

TRANSCRIPT:

Diane Ravitch Speech

“Two Visions for Chicago’s Schools”

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Vanessa Ott

Speakers (in order of appearance):

- [DOHERTY]: Jay D. Doherty, President - City Club of Chicago
- [QUINN]: Patrick Quinn – Governor, State of Illinois
- [RAVITCH]: Diane Ravitch – Research Professor of Education, NYU
- [GREEN]: Paul M. Green, Chairman – City Club of Chicago

[00:00]

[DOHERTY]

Our next speaker has been a public servant for the people of Illinois for more than a quarter of a century, both as a citizen and a public official. He has focused on restoring ethics and fairness to state government. His focus heading into the next election *undoubtedly* will be education and jobs. He is known for fighting like programs like the Special Olympics, [??], Haymarket Center, and Special Children’s Charities. Ladies and Gentlemen, the Governor of the State of Illinois, Patrick Quinn. Governor Quinn?

[AUDIENCE]

(applause)

[01:02]

[QUINN]

Thank you. Well I do want to thank Jay and the City Club. I called Jay a little while ago and asked if we could have this gathering here this morning. I thought it’s very important given all the discussion we’ve had on education issues in the state legislature, definitely the city council, all over Illinois – that we have one of the preeminent experts on education, really a national resource, someone who has worked with many, many different administrations in Washington, but also has devoted her whole life to the most important mission that we have as adults and parents: teaching the next generation.

And, I also want to personally salute a master-certified teacher in chemistry who's also known as Karen Lewis, for her great work. She understands how important it is to impart knowledge to citizens.

Our speaker today who just wrote a book called *The Death and Life of the Great American School System*. I think it's fair to say from the reviews of this book that it's really a very special opportunity for all of us to learn about debates on education in the American school system over the last several decades. I was reading it last night, and Diane talks about what do we really want from education? Obviously we want to make sure that our children are able to do subjects well, read, and write, and numerate, but it also talks about the importance of education to our democracy. We're several weeks before an election, 22 days to the election, 44 of you don't sleep, and for those who believe in democracy, it's important that we have well-educated citizens.

[02:57]

Diane Ravitch had the opportunity on the 250th anniversary of Thomas Jefferson's birthday, it was 1993, to speak, I think it was before the Library of Congress, about this very important subject of education for all of the citizens, everybody, and nobody left out, and the importance it is to the furtherance of our democracy. So I think today is an opportunity for all of us to hear someone who has spent her whole life on this issue. She was born in Houston, went to the Houston public schools, went to Wellesley for college, and then Columbia for graduate school, a PhD. Currently she's the research professor of education at New York University.

It's a city to the east of us, New York. They didn't do too well over the weekend in baseball. Although we aren't there yet. Illinois is 13 and the Cardinals are still alive.

[AUDIENCE]

(chuckles)

[QUINN]

Anyway, we have someone with us who I think can help us all in looking at the issues that affect education today. The importance of curriculum. The importance of a well-rounded education. The importance of making sure that every child gets the best. Without further ado, I'd like to bring forward one of the best we have in America and that's Diane Ravitch.

[AUDIENCE]

(applause)

[04:37]

[RAVITCH]

Thank you so much Governor Quinn. It's a pleasure to be here. I can't tell you how *much* of a pleasure it is because last night, in La Guardia, where my flight was delayed for six hours, I had a

terror that I wouldn't be here at all. I was trying to think about whether I could Skype you or something. My plane was the last flight out of New York. They cancelled all of the other subsequent Chicago flights. So, I'm really happy to be here, and I should tell you that I do have a little bit of Chicago credibility because I was on the Board for many years of the Encyclopedia Britannica, and used to come here four times a year, and enjoy your hospitality.

[05:13]

Well, I want to talk today about both the national context and the local context of what we call school reform today. You have heard for many years, we all have, all the lamenting about public education, about how it's in crisis, how it's declining, how it's getting worse and worse. Just this past spring there was a report by Joel Klein and Condoleezza Rice from the Council on Foreign Relations saying that our public schools are so terrible that they are a very grave threat to national security. Bill Gates likes to say that the system is broken.

[05:49]

But, all of this is nonsense. It is absolute, total nonsense. Here are the facts. And, all of this comes from the U.S. Department of Education web site. Test scores today, on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, that's the federal test that has no stakes attached to it, test scores today are the highest they've ever been in history. Now the NAEP, which is that federal test, has been given over a 40 year period. The scores today are the highest they've ever been for White students, Black students, Hispanic students, and Asian students, but you will not find that mentioned in the report from Joel Klein and Condoleezza Rice, nor by Bill Gates.

