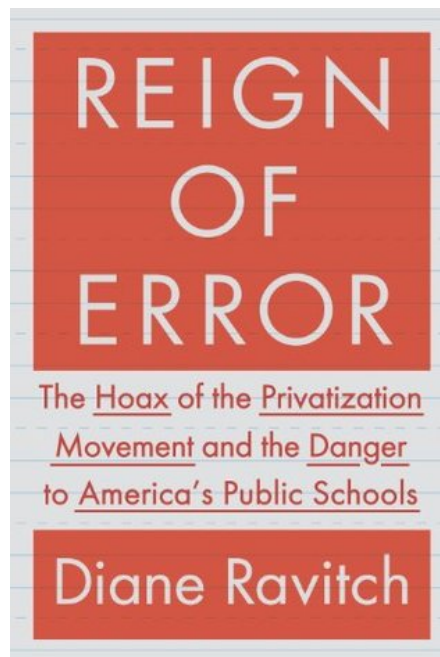




Reign of Error: The Hoax of the Privatization Movement and the Danger to America's Public Schools

Diane Ravitch

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From one of the foremost authorities on education in the United States, former U.S. assistant secretary of education, “whistle-blower extraordinaire” (*The Wall Street Journal*), author of the best-selling *The Death and Life of the Great American School System* (“Important and riveting”—*Library Journal*), *The Language Police* (“Impassioned . . . Fiercely argued . . . Every bit as alarming as it is illuminating”—*The New York Times*), and other notable books on education history and policy—an incisive, comprehensive look at today’s American school system that argues against those who claim it is broken and beyond repair; an impassioned but reasoned call to stop the privatization movement that is draining students and funding from our public schools.

In *Reign of Error*, Diane Ravitch argues that the crisis in American education is not a crisis of academic achievement but a concerted effort to destroy public schools in this country. She makes clear that, contrary to the claims being made, public school test scores and graduation rates are the highest they’ve ever been, and dropout rates are at their lowest point.

She argues that federal programs such as George W. Bush’s No Child Left Behind and Barack Obama’s Race to the Top set unreasonable targets for American students, punish schools, and result in teachers being fired if their students underperform, unfairly branding those educators as failures. She warns that major foundations, individual billionaires, and Wall Street hedge fund managers are encouraging the privatization of public education, some for idealistic reasons, others for profit. Many who work with equity funds are eyeing public education as an emerging market for investors.

Reign of Error begins where *The Death and Life of the Great American School System* left off, providing a deeper argument against privatization and for public education, and in a chapter-by-chapter breakdown, putting forth a plan for what can be done to preserve and improve it. She makes clear what is right about U.S. education, how policy makers are failing to address the root causes of educational failure, and how we can fix it.

For Ravitch, public school education is about knowledge, about learning, about developing character, and about creating citizens for our society. It’s about helping to inspire independent thinkers, not just honing job skills or preparing people for college. Public school education is essential to our democracy, and its aim, since the founding of this country, has been to educate citizens who will help carry democracy into the future.

Reign of Error: The Hoax of the Privatization Movement and the Danger to America's Public Schools Details

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From Reader Review Reign of Error: The Hoax of the Privatization Movement and the Danger to America's Public Schools for online ebook

Patrick says

10 stars. Please read this Goodreads friends! Even if you aren't usually interested in educational nitty-gritty, read the book because this is affecting your kids' schools.

I've finally finished the last bit. The last three chapters are important and sum up the problems with education and society, and the wrongness of the proposed reform solutions.

I LOVE this. I didn't wait to lend my book because this information has to become part of neighborhood wisdom in order to stop the steamroller of crap PR telling America the opposite of the truth: that our schools suck and are responsible for poverty.

The writing may only be 4 stars, but the importance and timeliness of the information makes it a 5 stars plus. There are sad and revealing examples of educational profiteering in Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, California, Florida, and other states. Most of these ideas are being pushed in Utah as well.

Dramatic claims that our public education system is "broken" and must be replaced with some radical fix are constantly blared through the media. These claims were repeated for the last week or more on NBC's mostly one-sided Education Nation. Condoleezza Rice was here yesterday claiming our schools "are a threat to national security."

