



Written by [William P. Hoar](#) on December 9, 2019

Published in the December 9, 2019 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 35, No. 23

Correction, Please!

“Big Ed” Aces More Spending; Student Test Results Mark Time

Item: *After the 2019 National Assessment of Educational Progress, known as the Nation’s Report Card, was released in late October, Washington Post education writer Valerie Strauss mocked the response by Education Secretary Betsy DeVos and other conservatives for claiming that the “sky is falling” (the Post’s term) in American education. In the Washington paper for October 30, Strauss tried to shoot down her own straw man — commenting that “if the sky were to fall because of NAEP scores, it would have happened years ago: Overall progress for fourth- and eighth-graders has stayed essentially the same for at least the past decade and for far longer for older students.”*



Item: *American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten said the results were “not surprising.” “Our students,” she said, are “still bearing the brunt of two decades of austerity.” In her October 30 response to the NAEP Report Card, Weingarten also charged: “Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos ignores the real issues that plague our classrooms and student achievement, presumably because they disrupt her political agenda to siphon public money into private hands and expand private school vouchers and for-profit school ventures.”*

Item: *The USA Today headline on October 30, above a story on the NAEP results, declared: “Despite Common Core and more testing, reading and math scores haven’t budged in a decade.”*

Correction: It would be more to the point to say “because of Common Core” and more assessments pushed by the federal government, scores have been languishing.

This year’s results showed that only about one-third of students tested nationally in the fourth and eighth grades reached proficiency level in math and reading. “Over the past decade, there has been no progress in either mathematics or reading performance, and the lowest performing students are doing worse,” said an official with the National Center for Education Statistics.

Here’s some background. Common Core, whose theories about national standards for education initially enjoyed support from some on the Right, as well as the always-willing-to-centralize-government leftists, quickly became controversial because what the federal government subsidizes, it has the power to control.



Written by [William P. Hoar](#) on December 9, 2019

Published in the December 9, 2019 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 35, No. 23

President Obama and his Department of Education, led by Secretary Arne Duncan, “incentivized adoption” of Common Core, as NPR put it discreetly several years ago. In 2009, noted National Public Radio, the Education Department “created Race to the Top, a \$3.4 billion grant competition. States that agreed to adopt the Common Core standards won points on their applications, increasing their eligibility for a share of the money.”

Common Core was also, in part, a reaction to a law in 2001 (No Child Left Behind) that “poured vast new federal resources into education and demanded that school districts meet performance thresholds or face sanctions,” as was pointed out by *Newsweek* in 2015.

All this reflected the fact that we have lost our constitutional way: In this country, education was historically a matter left to state and local governments. And parents.

The gates were opened with LBJ’s “Great Society” and the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA). President Lyndon Johnson told the American public that we had to accept “greater government activity in the affairs of the people.” That has come — with a cruel vengeance.

So too did the federal regulations, rules, and overall interference. A new book published by the Heritage Foundation, *The Not-So-Great-Society*, provides a scorecard: It recounts, for example, the number of pages of federal legislation affecting K-12 education, which increased from 80 to 360 between 1964 and 1976. And the number of federal regulations increased from 92 in 1965 to almost 1,000 in 1977.

And no, public education has not been suffering from “austerity,” as claimed by some. Federal spending on public schools, in nominal dollars, as summarized in *The Not-So-Great-Society*,

increased almost five-fold between 1960 and 1970, from \$651 million to \$3.2 billion. The share of public school spending coming from the federal government increased from 4.4 percent to 8 percent over this time period. As of 2016, 8.5 percent of public school revenues came from federal taxpayers.

Of course that is not enough for the radical Left, who seek additional money and more control.

Consider presidential candidate Elizabeth Warren. She is offering her own “quid pro quo”: If she gets the support of the teachers’ unions and enough votes, she has vowed to bribe the states with federal monies. She promises (as the *New York Times* puts it) to “quadruple federal funding for schools that serve low-income students” (aka Title I money). Warren naturally maintains that funding “for public K-12 education is both inadequate and inequitable.” (She also has plans to cancel student loan debts, eliminate tuition at public colleges, and provide “free” preschool and “free” child care for low-income families.)