[06:28]

The high school graduation rate today is the highest it's ever been in history. When you look at the age group 18 to 24, 90% of these young people have a high school diploma. When you hear Secretary Duncan, whom you all know so well, talk about the 75% graduation rate he is looking at the four year rate, but he's not counting the kids who graduate in August, or the kids who take five years, or the kids who get a GED. *That* graduation rate is 90%. There is a way of counting – we could play with numbers all kinds of ways.

[07:04]

The other thing is the dropout rate is the lowest it's ever been in American history. Amongst that age group, 18 to 24, only 8%, *eight percent*, have ever dropped out of high school. It would be nice if it were 0% but 8% is the lowest it's ever been in American history.

[07:23]

Now, we hear a lot about the international test, and you'll hear people like Michelle Rhee say, "We're number this, we're number that, we're not number one." Here's the news, we've never been number one on the international test. The first year that the tests were given internationally in 1964, there were 12 nations that participated. We came in twelfth out of 12.

But, the funny thing is that over the past 50 years or so since those tests were given, we have outperformed every one of the other 11 nations. This is true with all of the international tests. We've never been number one. We've usually been either at the average or in the bottom quartile. Why is that? It's because we have so many children living in poverty. Children who live in poverty have lower test scores than children who are not in poverty.

Now on the last international test, the results of which were published a couple of years ago, it's called the Program in International Student Assessment, we averaged about in the middle, as we typically do on the international test. But, the interesting thing is this: that our students who attend low poverty schools, that is, schools where 10% or fewer of the children are poor, we're number one in the world. Those schools with low poverty had higher test scores on those international tests than students in Finland, or Korea, or Japan. In schools where 25% of the kids are in poverty, the scores were the same as those of the highest performing nations in the world – Finland, Korea, Japan, and so forth. As the poverty level in the schools rise, the test scores go down.

[09:04]

Now, we *are* number one in one very important statistic. We are number one amongst all the advanced nations in child poverty. Nearly 25% of the children in this country live in poverty. This is a national scandal. This is an international scandal, but you won't hear much about that in the public debates.

Wherever there is concentrated poverty, and racial segregation, you will find low test scores. Children who are poor are less likely to have good health care; less likely to have stable homes and safe neighborhoods; less likely to have educated parents and books in the home. They're more likely to be sick; more likely to move frequently; more likely to miss school; more likely to be homeless; more likely to be hungry; and more likely to have disabilities.

All these things affect motivation to learn, readiness to learn, and frankly, just interest in school. These are just plain and simple facts about our society and our schools.

Low performance, contrary to the current pseudo-reform movement, low performance is not caused by unions; low performance is not caused by teachers. Low performance is caused by the toxic combination of poverty and segregation.

Low performance is not cured by closing schools and firing teachers. That just destabilizes neighborhoods and demoralizes the entire teaching staff.

[10:34]

So, I want to talk a little bit about what the advertised title of this talk is, which is contrasting two visions for Chicago.

One vision is the carrot and stick philosophy of school reform. This philosophy is rooted in the belief that teachers, principals, administrators and students need to be threatened and rewarded in order to raise test scores. So, part of this philosophy are things like merit pay, and threats to fire teachers, to close schools, using test scores to evaluate teacher quality, making the test scores the be-all and the end-all of education.

[11:19]

What you should know, and what I've documented in my books and articles is that this approach has failed. It's failed again, again, and again. Merit pay has never worked. Merit pay has been tried for a hundred years, and it has never worked. It's what I call the idea that never works, and never dies. It keeps coming back.

Evaluating teachers by test scores also doesn't work. For one thing, no country in the world is doing it other than us, and we've now invested hundreds of millions of dollars in this idea that we can identify good and bad teachers by the test scores of their students, and all it does is to identify *who* they're teaching, not whether they're good or bad teachers.

And the teachers who are teaching, for instance, the gifted will not see big gains, and so they're bad teachers. The teacher who have lowest performing students will see the smallest gains. And so, teachers will start avoiding the kids that they should be helping. They will seek to avoid them for fear of being fired because they had the nerve to teach low performing students.

[12:26]

What I've been describing, this carrot and stick philosophy, is not even school reform. It *is* the status quo. So when people talk about they want to reject the status quo, we should be rejecting merit pay. We should be rejecting using testing and abusing testing as we have because what we're doing now, and calling school reform is actually official federal and state policy across this country. It's been the policy in Chicago now for almost 20 years, and what have you gotten for it? People keep coming in and saving your schools again and again, and they're *still* not saved.