Did you know that despite the huge problems that exist, test scores and graduation rates at public schools are at their highest ever? That the "crisis" in education because other countries have higher test scores has been the same since the 1960's? That our middle-class kids score at or above Korea and Finland etc. on these international assessments? The most serious of our problems all correlate to poverty and the break up of families. We may not agree with every solution Ravitch proposes for poverty, but it becomes easy to see that "silver bullet" magic schools that make profits, take away public control, or pick and choose their students undermine our communities.

Ravitch's position on charters is reasonable and wise. Her examples about vouchers, corrupt charters, utterly corrupt e-schools, the so-called parent trigger, and the failure of merit pay need to be read and understood by everyone. The vast majority of education "reformers" have financial conflicts of interest.

This is an important book. Regular people all over America are reviewing it positively and getting their eyes opened, with a few attack pieces by corporate mouthpieces who admit they haven't read the book. There has been some major name calling and whyness reminiscent of my jr. high students. Their claims that paying attention to poverty is "soft racism" and every single one of their justifications for profit-based models of public education are specious.

Ravitch provides history and context for 4 chapters, and then critiques claims made by reformers for 16-17 chapters, then proposes research-based, common sense methods to improve education for the last 10 or 12. I don't 100% agree with every bit of every remedy in the last 10 chapters, but I agree w/ 80-90%, and they are all things I want for my family or my community.

The only thing I dislike about the book is the cover. Her last cover was perfect to pass along; this one is too

loud and reminiscent of a fad diet book.

Joleigh says

Diane Ravitch has validated my life in the classroom and what I have been saying for the past ten or more years. This is a must read for anyone concerned with education at any level. She debunks some of the myths being bandied about, clarifies who is funding some of the so-called reforms, and then provides some very clear thoughts on what really needs to be done to improve our educational system. While there were times in past years that she and I were at odds about education, we are now on the same page! We are very fortunate that she is still involved in education and we should all listen to her! This is a woman who knows what she is talking about, unlike some of the people trying to lead education today (yeah, that means you Duncan and Gates!). She tells it like it was, is and should be and has statistics and studies to back her up. Truly, read the book!

Jeff Raymond says

I can't remember the last time I was so frustrated reading a book. I don't like to say a book is one star very often, because I believe one star represents some sort of irredeemable qualities that cannot be rescued. Sadly, this is one of those books, as it's a pile of strawmen in a heap, knocked over by ridiculous conclusions and poor logic.

On the basic stuff, I actually found myself nodding in agreement with her. There *are* a lot of myths about education reform that should probably be addressed, there is a problem with testing, with Common Core, with all sorts of different ways to address it.

And then comes the "schools are being privatized by corporate interest groups" conspiracy theory.

It's like someone talking about global warming, making a ton of great points, and then blaming the whole thing on moon men. After spending pages talking about what is and isn't a problem, the solution is to say there *isn't* really a problem, teachers and education are better than they've ever been, and those evil ALEC corporate funded stooges are lying to you about all of it while privatizing public schools beneath our noses. Vouchers? ALEC-positioned attempts to get public money in private schools. Merit pay and tenure reform? ALEC-positioned attempts to run schools more like the businesses that now apparently own them. Common Core? Corporate enrichment by Bill Gates. There are great arguments for and against all of these things. Ravitch fails to make them, instead choosing to address arguments no one is seriously making and ensuring that she positions those who disagree with her as pro-business stooges.

The issue is not so much with her research (although there have been some murmurings about that) but with her conclusions. Beyond the conspiracy theorizing, her position is profoundly anti-technology, anti-reform period (except when it benefits whatever standard position she holds), and pro-expansion of the only things both sides of the debate agree with, yet she does not. For as much as she feels her position is based in data, her strong feelings toward universal preschool (and things that look like Head Start even though she doesn't name it as such) is especially baffling.

Overall, this is not a book that's worth your time. Even an education extremist as myself who really thinks the entire system needs to be imploded and reworked from the bottom up recognizes that it's an extreme position at its core. Ravitch not only fails to recognize her errors and her issues with the conclusions, but

considers herself in the position of the stalwart defender of a system that, because it's working better than ever, needs few changes outside of the ones that would benefit her preferred groups. Very unfortunate.