Warren is not alone with educational pie-in-the-sky schemes. Among Democratic frontrunners, Joe Biden is supposed to be the “moderate.” After all, he “only” wants to triple Title I spending. But he wants to fill up the schools with more support staff, such as social workers; give teachers higher pay; forgive student loans; expand pre-K; and more.

Education Secretary DeVos is viewed by many as being the polar opposite of Warren and other statists. She dares to quote favorably free-market economist (and Nobel Prize winner) Milton Friedman — who declared that education spending “will be most effective if it relies on parental choice and private initiative.”



Written by [William P. Hoar](#) on December 9, 2019

Published in the December 9, 2019 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 35, No. 23

DeVos is a reviled figure on the Left and among Democrat leaders at large. If you want to know why, consider how DeVos responded to the latest mediocre scores. She was direct, saying, for instance: "Government has never made anything better or cheaper, more effective or more efficient. And nowhere is that more true than in education." Yet, it should be kept in mind, the charter schools DeVos is well-known for promoting are still government schools (albeit nontraditional), and the school voucher programs she also supports still entail federal funding — meaning that she is by no means advocating the removal of the federal government's nose from the country's education tent.

And the intrusion is gargantuan. Keep in mind that American taxpayers have paid, at the federal level, around \$2 trillion on K-12 education programs.

DeVos also recalled that when Congress created the Education Department, it vowed the move would "not increase the authority of the federal government over education [nor] diminish the responsibility for education which is reserved to the states. But 'Big ED' took over."

She pointed to the additional rules and regulations. She also hit: "More staff and more standards. More spending and more strings. But, as the numbers in today's Report Card reaffirm, students and teachers have gained precious little as a result."

Per pupil spending has "skyrocketed" over the last three decades, but that increase has only led to "flat-lined achievement," noted the education secretary. A goal of the Great Society, with all of its ensuing spending, was to narrow the achievement gaps between children from low-income families and their peers from more affluent families. Yet that achievement gap is today as wide as it was in 1971.

Since 1950, summarized the education secretary,

the growth in non-instructional school staff has increased seven times faster than student enrollment growth. If staff levels matched student enrollment, public schools across the country could have saved — or reinvested — around 35 billion additional dollars every year. Imagine what that could've meant in teacher compensation.

Worse still, at the federal level alone, taxpayers have spent more than 1 trillion dollars trying to "fix" K-12 education.

Meanwhile, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, the U.S. spends more per student than any other country (except Norway). Yet, the United States ranks 24th in reading, 25th in science, and 40th in math in the world, as reported by the Programme for International Student Assessment, or PISA.

Warren and the other top Democratic presidential contenders crave to give us more of the same — much more. And the teachers' unions — very influential in national and other elections — back this strategy. Indeed, they enthusiastically acclaimed Warren's plan, calling it "bold" and a "game changer."

Warren took note. She flew to Chicago to support a public teachers' strike.

— William P. Hoar

Photo Credit: AP Images



Written by [William P. Hoar](#) on December 9, 2019

Published in the December 9, 2019 issue of [the New American](#) magazine. Vol. 35, No. 23

Subscribe to the New American

Get exclusive digital access to the most informative,
non-partisan truthful news source for patriotic Americans!

Discover a refreshing blend of time-honored values, principles and insightful perspectives within the pages of "The New American" magazine. Delve into a world where tradition is the foundation, and exploration knows no bounds.

From politics and finance to foreign affairs, environment, culture, and technology, we bring you an unparalleled array of topics that matter most.



Subscribe

What's Included?

- 24 Issues Per Year
- Optional Print Edition
- Digital Edition Access
- Exclusive Subscriber Content
- Audio provided for all articles
- Unlimited access to past issues
- Coming Soon! Ad FREE
- 60-Day money back guarantee!
- Cancel anytime.