[13:02]

The other vision for school reform rests on a different perspective. And it begins with this simple question. What kind of school do you want for your own child? Most parents want small classes so that the teacher gets to know their child. They want a campus that's attractive and that's safe. They want a school with experienced teachers who are admired and respected in the community. They want stability. They don't want churn and upheaval. They want a school with a full curriculum. They want a school with science labs, with history, with civics, with foreign languages. They want a school where children have physical education every day, where they have arts classes every day, where they have a library with a librarian.

Aren't these the reasons that people move to the suburbs, and send their children to elite private schools? Yet I think back to my own education in the Houston public schools. I had all those things and now it seems to be something that is so far out of reach. Something that only the wealthy can afford. It's crazy. Don't you think that poor families want exactly the same things for their children?

So think of these two visions when you think about what children in Chicago actually need.

[14:13]

The Chicago Teachers Union went on strike because it was sick of the status quo. It was sick of testing, and choice, and privatization, and merit pay, and this entire carrot and stick approach which has typified Chicago school reform now for almost 20 years, and has typified federal policy now for almost 10 years. The carrot and stick people like to say that poverty doesn't matter, but they're wrong. Poverty does matter. Family income is the single most reliable predictor of test scores.

This combination that I've referred to, this combination of poverty and racial segregation is devastating to academic achievement. There *will* be kids who break the barrier, but most of them don't.

[14:59]

Chicago, I'm sure you realize this, Chicago has the greatest degree of racial segregation of any large urban district in the United States. This just from the report of the UCLA Civil Rights project. Chicago is *the* most intensely segregated school system in the country. Chicago has extremely high rates of poverty amongst its Black and Hispanic children. Chicago has an extremely high level of youth violence. Chicago has been reforming its schools for nearly 20 years. Nothing that Chicago has done for the past 20 years has reduced, or even addressed, racial segregation, poverty, or youth violence.

You might even say that the constant closing of schools has actually intensified youth violence by destroying communities and destabilizing neighborhoods. Chicago has, instead of addressing the root causes of low academic achievement, Chicago has adopted reforms that give the illusion of change. And when those reforms failed, the easy response, and the wrong response is, "Blame the teachers."

[16:08]

Another easy and wrong response is, privatize the schools. Chicago has relied on testing, accountability, closing schools, charter schools and merit pay for nearly 20 years. At what point do you say, "This doesn't work"? People often say this is a business model. What business would work by doing the same thing over and over and over, bringing in chancellor after chancellor, superintendent after superintendent to continue doing what has already failed?

Arne Duncan called his reform plan "Renaissance 2010." It's 2012. Have you seen the renaissance yet?

[16:52]

The reformers like to say that the test scores are the *only* measure of success or failure. But, high stakes testing, one of the things that we know about it for certain, is that it incentivizes negative behaviors. It incentivizes schools to narrow the curriculum, to drop the arts, to eliminate recess, to drop history, to drop civics, to narrow the time available for anything other than what's tested because the life of the school depends on getting those scores up. It incentivizes teaching to the test.

[17:24]

Used to be, years ago, the teachers would say to one another, as a matter of professional ethics, "You never teach to the test." You just don't do it. Good teachers don't teach to the test. And now you *must* teach to the test. Districts and states are spending hundreds of millions of dollars on testing, and on test prep materials to help teachers teach to the test which is professionally unethical. It incentivizes cheating.

[17:50]

We saw a major, major cheating scandal in Atlanta Georgia, a major cheating scandal in Washington, D.C. And now, just the other day, a major cheating scandal in El Paso, Texas where the superintendent literally pushed kids out of school in order to keep the scores of the district up.

We've seen gaming the system. We've seen states lowering the passing mark so that more kids could be declared proficient.

[18:18]

Now, there's been this big emphasis in *this* administration in Washington on evaluating teachers by test scores that has bipartisan support, but the one thing we know about this is that there's no country in the world that does it. We're breaking new ground here, and it will inevitably produce teaching to the test, narrowing the curriculum, and cheating because now teachers' jobs will depend on test scores.

If you understood the tests, you would not want to put that much emphasis on them. The misuse of testing falls particularly hard on the poorest kids.

[18:57]

Standardized tests are designed to produce a bell curve.