Kay says

I understand why Ravitch is considered a saint by many progressives. Education issues inevitably become heated, and Ravitch is a fierce adversary. She arms herself with both both passionate argument and careful statistics -- but she never manages to wade too deep into either.

With each chapter clocking in at less than ten pages, she does a quick hit on why "education reform" types are corporate shills and then moves on, often using straw-man arguments and contradictory evidence. She defended the "democracy" of locally controlled schools, while a few pages later, decries increasing segregation in public schools -- either unaware of or unwilling to address how those two things might contradict one another. She actually uses international test scores to demonstrate their uselessness in assessing learning. And after chapter after chapter of bashing the charter school movement, she admits that charter schools are here to stay, and we should probably come up with some modest reforms for incentivizing a focus on students. She says teachers are understandably angered by new corporate overlords who don't have education experience, but she never quite explains how we can have rich learning environments without figuring out what, exactly makes those teachers effective.

When you get down to it, it seems likely that Ravitch might not be completely unreasonable, but her career has become successful by tapping into teachers' radicalization as a response to accountability movements. Ravitch might not want to find common ground between the two -- it would lead to a decline in book sales.

But as someone who stands between the two (or perhaps even leans more toward the education reform side of things), I know that the more you learn about education, the less clarity you have about it. How Ravitch remains so clear-eyed about it makes me think she'd rather maintain a shallow understanding, or at the least, present one to her readers.

James (JD) Dittes says

Diane Ravitch is the rarest (and finest) of intellectuals: one who both admits when they are wrong and then demonstrates the reasons why.

Ravitch is a former Bush (I) Administration education official, and she targets her strongest criticism at the "big guys," Bush (II) and Obama, whose "reforms" played into the hands of the charter and privatization crowds by dramatically increasing testing, and ratcheting up teacher evaluation and de-unionization to inspire a mass exodus from a profession that was already struggling to hold on to its teacher. Her greatest ire is reserved for meddling foundations (Gates and Walton) that push reforms and insist on accountability--all the while resisting accountability for their past mistaken ideas.

As an historian of public education, Ravitch can go far back along the accountability pathway. She shows that Americans have been grumbling about public schools since the 19th Century--only in the 21st Century do private interests feel brazen enough to full undermine the system. She shows that schools are improving--not failing--using NAEP scores that go all the way back to 1972.

This is a great book for anyone whose present or future depends on a strong education system in the United

States. I recommend it highly.

Miles says

This isn't a "great" book in the usual sense of the word, but I'm giving it five stars because I think there are few books out there that so intelligently and directly address this important issue at such a critical moment. It often feels like the components of American public life are being sold, one after the other, to private parties that flash a vulpine smile and offer those perennially comforting words: "We'll take care of this for you." Ravitch makes no mistake about assuring us that, as far as public schooling goes, we are definitely deeper into that process than most supporters of public education would like to admit.

This is a personal read for me, as I have spent the last three years of my life dancing around the idea of being a teacher. I got my teaching credential the year after I graduated from college, but didn't look for a job right away because I was so frustrated and disillusioned during my short tenure as a student teacher in a relatively normal, lower to middle class Californian high school. The following summer, I worked in Washington, D.C. for two months at a summer school program for students from struggling districts. Despite having the best of intentions, the program proved heavy on "reform rhetoric" and extremely flimsy when it came to actually giving the kids what they needed. This was mostly because it was beyond our power to give the kids things they truly needed, such as more stable home environments, healthcare, and appropriate public programs funded by a society that genuinely cared about their well being. Instead, we spent a lot of time preparing them for the ultra-competitive process of applying to high school in our nation's capital. That's right, *high school applications*, not college. In fall 2012, I jumped on a plane to Japan to teach abroad for a year, and while the job certainly had its perks, I became more convinced than ever that neither my own culture nor those in Asia had the right approach to educating the next generation. I decided teaching wasn't for me, and came home. But I still live with two teachers; these matters are more to me than just intellectual curiosities.

After a series of personally disappointing forays into the life of the modern teacher, to say that Diane Ravitch's wonderful new book is a breath of fresh air is a massive understatement. I can't even begin to count the number of times I found myself nodding uncontrollably, delighted to read something about education that sounded like it was coming from an *actual educator*, not some private company trying to sell textbooks or promote itself as the next big "savior of disadvantaged children."

