

Michelle Rhee

“We can’t keep politics out of school reform. Why I’m launching a national movement to transform education.”



Education Reform - Good for Kids? Don't be Deceived.



This is a response from your APLE President, Linda Manion, to Michelle Rhee, of the "Students First" organization; an organization which claims to want what's best for kids through "Education Reform." Michelle Rhee's organization has begun to target communities in California to solicit money and gain support for "Ed Reform". Education Reform is a movement that is sweeping the country and is focused on eliminating collective bargaining, teacher tenure, retirement provisions, and tying teacher evaluation to student test scores.

Dear Ms. Rhee,

Will I contribute to your organization and support your "Education Reform" movement? Absolutely not! You are misguided in your assumption that your education reform goals would be good for kids, and you are misleading the public in order to destroy California's wonderful public education system. Our students are making unprecedented achievements in all academic areas due to the hard work and dedication of our teachers who work countless hours and spend thousands of dollars out of their own pockets every year to help fund their classrooms. Your agenda is nothing more than an attempt to pass legislation that would funnel much needed funds away from public education into private charters that could pick and choose which children to educate and close the door on those with special needs, creating a class system of the haves and the have nots. Thomas Jefferson fought his entire life to gain a public education system that would educate all children because he knew that an educated populace was necessary to maintain a democratic form of government.

Collective Bargaining legislation came about out of a need to protect California teachers from unfair practices by their local administrators. If teachers had been treated fairly as the professionals they are, then there would have been no motivation to fight the long, uphill battle to ensure that teachers could make a living wage and be protected against cronyism. I am so saddened that our teachers in Florida, Michigan, Tennessee, Indiana, and Nevada have lost basic rights and are now at the mercy of administrators who are held accountable to no one. Our teachers in California have

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voluntarily taken pay cuts the last three years in addition to providing funds for their classrooms. Now, you want to take away their right to sit professionally with district administrators to negotiate contract language that will be agreeable to both sides and will define not only teacher rights, but their responsibilities as well? You want to empower an administrator to arbitrarily pick and choose who will stay and who will lose their jobs? Do you want a system where the power to hire and fire is left to subjectivity and the whim of one administrator? Don't you realize that that opens the door to discrimination and favoritism and would create a staff of teachers who would be walking on eggshells to please their principals; too afraid to voice any opinion that differed from his/hers? Do you think this would create a climate that would be good for kids?

There are so many wrong assumptions in your "reform" movement. None of them will help children in the classroom. If you want to control a child's education, then you would have to control all the variables that affect his/her life. This is not possible. Fortunately, children are not widgets on an assemblyline where all pieces are the same and, therefore, all children develop differently. Our children come to us from all over the world. In some areas, as many as 20 different languages may be spoken in an individual classroom. Our children come with different abilities, different home backgrounds, and experiences. Some have great home support, but others have none at all and often come to school hungry and tired from sleeping on the street. Our teachers work with and embrace all children. They all have a home in our classrooms where their individual needs are addressed. But do they all achieve at that same rate? Can you expect the same performance from a hungry, non-English speaker that you would from a child who is well-fed and supported at home? Of course not, and yet, I hear reformers loudly promoting merit pay or basing a teacher's evaluation on a child's performance on a single test score. If this were the case, who would work with our struggling learners or our special education children?

If you truly want to help public education, then put your efforts into making sure that the federal government provide the required funding to pay for the federal mandates on special education. Mandates governing the legal requirements that school districts must adhere to for servicing our special needs children are grossly underfunded and are draining billions of dollars from school districts' general funds every year. If school districts had the money that is owed to them by the federal government for these mandated programs, there would be no budget crisis.

In addition to this, put your money into lobbying for funding for public education. California needs a stable funding model so that our schools have a predictable source of income every year.

You are headed down a path that would deceive the public and cause irreparable harm to our public schools and our children. Hopefully, you will rethink your direction and put your efforts where it will benefit children, not harm them.

Sincerely,
Linda Manion
President of the Association of Placentia-Linda Educators