Now, I was appointed by President Clinton to serve on the National Assessment Governing Board. That's the entity, the federal government entity, that oversees federal testing. All the tests are designed to produce a bell curve. A bell curve has, always, a top half, and it has a *bottom* half. It's the nature of the bell curve. The affluent kids are populated heavily in the top half. Poor kids, always, are overly represented in the bottom half.

Tests do not close the achievement gap. Tests reflect the gaps. They show the gaps. They do nothing to narrow it. And so the more you test, the more you prove what you already know, which is that there is a gap and it does not narrow by continuing to test and test.

Every standardized test has a bell curve. And we see the same gaps in the same pattern on every test whether it's the SAT, the ACT, The National Assessment of Educational Progress, the state tests, the International tests. The poor kids are always in the bottom, and the wealthy kids are always in the top.

[20:10]

Now, NCLB, No Child Left Behind, President Bush's initiative said that 100% of students must be proficient or the school will be punished. The Race To The Top says the scores have to go up every year or the schools will be closed.

These are both very punitive strategies. There's nothing about support teachers, supporting schools, helping anybody do a better job. None of this is realistic. No nation in the world has 100% proficiency, and no state in this country has 100% proficiency, nor will it.

[20:46]

You have to remember, just as a matter of common sense, tests are not the purpose of education. Developing young people's character is the purpose of education.

[AUDIENCE]

(applause)

[21:05]

[RAVITCH]

Now, I say that this not to be against testing, 'cause I think that testing can be used intelligently as a diagnostic tool to identify areas where kids need help, where teachers need help. But, they should be used positively and not negatively, and not punitively.

Instead of helping children, we're labeling them. We're telling children right from the git-go you're not good enough. You're in the bottom half. You're in the bottom third. You're in the bottom somewhere. This is not education. This is stigmatizing.

I've met parents who told me, "My second grader feels she's a failure." Why should a second grader feel she's a failure?

[21:43]

Now we're developing, states across this country, districts across this country, will be testing *Kindergarten* children to find out about their college and career readiness. This is my definition of insanity. I mean, what career is a Kindergarten child ready for? To be a cowboy? A fireman? A policeman? Batman. Robin. I mean, c'mon. This is very sick.

[22:10]

Now there's talk from Washington and elsewhere of testing for pre-K. This becomes, at a certain point, manic behavior. This is not healthy. This is not about educating children. It's about labeling them early.

[22:30]

So, instead of helping children, we're stigmatizing. Instead of helping teachers, we're demoralizing them. And now there have been several surveys this year, one funded by the Gates Foundation, another by MetLife which says that close to 30% of teachers in America are ready to quit. That's a million teachers. They're not going to be replaced by Teach for America.

We have to *really* support our teachers, and give them reason to believe that they're respected in the community, and that we want to help them. We don't want to punish them. We don't want to fire them. We want to help them.

[23:04]

Now, the reformers have a silver bullet, and their silver bullet is charter schools. Now, there are good charter schools. There are great charter schools. There are terrible charter schools. And, study after study shows that when the children are the same, the results are no different.

There are some charter schools that succeed by skimming. They take the best kids in the poorest communities. They push out the English Language Learners. They push out the kids with disabilities. They don't accept them.

Many of the charters that have high scores have a high attrition rate. And overall, the charters are more segregated than public schools.

[23:42]

I keep wondering, as I watch this movement grow, particularly in the urban districts, what the end game is. My fear, having attended segregated schools in Houston, Texas, is that we are returning to a pre-"Brown vs. Board of Education" society in which segregation will be based on class, and not on race, in which the charter schools will take the most motivated children, and the public schools will become dumping grounds for the less motivated children.

[24:13]

The reform vision, I believe – (and I don't think of it as reform, I think it's the Status Quo vision) – has consistently failed to produce the changes we need in our education system. In fact, there is no district in the country where this approach to education has worked. It's not worked in Chicago. You've been doing it for almost 20 years, and you're still looking for a savior. It's failed in New York City. New York city mayors had total control now for almost a dozen years. The test scores have changed [??] – the achievement gaps have been unchanged over this past dozen years.

It's failed in the District of Columbia. The District of Columbia has the largest achievement gap in the *nation* for both Blacks and Hispanic kids. It's double the achievement gap of that in other districts. Fifty percent of the teachers in the District of Columbia leave every single years. Fifty percent of the teacher leave every year! What instability. What churn. This is bad for children.

[25:09]

Sixty percent of the principals hired by Michelle Rhee have already left. Sixty percent. This instability is not good.