Before I gush too much, I will say that this book has a few drawbacks. First, Ravitch is a competent but often uninspiring writer, and she likes to belabor points she feels are particularly salient instead of stating them once and then moving on. Though it is brimming with useful information, this book repeats itself often. There is also the problem of using test scores and other educational "data points" to make assertions about the successes and/or failures of various programs and schools. While Ravitch is roundly critical of this approach, I felt a few times that she was relying on precisely the kinds of data she generally eschews in order to make a point. It didn't invalidate her arguments or soften her approach, but it reminded me of economic debates, where experts often use the same set of data to claim seemingly disparate results. Rather than discrediting Ravitch, this point actually supports her perspective, which is that measuring learning using test scores or other quantitative metrics isn't just ineffective, but also reductive and morally reprehensible. My last criticism is that this book is undeniably partisan. It doesn't take a direct liberal vs. conservative approach, but Ravitch is clear from the beginning that, at least when it comes to public education, she sees the private sector as the enemy; she goes out of her way to excoriate private interests whenever she can.

Fortunately for Ravitch, some issues simply *are* partisan, and I think the current state of our nation's public schools is one of them. It's not that there aren't two sides to this argument, but simply that the argument for privatization of American education is absurd and undeniably dangerous to the integrity of our democracy.

Ravitch doesn't attack privatized education because she hates business or capitalism, but rather because she knows exactly what is at risk when we turn over the schooling of our kids to people who think about profit margins first and about the future of our country second. Government is not a perfect entity, and it often does shortsighted or unsavory things in the name of its own perpetuation. But corporations, Ravitch reminds us, are far worse on that account. In addition, they are also new to the education business, which means that they don't know what they're doing, despite the flashy captions and anecdotes about "miracle schools." Better to stick with the devil you know (we need to get big money out of politics for this statement to truly make sense, but that's a whole other story). Ravitch also recognizes that conservatives ought to be outraged by this new development because they should want to protect a public institution that has long been an important pillar of our democracy. She attempts to use this point to unite the liberal and conservative points of view, but my guess is that her book will be labeled by the conservative media as a socialist, potentially job-killing hatchet piece designed to unjustly defame the generous philanthropists who are desperately trying to coax our schools into the twenty-first century. Nothing could be further from the truth.

It's impossible to summarize here the preponderance of cogent arguments, all of which come supported by relevant research, that Ravitch offers in support of her overall message that privatizing education, whether by sending our kids to for-profit schools, starting ostensibly non-profit charters that outsource their management to private companies, or accepting vouchers that give families the illusion of choice while actually macerating the fabric of our already struggling public institutions, is a lousy idea. She covers the whole gamut of strategies used to siphon public money away from students and into corporate bank accounts, debunking each one not just with clear thinking, but germane data as well. I was surprised to learn that the notion that our public schools are "failing" or "in crisis" is an almost entirely manufactured claim. Sure, schools can always use more money and resources, but Ravitch does a remarkable job of showing how the movement toward standardization and privatization, coupled with the increased control of the federal government over educational policy and funding linked to high-stakes testing, has directly precipitated, rather than ameliorated, many of the dire circumstances now faced by our public schools.

Ravitch's staunch defense of teachers is enough to make anyone who has spent time in a modern classroom stand up and holler with relief. In a culture where teachers are being constantly scapegoated for the "failure" of students far and wide, it is refreshing to know that there are still people out there who believe in the essential goodness and professional competence of teachers, and who believe they are in the best position to determine what students require to learn. This book carefully exhumes the obvious but recently unheeded truths that educators are the best judges of what makes an "effective teacher," that educators are the people who know what their schools need, that educators are the ones who spend their entire professional lives working not just "for children," but *with* them. Ravitch goes to great lengths to expose the vicious and unwarranted attacks that have been leveled at teachers and administrators by those seeking to subvert the public school system and replace it with profit-based schools that depend on technology and trendy educational theories to cut costs and move our country even farther down the road toward inequality for all.

