



Written by [Sam Blumenfeld](#) on October 21, 2013

Jeb Bush's Education Summit Promotes Common Core

Since former Florida Governor Jeb Bush's Education Summit was held this year in nearby Boston on October 17-18, I decided to attend as a columnist for *The New American* magazine. All of that was neatly stated on my badge. But I doubt that anyone at this annual Summit of the Foundation for Excellence in Education was familiar with *The New American*. Most of the attendees were born after [Why Johnny Can't Read](#) was published 58 years ago. They know nothing of the reading wars or the rise of the progressive education movement. Their interest is in the new lucrative opportunities that education "reform" is providing with charter schools, private schools and colleges, vouchers, online education, and Common Core curriculum development. Public education is financed by billions of taxpayer dollars, and the new reformers are finding creative opportunities to share in that never-ending cash flow. They all know that American public education is an awful mess, but have no burning interest in finding out why. Poorly trained teachers and unions seem to be the generally accepted causes of why the system has failed so miserably. Jeb Bush spoke passionately about the system's failures, the dropout problem, and the functional illiteracy of the students. But he gave no hint that the dumbing down of American education has anything to do with a deliberate plan. That's conspiracy theory and conspiracy theories are non-starters.



The aim of this new breed of reformer is to find solutions and not dwell on blame. That is why the atmosphere at the Summit was so distinctly positive. The movement now has the financial support of the nation's wealthiest foundations: Carnegie, Bill and Melinda Gates, Bloomberg Philanthropies, The Walton Family Foundation, GE Foundation, and others. Everybody wants to improve education. Thus the attendees were not parents trying to get their kids into charter schools. They were mainly investors and entrepreneurs who see gold in the charter school movement. Charter schools are private schools financed by the taxpayer. So there is less risk for the charter school entrepreneur. New private schools and colleges also provide money-making opportunities. Unfortunately, these business types know virtually nothing about education. That is why they are easily taken in by dreams of digital technology



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doing the educating. The newest book that expresses that optimistic philosophy is Ron Packard's *Education Transformation*, which tells of "how K-12 online learning is bringing the greatest change to education in 100 years." Jeb Bush has endorsed the book. He says on its jacket: "Online and digital learning have begun to change the way schools and our education system work.... Thanks to technology, every student can receive a personalized, high quality education." Indeed, one of the Strategy Sessions was entitled: "A Customized Education: Extreme Choices Through Digital Learning." A description of the Session stated: "Educational choice is evolving beyond simple options between traditional public schools and alternatives such as charter and private schools. The next generation of choice introduces innovative ways for students to enroll in the best individual courses from a variety of sources."

Of course, the homeschool movement has been providing home-based individual education for the last 30 years. Homeschoolers have the freedom to create whatever kind of curriculum they want, and most of them use computer technology. But they also use time-tested methods of teaching: phonics in reading, cursive in writing, and basic arithmetic. And they often instill in their children traditional Judeo-Christian values and patriotism. In other words, most parents can accept using technology to improve education. But what they are now rebelling against is the imposition of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) on all the public schools. A new blog, Truth in American Education, has launched a nationwide movement against the Common Core. The site states: "Adopting the CCSS takes control of educational content and standards away from parents, taxpayers, local school districts, and states." It urges citizens to "take action ... to get your local, state, and national officials to stop the adoption and implementation of the CCSS."

Despite the controversy, education publishing giants such as Scholastic are already preparing expensive new books and teaching guides to help implement the Common Core. All of that makes well-paying jobs for those masters and doctors of education coming out of our universities. There was a General Session at the Summit devoted to promoting the Common Core. Its title: "High Expectations Make Cents: The Business Case for Common Core State Standards. Presented by the Foundation for Excellence in Education and the Business Roundtable." The participants included Fred Humphries, vice president of U.S. government affairs for Microsoft in Washington, D.C.; Rex Tillerson, CEO of Exxon Mobil Corporation; Joe Tucci, CEO of EMC Corporation; and Jorge Benitez of the Business Roundtable and U.S. Chamber of Commerce. A description of the Session states: "American students must be able to compete with their peers across the nation — not to mention the rest of the world. However, when compared internationally, students in the United States aren't performing as well as students in other countries, most of which spend far less per pupil.... Thankfully, Common Core State Standards hold the potential to increase our nation's global competitiveness, all the while allowing for more innovation in the classroom and less regulation."

That's the kind of song and dance that can impress only the ignorant. We don't need new standards. Why not go back to the standards that produced the Greatest Generation? But that would not provide the new jobs needed by new masters and doctors of education. So the new reform movement is all about money — taxpayer money, federal money, foundation money, and investors' money. One of the areas of greatest growth is the charter school movement, which is growing by leaps and bounds. According to Reuters, "There are now more than 6,000 [charter schools] in the United States, up from 2,500 a decade ago, educating a record 2.3 million children." The charters improve a district's real estate values. Parents often buy homes near good schools. Since charters are financed by the school district, parents don't have to worry about tuition costs. But are the charters actually improving education? According to a Stanford University study of test data from 26 states, only a quarter of the



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charter schools delivered better reading scores, but more than half produced no improvement and 19 percent showed worse results. In math, 29 percent of the charters delivered better math scores, and 40 percent showed no difference, and 31 percent did worse.

Why aren't the charter schools doing better? Because those running them don't know much about education, but they seem to know a lot about making money. Indeed, *Forbes* magazine characterized charter schools as "gravy trains for investors." According to an Internet blog, Chris Guerrieri's Education Matters:

It's the tax code that makes charter schools so lucrative: Under the federal "New Markets Tax Credit" program that became law toward the end of the Clinton presidency, firms that invest in charters and other projects located in "underserved" areas can collect a generous tax credit — up to 39% — to offset their costs.... It's not only wealthy Americans making a killing on charter schools. So are foreigners, under a program critics call "green card via red carpet."

According to a 2012 Reuters report, "Wealthy individuals from as far away as China, Nigeria, Russia and Australia are spending tens of millions of dollars to build classrooms, libraries, basketball courts and science labs for American charter schools." In other words, the Jeb Bush Summits are congenial places where the new educational entrepreneurs, investors, educator professionals, and foundation folk can meet, make deals, and do it all for a good cause: the improvement of American education. One good thing that libertarians like about the movement is that it favors educational freedom. And such freedom is bound to be messy and experimental, especially with the development of Internet technology. The Summit ended with a closing keynote by Rahm Emanuel, mayor of Chicago, and former White House chief of staff for President Obama. No need to describe its contents. He is for the Common Core, financed by the Obama administration's "Race to the Top." For Jeb Bush, it gave the Summit a glowing patina of nonpartisanship.



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