Reform has not work in New Orleans. What you hear about New Orleans is hype and spin. New Orleans has now 80% of its children in charter schools, and New Orleans is a low performing district in a low performing state. New Orleans as a district is ranked 69th out of 70 districts in the State of Louisiana. They'll tell you about the gains they've made, but the gains they've made are miniscule in comparison with the fact that it's a very low performing district. And, of the charters in New Orleans, 79% were graded either a D or an F. This is hardly a record of success the rest of the country should be emulating.

[25:58]

So, I've come to believe that what we're seeing from Michelle Rhee, from Arne Duncan, from Joel Klein, from all of the others, is not a reform movement. It's a privatization movement.

I oppose privatization. I believe in public education. I'm a product of public education. I would not be here today had I not had access to the Houston public schools. My mother would not have had an education when she came from Bessarabia in 1917, but for the fact that there was a public school system.

[26:32]

Public education is an essential democratic institution. We cannot allow it to be handed over to entrepreneurs. If we want to improve academic achievement we cannot afford to ignore the effects of poverty on children. What should we be doing? I'll give you an agenda.

I have a new book that I just finished over the summer in between blogging and tweeting. The working title is *Reign of Error*. And I decided I had to write this book because people said, “What are your solutions?” So, about a third of the book is devoted to solutions. The other two-thirds is going over everything I’ve learned these last couple of years.

[27:14]

The first is, we should really as a country invest in prenatal care for all the women who need it. Women who have babies who don’t have early, good, medical care are likely to have pre-term babies, and those pre-term babies are likely to have cognitive deficiencies and developmental delays. And our society will be paying for these children in special education for the rest of their lives in one way or another.

The research is very clear. March of Dimes just brought out a major survey of country rankings in relation to the quality of prenatal care they have, and we ranked somewhere towards the bottom. I think we were number 140 of all the rankings that they had. We were somewhere around Turkey or Somalia. It’s *pathetic*.

[28:03]

We also know from the research about the importance of early childhood education. Every child in this city, in this country should have high-quality, early childhood education to help them get ready for school. The achievement gap begins before the first day of Kindergarten.

[28:20]

We should look to research and learn about the importance of reducing class size particularly in the early elementary grades. The research is very clear about how important this is particularly for minority children.

[28:33]

We should have, wherever it is needed, a nurse, a social worker in every school. This is just common sense. If people were really concerned about reform, they would make sure that children had access to regular medical care. That would do more to raise test scores than all the merit pay schemes in the world.

[28:53]

We should have arts and physical education in every school. There should be after-school activities for children.

There’s a wonderful movie that I saw recently called *Brooklyn Castle* which is just being released about a very impoverished neighborhood, in New York, in Brooklyn, in Williamsburg. And, the children in this middle school in Williamsburg – Black, Hispanic, a few White kids, a few Asian kids – have won the National Chess Championships for junior high schools, middle schools, ten years

running. Nobody even knows about them. And, these kids are so focused on their chess, they *will* succeed in life, and it's an after-school activity. It's so important.

[29:33]

So, here is the difference between schools for the rich and schools for the poor. In schools for the rich, the children get taught , and in schools for the poor, the children get tested. This is wrong.

We should really reduce our reliance on high-stakes testing. It does not help education, it harms education.

We should address the problem of racial segregation. Our society has turned its back on this issue, and this is wrong.

[30:03]

The latest studies from economists at Berkeley show (this is a study of life course with many, many thousands of people) that Black adults who went to desegregated schools for at least 5 years had 25% higher earnings in their life than those who went to segregated schools, were more likely to graduate high school, more likely to go to college, more likely to *graduate* from college, and more likely to live a longer and healthier life. And, the advantages that they had were transferred to their children.

[30:36]

We know what works, and the question is, "Why don't we do it?"

Thank you.

[AUDIENCE]

(applause)

[31:08]

[RAVITCH]

Thank you so much. You know, when Governor Quinn got up and everyone got up and applauded, I thought, "Wouldn't it be wonderful to be the kind of person where your name was announced and everyone got up and applauded?" But, it's very nice when I finish and everyone gets up and applauds. Thank you.

[AUDIENCE]

(laughter)

[GREEN]

You haven't heard the questions yet.

[AUDIENCE]
(laughter)

[RAVITCH]
Okay.

[GREEN]
Though, that's a nice standing ovation.

[Questions From Audience]

[31:30]
(GREEN)

Okay. Here we go. Start off with Jessie Ruiz, Vice President, Chicago Board of Education.