But this book isn't just a list of complaints. The last third of *Reign of Error* is packed with solutions for how to stop the steamroller of private enterprise and reinvigorate our commitment to a strong, sustainable public school system. Ravitch doesn't pull any punches. It will be expensive. It will take time to observe concrete results, much more than we would like. It will require that we address the issues of poverty and school segregation with the seriousness they deserve. And it will demand that we make peace with that ugly truth no one wants to admit: even in the best school system, some children will fail to meet our preconceived standards. But Ravitch helps us see that this reality is only a problem if we perpetuate the lie that learning is a competition with winners and losers, rather than the greatest gift we could hope to share with our young ones. If we can overcome the crippling shortsightedness and greed seeking to dominate our public institutions of learning, I hope we will eventually realize that there are more important things than if a child gets into college or leaves school ready to be hired, things that comprise the heart of a good education: happiness, curiosity, artistic expression, moral imagination, and the ability to listen to others and be heard with grace. These are the qualities we should seek to instill in the youngest members of the American

community. This book might help you find a way to get started.

Tanya says

Excellent!! Diane Ravitch not only presents the evidence against the reform movements, but provides solutions to the problems that are plaguing schools. As a teacher at an "apartheid" school I agree with almost all of her arguments. Teaching to the test and the focus on standardized tests is not what makes for a quality education. Affluent and suburban schools would not stand for it, so why do our neediest children have to have schools this way. I am glad that my district has managed to keep charters out and I have seen first-hand how Parent Revolution tries to get their hands into a district. I'm not saying that all of the teachers at my school are excellent, but the majority care and bust their behinds for the students. I think this book should be read by anyone who cares at all about the education system in our country, and all administrators and school boards. People need to see what is going on and not just be swayed by slick presentations and skewed data. NAEP shows that kids are doing better and schools are not as bad as the media seems to portray them.

Jenny says

This is not a balanced book full of facts and information to understand a complex problem - if you are a learner and want to understand a system, don't read this book. If you are already a Ravitch supporter and just want to read something to confirm your views rather than to think critically about how to solve problems, you will enjoy this book very much. It is a narrow, one-sided view that makes leaping conclusions that you would expect from someone who is looking for data to support her pre-existing views. The education system is complex, and Diane Ravitch denies this complexity by narrowing every ed reform solution as clearly bad/evil/capitalist/anti-public. This is one of those books where even if you didn't know the complete facts about our education system, you would question the author's validity based on her oversimplification of a problem, her strong use of rhetoric, her staunch support of status quo, and her selective use of data. I can't remember a time where she showed any balanced views to demonstrate how some of the reforms being done is working, and what those successful schools have in common, and how to further support the growth of successful schooling models? She has nothing positive to say about the ed reformists, and this is a red flag for me. Reading her book made me want to rush to read an opposing view just to make sure I didn't internalize the one-sided conclusions and the selective data points.

Ravitch polarizes public education to make it about reformers-privatizers (because they are obviously in on it together in a plot to profit off poor children) vs. public schools. You will buy into this oversimplification if...

- a) this is the first book about public education you've read
- b) you don't try to think about opposing view points and buy into straw man arguments easily

A book like this is honestly damaging to the public because Ravitch's impressive credentials provide the facade of someone who is a critical thinker who puts students first. But Ravitch here is not a historian but a politician. I've seen failing public schools quote Ravitch to justify why high-performing charter schools with a track record of success shouldn't be allowed to open in their regions - because Ravitch says that charters are part of a "privatization movement" and are "capitalist" and don't care about poor kids. I'm confused why a publicly-funded non-profit school system (which many charters are) are labeled as part of a "privatization" movement, and Diane Ravitch doesn't really explain this either. Instead, by using privation early and often, she hopes that you internalize that anything that wants to disband teachers unions and lifetime tenure is anti-public. The problem is that too many people seem to believe that what Ravitch says is fact, despite any data

showing that there are high-performing charters who focus exactly on students of low-income neighborhoods, who get the job done despite only having 75% of the funding that public schools receive, and do so with great political barriers that fight for their closure.

the review below summed the book up nicely better than I could explain, so I'm pasting it here.

++++

Public schools? They're fine.

Teachers who can't be fired? No problem at all.

Our international competitiveness in education? Nothing to worry about.

Too many kids dropping out of high school? It's a myth. And anyway, some kids are just poor, hence doomed, so what are schools supposed to do about that?

Get ready for the world's longest excuse note: Diane Ravitch's new book "Reign of Error: The Hoax of the Privatization Movement and the Danger to Public Schools." Only this note is from the teachers' unions (who have paid Ravitch for her flackery) to you.

