers. The British multinational corporation Pearson has ambitions to open for-profit schools using its products in many nations across the world. In Africa, a corporation called [Bridge International Academies](#) (BIA) is opening for-profit schools in poor countries that cost \$1 a week. Liberia is considering outsourcing [its entire elementary program](#) to BIA, which is funded by American billionaires Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg and others from Wall Street.

The Economist magazine wrote a [glowing article](#) about BIA's plan to make low-cost schooling available in Africa, because existing public schools are so poorly resourced. The potential market of hundreds of millions of children is alluring and sure to be profitable. Teachers in the Bridge schools are uncertified; They [teach a scripted curriculum from a notebook computer](#). Many families cannot afford even \$1 a week, especially if they have more than one child. Meanwhile, the state is relieved of responsibility to supply what is being outsourced to private enterprise.

Many of the plans to privatize education globally can trace their beginnings back to ideas and funding that started in the United States.

In the U.S., the attack on public education can be traced to a 1983 report by a commission appointed by the Reagan administration. Titled "A Nation at Risk," it warned that the public schools were so mediocre that the future prosperity of the nation was endangered by them. Advocates of privatization saw an opportunity to advance their cause and joined in the attack on public schools. Thirty-three years after the report, it is obvious that its predictions of economic disaster were wrong. The U.S. has the [strongest economy and military in the world](#).

[READ: [Is America's image on the decline?](#)]

Yet the privatization advocates kept up the drumbeat of failure. In 1990, a few states began to experiment with charter schools, which are privately managed but publicly funded, and free of most state regulations that apply to public schools. Today, almost every state has endorsed and opened charter schools. About 90 percent of these schools are non-union; one-quarter of the nation's charters have received financial support from the right-wing Walton Family Foundation, which was created by the family that owns Walmart.

Charter schools claim to be public schools, but the only thing "public" about them is their funding. They are run by private boards that do not hold open meetings, as elected boards of education do; they are neither transparent nor accountable in their finances.

At the same time they were pushing for charter schools, U.S. privatization advocates pushed for publicly funded vouchers that students could take to any religious or independent school. Once considered an extreme right-wing idea, vouchers have been enacted by nearly half the 50 states in the U.S., even though most state constitutions mandate that public money must be dedicated only to public schools.

A quarter century after privatization began in earnest, it is clear that its main effect has been to undermine the public schools. Actually, that has always been the goal of the privatization movement. Their propaganda campaign – which now spans from Kenya to the United Kingdom – blames public schools for the persistence of poverty and for the low test scores of children who grow up in poverty, without adequate food or medical care.

The privatization movement has cleverly and deceitfully branded itself as a "reform movement." As they divert resources and students from public schools, which still enroll the vast majority of students, they congratulate themselves for leading a civil rights movement and introducing market discipline into what has traditionally been a government responsibility.

Who is behind the privatization movement? A lot of money and influence. Hedge fund managers are big supporters of charter schools; they clearly prefer the private sector to the public sector, though they like the secure cash flow from the public coffers. Major foundations, such as the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation and the Walton Family Foundation have poured hundreds of millions of dollars into the charter movement.

Who would have imagined that public education in the U.S., U.K, Australia, Africa and elsewhere around the world would become a target for a hostile takeover by corporate interests? The outcome is predictable.

Two nations – [Chile](#) and [Sweden](#) – have demonstrated what will happen. Students use choice to self-segregate by religion, social class, race, and family income. The neediest children do not benefit. Educational results are negligible. The most admired school systems in the world, such as Finland, have not promoted school choice or privatization. They have concentrated on creating a highly professional teaching corps, funding public schools adequately and ensuring that children and families have a good quality of life.

The question for the coming decade is whether privatization will undermine and enfeeble public education in Australia.

<http://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/articles/2016-08-09/worldwide-public-education-is-up-for-sale>

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