“Do you believe there is any place for student performance in the evaluation of teacher performance?”

[31:40]

[RAVITCH]

I think that student performance should be *noted* by the Principal when evaluating a teacher. I think that the student test scores are something that should be treated like a medical record. They belong to the student. They should be part of the diagnostic kit. This is what we know about the teacher. If you find out that no one in Miss Jones's class ever learns to read, then the Principal should *do* something about it. But if turns out that everyone in Miss Jones's class is autistic and has trouble tying their shoes, then the Principal takes that into account, too. So, I think that there is a judgment call.

[32:25]

What we're trying to do today is to replace professional judgment with data, and data are too blunt. Data can't tell you all the things you need to know. So, you need to have *competent* people who are the Principal. Those Principals should look at the teacher's record when making an evaluation and take into account who are the students, what kinds of challenges did Miss Jones or Mr. Jones take on, and then make a judgment about whether they're a good teacher.

[32:50]

I happen to think that the best kind of evaluation, or the best system that I've seen is the one that's been pioneered in Montgomery County, Maryland. This is a system where test scores are not involved. The county assigns mentor teachers to all new teachers. So, a senior teacher helps young teachers get to

know the ropes. And when a teacher is singled out by the Principal as being low performing or struggling, that *senior* teacher gets a mentor teacher. Then, the mentor teacher spends a year working, master teacher, really, working with the struggling teacher, and then comes back and makes a recommendation after a year or two to a committee made up of eight Principals and eight Teachers, and says the teacher either is doing great, leave him or her alone, or needs more help, or this teacher needs to be terminated. Hundreds of teachers have been terminated and removed from the classroom, and removed from the system, and sent elsewhere. The system actually works, and the teachers accept it because it's based on judgment, not on test scores. They have a role in making decisions about their peers. The bottom line is that teachers don't want bad teachers in their school. So, *that* works.

What doesn't work, I think, is using the scores because it incentivizes all those negative behaviors.”

[34:11]

[GREEN]

Low Collens, former President of Illinois Institute of Technology.

“If you were the head of Chicago Public Schools’ – tough job, for the record – ‘how would you determine whether your schools and teachers were doing a good job of developing character?’”

[34:31]

[RAVITCH]

How would I determine if they were doing a good job? I don't think that there is a metric, there's not a character test you can give to students or to teachers, but I think that the first place you begin is by developing an atmosphere of trust.

You know, Tony Bryk who used to be in Chicago, at the University of Chicago, wrote a book about trust in education, and he said that you cannot reform anything in the absence of trust – that trust is the glue that makes reform work.

[34:59]

So, I would say that you begin with the expectation that the adults who work in the school are really doing their best, and you talk to them, and you meet with them, and you make sure that you have the best qualified person as the principal, and then you trust them to build a community.

The *best* form of character building comes about because the school has a culture, and the school is a community where people work as a team. *That* gets transmitted to the students. The students understand that the adults care about them, and that they're working together on their behalf. When you see it in a school, when you see it, you know it. It's a community

[35:34]

And this is why, what's so destabilizing is this idea that you can just keep closing schools, and opening schools, and closing schools, and opening schools. It takes years to build that level of trust, that level of community of the sort that does, in fact, build character amongst students. But, if you go looking for a metric, you'll never find it.

[36:11]

[GREEN]

Lee Anne Caston [sp??]. Where are you Lee Anne? There you are. We finally got your question.

'If test scores are so good for the U.S., how is it so easy to manipulate the public perceptions? Where does critical thinking come in? How do we test for critical thinking, or creative ability?'

(to Ravitch) Told you this wasn't going to be easy.

[36:17]

[RAVITCH]

The tests measure one dimension of learning. They measure your ability to select one out of four bubbles. That's what most tests do. There are several different points to your question. One is, why is the public so misled? You have to understand that people have been lamenting the public schools for about 150 years, and yet our nation keeps getting more and more successful. So, there's a disconnect here.

I frequently quote Richard Hofstadter who wrote a book called *Anti-Intellectualism in America Life*, and in his chapters on education, he said that the typical education writing is a jeremiad. Since about 1820, we've been talking about how we're failing. So we're failing, failing, failing, and yet we continue to be the most technologically innovative, the greatest military superiority, the most vibrant economy and culture, and we continue to complain about our schools. I think what's different about this era right now is, whereas people who wanted to reform schools in the past talked about they need more funding, they need better teachers, they need higher standards, they need a better this, or more of that, less of this or less of that, today they're saying we need to get rid of public education. *That's* dangerous because that's striking at the heart of a democratic institution that has its doors open to all, where you don't have to apply to a lottery to get in. I think it's crucial that we keep these issues separate.