The book veers between argument and rant. Ravitch seems scarcely able to stop sputtering out meaningless and irrelevant buzzwords that she hopes will inspire ill will towards school choice. Again and again — hundreds of times — she tosses out words meant to stir up irrational hatred. I refer to words like "privatization" (which no one is proposing), "entrepreneurs," "corporations," "profits" and (most hilariously) "creationism," which she claims is one of the hidden agendas of school reformists.

A chapter on tenure is particularly instructive about Ravitch's style. She says "tenure means due process. There is no ironclad tenure for teachers."

There isn't?

Before the recent, mild tenure reforms in New York City, 97 percent of teachers were granted tenure in 2007. In the three years up to 2010, only 88 teachers out of about 80,000 city teachers were fired for any reason. That's one-tenth of 1 percent. Sounds fairly ironclad to me, but Ravitch simply pretends such figures don't exist. What other profession is so protective of poor performers?

Ravitch told The New Yorker that without tenure, "There will be huge parts of this country where evolution will never again be taught."

Sure.

Charter-school backers like Bloomberg, Bill Gates, Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel, Obama's Education Secretary Arne Duncan, the guy who directed "An Inconvenient Truth" — they're all closet creationists using school choice as a Trojan Horse to sneak their evangelical Christian views inside the castle walls.

What would happen to all those charter students if Ravitch destroyed the charter movement in the name of "community," i.e. local monopolies?

Answer: More fragmentation of the community. More separation of rich and poor, white and black. We already have "privatized" education in a sense: Your child's education is simply part of the price of your home, which costs more in a good school district than it would in a neighboring one where the school is a dropout factory. Charters are severing that link between the value of your home and the value of your kid's

education.

Poor kids may never achieve at the level of rich kids, but poverty is no excuse for defending the status quo of terrible schools in the least affluent neighborhoods. Rich people already have school choice — they can move to another neighborhood — and the indigent ought to have more options than the citizens of some thug dictatorship where there's only one name on the ballot.

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the full review:

<http://nypost.com/2013/09/14/author-s...>

Marks54 says

This is a superb book that critiques the current reform movement in American primary and secondary education. Everybody who is interested in the state of public education should read Diane Ravitch's book carefully.

Ravitch is an accomplished historian of American education who worked in the Department of Education during the reform efforts of President Bush. She soured on the reform movement, rethought her positions, and has come to be sharply critical of this reform effort -- which is now quite mainstream in US educational policy.

Ravitch is an advocate who is an active participant in education policy debates. What makes this book so distinctive is that it combines a clear critical position with a devotion to scholarly rigor that is seldom matched elsewhere. One can certainly disagree with Ravitch, but to do so credibly, it will be necessary to confront her arguments and her research and show what is lacking. That will not be an easy task.

The beginning of the book -- and in my opinion its strongest part -- is a systematic review of the central tenants of the reform movement -- that US education is broken and needs to be fixed, that systematic testing is crucial to producing reform, that bad teachers are a major source of educational deficits in US schools, that the shortcomings of US education can be remedied by firing bad teachers, closing under-performing schools, and bringing new blood into the teaching profession, through such programs as "Teach for America". In the first part of the book, Ravitch goes through the reformist critique in detail and shows how it neither makes sense conceptually nor is supported by any credible longitudinal data. There is no crisis, there is no decline in test scores, schools are generally educating well - although there are gaps with poor and disadvantaged populations. The reformist answers to the crisis (which isn't a crisis) are both poorly thought through and lacking in credible research support. Charter schools, for example, are not the magic "silver bullet" that their proponents claim. Some do well while others fail. Overall, they do not outperform public schools and when they do, the result is credibly linked to their ability to exclude high cost and high attention students that public schools must accept.

In the middle part of the book, Ravitch looks at reform efforts and they do not come up well. Not only are the results limited and likely not superior to public schools, but the new schools formed through privatization also suffer from a range of agency problems that raise fundamental issues about the wisdom of outsourcing public education to the for-profit sector.