As for the testing, what I am concerned about is, first of all, the false narrative – the false narrative which is now *so* prevalent in television and the movies where they say we're failing, failing, failing, and it almost begins to sound like they just don't believe in our country. How can we possibly be the most, I think we're the most creative and vibrant society in the world, and yet people keep knocking our education system. So I think that there is a false narrative, but I think there is also this danger that

relying so much on testing, we are relying on a tool, if you think about it, 12 years of bubbling. What does that do to creativity? What does that do to risk taking? What does that do to innovation to say that if *you* think differently, you're wrong? If you have a new idea that no one ever had, you're wrong.

I spent seven years on this national assessment governing board, and part of my job was reading test questions. I can't tell you how many times I came across test questions that were wrong. Test questions that had two answers. Test questions that had no right answer. Test questions where the thoughtful child would choose the wrong answer. Yet, we're using these scores as if they are an unerring measure, and they're not. So, we must use them wisely, carefully, and with many, many grains of salt.

[39:21]

[GREEN]

Trying to give you a softball here. Len Dominguez. Where are you Len? Education Association [??], an longtime pal of mine.

'Can you please speak about successful unionized school districts in the U.S. or abroad where charters are not such a political issue?'

You've got 25 words.

AUDIENCE

(chuckles)

[39:43]

[RAVITCH]

Well, the short answer is Finland. I was in Finland a year ago. Finland, looking at the international test scores, they're been either number one or two in Math, Reading, Science, for the last 10 years. And, they have no standardized testing at all in their schools, and they have no charter schools, and they have no vouchers. What they have is, they've stolen our educational philosophy that we used to believe in about being child-centered. When young children first start school, the teachers immediately identify kids who need extra help. They have lots of specialists. They make sure that if they have language issues, that they help them with the language issues. If they have hearing issues, whatever the issue is, the help comes early, and the kids get back on track. They never fall off track.

They have a tremendous emphasis on the arts, and physical education. They have recess frequently during the day because kids need physical activity, and there's *no* standardized testing. The teachers make their own tests.

But, the secret to Finland is two things. I mean, those are the things that are part of their practices, but number one is, they made a decision many years ago to make entry into teaching difficult. So, there

are only eight universities in all of Finland where you can train to be a teacher, and they only accept one out of ten people who apply. Teaching is so prestigious, it's on a par with every other profession – with the law profession, with the medical profession, and young people want to be teachers. They have to have at least five years of their post-collegiate education before they're allowed to become a teacher.

They're completely unionized. The whole country's unionized. It's a hundred percent union. The teachers and principals all belong to the *same* union. There are no charter schools, no vouchers, and they have a wonderful school system. If you went into a Finnish school, it doesn't really matter where you go to, whether it's in the city or the suburbs, or the outskirts, there's very little difference in the kind of schooling. They're all excellent schools, very child centered, and the kids are engaged. The teachers make their own tests. The teachers make the decisions about the children's readiness to move forward to the next topic or grade.

It's a very non-punitive approach to education. We, unfortunately are wedded to a more punitive approach to education.

[42:02]

[GREEN]

We have two more questions left. We're trying to get people out of here so they can earn enough money to pay their property taxes to support public education.

[AUDIENCE]

(chuckles)

[GREEN]

It's part of the mission of the City Club of Chicago. Dianna Nelson. Where are you Dianna? This is maybe one of the longest questions I've ever seen. We're gonna shorten it a little bit. Now, this is the City Club. No controversy here, all you all, just listen to the first two lines.

'Before Mayor Daly co-opted the word reform and began the movement to privatization...'

Nice way to start, huh. I don't know if you're all ready, just right off the bat.

'...Chicago experienced actual reform between the mid-80s and 1995. Local school councils chose the Principal, set the direction for the school, and addressed new directions. Do you have any research, any familiarity with that period of time, and could you speak to it?'

[42:59]

Well, you know it takes time for any reform to germinate. So, you can't keep pulling things up by the roots and saying, we don't have time to wait, we don't have time to wait. *No* plant will grow if you

say, I've planted it. We don't have time to wait. Let's pull it out now, which is what today's reformers are doing.

I think that the fruition of the reforms of that period you are referring to came home to me when I was reading the reports about the turnarounds in Chicago. I actually hate the term "turnaround." I'll tell you the reason I hate it. It sounds like a dance around a Maypole, but what it really means is closing the school and firing the staff. It's *brutal*, it's mean, it's destabilizing, it's harsh, and it's called a turnaround.

There was a study that came out of the consortium that said that the turnarounds were doing well, and it gave several examples. There was another study that came out at the same time that time by Designs for Change that said there were democratically controlled schools that *way* outperformed the turnarounds, and yet no one talks about them. There were 33 of these democratically controlled schools, the kind that grew out of the period that you discussed, and they *way* outperformed any of the schools that had been closed and reopened.

I think this whole approach of, you can fix the schools by closing them, sounds to me like Viet Nam. You know, you can save the village by bombing it. I don't think so. I think that what you need to do in a school is what you need to do in a family which is to develop relationships, work at it steadily, and make sure that people have the resources they need to be successful in educating the kids.

From what I've seen of these two contrasting papers, I actually have a chapter in my book about those two papers, it really is a testament to the success of the democratically controlled schools, where parents, and teachers, and adults treat one another with respect, and work around the interest of the children.

[45:04]

[GREEN]

We have one last question. My pal, Eric Zorn, we have a rule. The press, you'll have a chance to ask a question afterward – your short question. Normally, I would read it because it's short, but let's conclude with something that I can identify with.

Ross Jacoby where are you? Raise your hand. There you are. I used to have hair like that myself. Graduate University of Chicago student. You know I had to read this.

'In your book you argue that the charter school movement has left behind a democratic vision of education. What are the undemocratic features of the charter school movement?'

And on that noncontroversial thing, that'll be the last question. Keep your gloves up at all time.

[45:51]

[RAVITCH]

Let me say that I'm not speaking specifically about charters in Chicago, but just generally, the way charters have evolved. The reason that charters, as an idea, came about was there was a couple of people, Albert Shanker was one of them, who had this idea that you could create charter schools for the kids who were failing. Charter schools would focus on the *lowest* performing kids. They would bring in the dropouts who were already out on the street. They would take the kids who were in school who had their eyes closed, or their heads on the desk, and they would show how to reawaken these kids, motivate them, and bring them back to caring about education.

But, the charter movement has evolved into something quite different. There are now some very – there are charters where the executives are paid four hundred thousand dollars a year, five hundred thousand dollars a year. There are charters, as I said earlier, that are *not* taking the lowest performing kids, but are skimming the highest performing kids in the poorest communities.

What I see is the risk, is this danger of creating this 2-track system. In some cities there'll be a 3-track system. There'll be the voucher system, the charter system, and the public system where the public system is the *dumping* ground. Also, it concerns me that in many districts and states, the charters are taking public money away from public schools, and the public schools are suffering. In some districts, the public schools are *dying* because the money that they would have had has gone to charters or to vouchers.

In some places, like Louisiana, this is an *intention*. Louisiana just passed the most sweeping legislation in the country to privatize public education. More than *half* the students in the state of Louisiana are now eligible for vouchers, and they're giving bonuses to people to open charters. People are popping up from all over the place to open charters, and all of this will be taken out of the minimum foundation funding for public education. So, I am very fearful that there is a risk to public education in continuing on this track.

I do think that charters could serve a very *useful* role if, first of all, the salaries were capped at no more than that of the local superintendent. That would make a big change.

I would *totally* prohibit all for-profit charters as well as charters that open as non-profits and then contract out their services to a for-profit. This is just ripping off taxpayers. I can't think of a way to ban virtual charters, but if I could, I would because the virtual charters are a complete and total rip-off. They get terrible results, and they're big money makers. The biggest of the virtual, for-profit charter companies has a CEO who's from McKinsey and Goldman-Sachs, and he's paid five million dollars a year of your tax-payer dollars. They get terrible results, high attrition rates, low test scores, low graduation rates.

This whole education sector has suddenly become a playground for entrepreneurs, and for people looking to make a buck. I think that this is not going to make our education better. It's going to make it profitable for a lot of people, but it's going to make it very unprofitable for children.

So, my concern is, how do we improve the quality of education? That's by providing that rich, full curriculum. Charter schools should exist as an alternative for the children that we should be saving, but charter schools are now moving, in many states, into the most affluent neighborhoods to suck the kids out of the public schools there, too. So, I think that the overall picture right now is that the public has to understand what's at stake here. Will we have a public education system 20 years from now or will it be a public system that's only for the kids who couldn't make it into charters or didn't get a voucher?

Thank you.