The last portion of the book discusses solutions. Consistent with her story, Ravitch does not offer global solutions - but remember she does not grant the global problem definition claimed by reformers. Tying these

last chapters together is the idea that educational deficits are a result of poverty and class and that the solutions to educational deficits are known - provide everyone with the education that the rich provide their own children. Is this practical? Perhaps not, but it is more satisfying that being bamboozled by the rhetoric of corporatist privatization.

Some readers may be troubled by the sharply critical orientation of the book, but it is well written and organized and the reader is provided with sufficient cites and data that they can check out her claims for themselves if they wish.

This is one of the best policy-related books I have read in years.

Clif Hostetler says

This is the best defense of public schools I've come across. Americans who have not read this book are probably insufficiently informed to vote wisely in local and state elections.

Contrary to what one might conclude from media reports, levels of educational achievement and graduation rates in the United States have been consistently rising over the years. Surprise! Achievement scores are now "at their highest point ever recorded." Achievement has been going up for all racial groups, but the gaps between the groups persist. (It is interesting to note that current age 9 average math score for blacks is now equal to what the age 9 math score was for whites in 1982, but the gap continues because scores for whites have gone up.) [LINK to NAEP Report](#)

But supporters of charter and on-line schools point out that many other countries have higher levels of educational achievement, and their proposed solutions are needed to catch up. It's interesting to note that these other countries achieve their educational success without the use of charter schools, virtual on-line schools, and punitive threats of firing teachers and closing schools.

Ravitch provides a comparative look at Finland which consistently scores high on educational achievement tests. She shows that they obtain their success by respecting their teachers as professionals, and their students don't take standardized tests until it's time to enter college. How does Finland do it? There is one very significant difference between Finland and the United States. Finland has a much smaller percentage of students living in poverty (3%) compared to the United States (20%). It just so happens that the family wealth/poverty level is a significant indicator of probable academic success. No charter or virtual on-line school has been able to overcome the effects of poverty and segregation for their average achievement scores when they're required to accept the same students as public schools.

Some promoters of charter schools criticize public schools for using poverty is an excuse. But experience has shown that charters are quick to use it as an excuse when they fail to perform any better. In case you think on-line computer classes are the answer you need to read this article.

Ravitch doesn't have much good to say about standarized tests, "No Child Left Behind" or "Race to the Top." She has plenty of criticism for both Democrats and Republicans. And she very critically lays into some of the well-known private-sector leaders and political officials — among them Arne Duncan, Joel Klein, Bill Gates, Wendy Kopp and Michelle Rhee. The scary thing about the private for-profit charter school chains is that they are now a formidable political lobby group with lots of campaign contributions for friendly politicians. They're not going away anytime soon.

Ravitch acknowledges that her previous books were criticized for being long on criticism and short on suggestions of ways to improve the American educational system. She says the solution is simple. Just look at what wealthy private schools and public schools in the wealthy suburbs are doing. Their test scores compare well with international comparisons. In order to duplicate in all schools what they are doing will require providing good prenatal care. Then there should be vastly expanded prekindergarten programs, more comprehensive medical and mental health provisions, smaller classes, and diagnostic testing that, unlike a standardized exam, show us where a child needs specific help. Ravitch says we should honor the teaching profession by strengthening the profession with higher entry standards. She doesn't think that answer is in recruiting "enthusiastic amateurs" who teach short term and move on to other professions.

She describes stick-and-carrot incentives such as merit pay as "the idea that never works and never dies." She says such incentives undermine the spirit of collaboration by pitting teachers against each other. She also deplores humiliating practices such as publishing teachers' names beside students' test scores. She tells of one teacher publicly humiliated as the "worst teacher in New York" when all teacher scores were published. After news reporters circled her house hounding her for interviews it was revealed that she taught a class of English language learners who moved on to regular classes when they were able. It's obvious not all students are equally teachable. Tying pay to student performance will provide a strong disincentive for teaching disadvantaged students, or teaching students who are already at the high end of achievement levels with little room for improvement.

This "Children as Blueberries" story is reference by this book. If you haven't heard the story it's worth reading.

I hope this book is a best seller and widely read. I hope it puts a nail into the coffin of the for profit privatization movement in education. I hope it also increases the willingness of voters to support spending on public schools, and providing the other services and changes that Ravitch recommends to equalize access to good education.

Greg Brozeit says

Students of current American public policy should have this book in their library. Ravitch lays out a clear, compelling case that citizens and policy makers should act decisively to protect and save our nation's public education systems from short-sighted profiteers and ideologues who understand neither the history or value of the fundamental institution that makes our nation great.

Ravitch makes empirical, pragmatic and evidence-based policy arguments in accessible prose to explain why public education should matter to every American, including everyone who does not have children in public schools. She clearly explains how public education is and has been threatened by, as Isaiah Berlin once wrote, the "reactionary forms of irrationalism" who are taken seriously by those who shape our national political debate. Her clear-sighted critiques of how the No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top policies of the past decade have accelerated and distorted the mission and purpose of public education is impossible to ignore or refute.

Ravitch masterfully exposes the many radical reformers whose simplistic, unproven ideological and agenda-driven "reforms" have perverted and destroyed too many public education systems throughout the nation. Instead her conclusions include focusing on health care beginning at the pre-natal stage and continuing through adulthood. It includes respecting, supporting and honoring the professionalism of teachers and administrators. And most of all, it means restoring local, democratic control of public education.

Like the best works of Kevin Phillips and William Julius Wilson, Ravitch's case goes far beyond the simplistic labels of "conservative" and "liberal" that dominate today's political discourse. She lays out a workable framework that all Americans should embrace and commit to achieve. Acted upon and taken together with Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow*, *Reign of Error* is one of those rare books that actually can change the course of the nation and reinvigorate the idea and promise of the American Dream. Or we can at least hope so.

Jeff Larsen says

Diane Ravitch has written the definitive account of the false promises behind the reform (privatization) movement in public education. There is no better explanation of what is wrong with the push for more charter school and more standardized tests than within the pages of this book.

Ravitch doesn't stop with her well-researched take down of the privatization movement. She offers sound advice for fixing our broken schools, too.

This book should be read by every legislator in every state, every member of the US Department of Education, every parent who cares about her children's education, and every citizen who cares for the future of our democracy.

Jennifer Mangler says

I remember vividly a moment from my first year of teaching. All teachers, K-12, were sitting in one room for a professional development day. The superintendent was talking about some new initiative (like many new initiatives it came and went, and I honestly do not recall what it was). The veteran teacher sitting next to me, a woman I greatly admire and consider one of the best teachers I have ever had the pleasure to know and work with, whispered to me, "this is not what it seems. This is leading to the dismantling of public education. That is their goal." That was 14 years ago. I didn't know what to think at the time. Now, I see very clearly how right she was. So many people criticize Diane Ravitch for being paranoid or seeing a conspiracy in the reform movement. Well, sometimes you need to be paranoid because *you're right*. Not everyone in the "reform movement would advocate for privatization, but make no mistake: the people who are funding the movement *absolutely* desire this.

This teacher has been so incredibly frustrated by "education reform" for so many years. Non-educators have dominated the discussion, and what seems self-evident to them often seems asinine to those of us in the trenches. It boils down to the central premise of education: it is not, as they assert, to prepare you for the workforce; rather, it is to prepare you be a productive citizen in our society. The premise you start with matters. Starting with the first premise means you focus solely on skill acquisition devoid of context and meaning. Starting with the second premise means you focus on helping students develop their curiosity, passion for learning, and their character.

If you care about public education in the United States, read this book. Read it, and then pass it on to someone else. Encourage them to pass it along once they're done. Mention it to every member of your family and to all your friends. Encourage them to read the book. Then encourage them to talk about it. People who truly love public education in this country need to get as many of our fellow citizens as possible to read and talk about this book.

Virginia Birks says

This book is a must read for all supporters of public education, especially for its future.

Christy says

No other advanced society has threatened the public part of their public schools like has happened in the US. Under the business ethos of "anything the public sector can do the private one can do better", we've gone remarkably far in privatizing one of our hallowed public goods, high-quality K-12 education for all, and are now no where near the top in either academic achievement nor equality of access based on class, race, or national origin (language) differences.

K-16 schooling is a source of big profit now for big business, and it will take all our will to turn the ship around and remember that human concerns (like education) aren't always best considered as business ones.

Ravitch was part of the New Left then did a trajectory to the Right (horrified at the collapse of curricular rigor and political correctness) but has since regained her senses to become the best critic of public education (including privatization, testing, and teacher training) that we have.
