Community Schools and the Dangers of Ed Tech Privatization

written by John Adam Klyczek | January 30, 2021

Bottom-up democracy through community schools sounds like a great idea. However, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the federal legislation funding pre-K-12 schools that replaced "No Child Left Behind," requires "full-service" community schools to incorporate public-private partnerships that facilitate "wrap-around services" managed by data analytics.[1] Consequently, ESSA incentivizes the corporatization of community schools through "surveillance capitalism."[2] Although Dylan Craig believes "open bargaining" and "bargaining for the common good" can mitigate such privatized data surveillance, ESSA fundamentally structures community schools as vassals of corporate-government partnerships, with Big Tech wrap-around services, such as health care, crime prevention, and workforce planning, through Big Data.

Community Schools Are Charter Schools on Steroids

According to ESSA, "the term 'full-service community schools' means a public elementary school or secondary school that (A) participates in a community-based effort to coordinate and integrate educational, developmental, family, health, and other comprehensive services through community-based organizations and public and private partnerships."[3] As public-private educational partnerships, community schools are essentially the same as charter schools, which are private corporations subsidized by public taxes.[4] The only difference is community schools are required to facilitate "family, health, and other comprehensive services," or "wrap-around services," through public-private partnerships.

As Mr. Craig acknowledges, "charter schools were originally envisioned as something similar to community schools, … but were quickly co-opted by corporations and their political allies in both parties." Given ESSA's mandates for "full-service" public-private partnerships, community schools are structured for corporatization similar to their charter school counterparts. In fact, community schools pose even greater threats of privatization because ESSA mandates not just academics through public-private partnerships, but also health care, crime prevention, workforce training, and other wrap-around services.[5]

It might sound like community schools are more democratic since they partner with community-based "stakeholders" to provide wrap-around services. However, these wrap-around services require public-private "pipeline" partnerships with business stakeholders bent on privatizing community schools by reducing them to clearing houses for corporate-government contracts.[6] By requiring community schools to provide wrap-around counseling through public-private partnerships with "community-based" businesses and other corporate stakeholders, ESSA's "pipeline services" mandates will siphon public taxes into private companies that pipeline health care, crime-rehabilitation, and workforce-training services to community schools.[7]

Big Tech Wrap-Around with Big Data and Surveillance Capitalism

Privatization under the guise of community-based partnerships is pernicious enough. But it's even worse when Big Tech dominates such public-private partnerships through a Big Data panopticon of "surveillance capitalism."[8] While oligarchic technocrats tout their data-tracking technologies as democratic instruments of "personalization" and "equity,"[9] the track records of such tech barons demonstrate that "personalization" means data-mining consumers' psychological profiles to target them with behavioral advertisements,[10] and "equity" means trickle-down redistribution of resources to subsidize centralized social-engineering and workforce planning by corporate technocrats.[11]

Although Mr. Craig hopes community schools can use "open bargaining" and "bargaining for the common good" to prevent corporate-government data-mining through "privatization and predatory partnerships," these hopes are dashed by ESSA's data-tracking requirements for community schools. ESSA stipulates community school pipelines must assess "the academic, physical, nonacademic, health, mental health, and other needs of students, families, and community residents." In addition, pipelines must record "annual measurements" of "outcomes" data. In other words, community schools are required to track data pertaining to the health, crime risk, and workforce readiness of community "stakeholders."[12]

For example, according to the Rand Corporation, New York City Community Schools "engage in strategic data collection and analysis … conduct[ing] an annual assets and needs assessment of … academic, health, social, and emotional needs." Such "needs assessments" are "shared among all school partners through data inquiry and collaborative data review."[13] In turn, all the community schools' public and private partners are authorized to surveil students' psychometrics and biometrics to "personalize" corporate-government workforce training, health care, mental wellness care, and crime prevention.

Indeed, consider the public-private data-tracking at Richmond Community Schools in Michigan, where new COVID-19 hybrid-learning policies require students to "utilize Schoology and Microsoft Teams to access assignments, videos, and assessments and to submit homework."

The Schoology platform is a subsidiary of Power Schools,[15] which provides data analytics through tech partnerships with corporations such as Microsoft, Amazon Web Services, McGraw Hill, Cengage Learning, Carnegie Learning, and FIS Global. Additionally, Power Schools partners with digital ID companies such as identiMetrics, which provides "unified biometric ID management"; and Eyemetric Identity Systems, which "combine[s] 3D facial recognition technology with … [an] automated alert system." Power Schools also tracks medical data through partnerships with School Day, which analyzes "AI-enhanced … real-time wellbeing data for schools, districts, and educators"; and EduHealth, which enables "school nurses to collect, track, and manage student … health history and documents in a single button click." Moreover, Power Schools flags "precrime" algorithms through partnerships with School Safety Manager, which "identif[ies] kids in distress and turn[s] around behavior that could become violent" through "threat assessment and … tracking [that] keeps distress from growing to shootings and other violent acts."[16]

This network of public-private "wrap-around" partnerships between Richmond Community Schools, Schoology, and Power Schools is just the tip of the Big Data panopticon as the Gates Foundation exploits the COVID lockdown to "reimagine education" through a "Screen New Deal" that monetizes predictive learning analytics.[17] To ensure ongoing success, the Gates-financed InnovateEDU has developed a post-COVID "Connector" app that pipelines student data from Google Classroom into Google's BigQuery database, while InnovateEDU partners with Cortex,[18] a learning-analytics platform linked to Learnsphere's data-sharing repository modeled after InBloom.[19]

In the final equation, community school amalgamation of education, health care, criminal justice, and workforce planning into a singularity of corporate-government Big Data will usher in an

American version of China's dystopic Social Credit technocracy, which algorithmically dictates students' access to schools, jobs, health care, transportation, housing, due process, and even food.[20]

Bargaining for the Corporate Good

Mr. Craig believes community schools can avert corporate data-tracking through "open bargaining" and "bargaining for the common good."

However, while bargaining for the common good attempts to level the negotiating table by dialoguing with all community-based stakeholders, working-class public stakeholders are pitted against well-funded corporate stakeholders such as data-analytics companies that capitalize on student data through partnerships with community schools.[21] As a result, the lobbying efforts of well-financed corporate interests will hijack bargaining for the common good.

Mr. Craig contends open bargaining can mitigate the power brokering of corporate stakeholders by including the broader community in negotiations. However, as Mr. Craig admits, open negotiations do not necessarily bear upon voting procedures, as "voting rights are often still reserved to traditional parties." Despite open negotiations, the wider community is divided into separate interest groups that delegate voting authority to the representative "leaders" and "experts" who are privy to final deliberations at the "larger board" where binding votes are cast. In the end, open bargaining defers to hierarchical chains of special interests dominated by corporate interest groups.

Far from a "bottom-up democratic process," open bargaining for the common good of community schools defaults to a top-down process: "Community school coordinators" pose as "community organizers" while lobbying for corporate stakeholders that buy off union leaders in order to harvest and monetize student data through public-private wrap-around pipelines.

notes

1. United States, *Every Student Succeeds Act*, Public Law 114-95, 114th Congress, S. 1177, Dec. 10, 2015.

2. Shoshana Zuboff, "Shoshana Zuboff on Surveillance Capitalism: VPRO Documentary," *YouTube*, Dec. 20, 2019.

3. United States, *Every Student Succeeds Act.*

4. Joanna Smith and Priscilla Wohlstetter, "Understanding the Different Faces of Partnering: A Typology of Public-Private Partnerships," *School Leadership and Management* (Vol. 26, No. 3, July 2006),

5. Partnership for the Future of Learning, "Community Schools in ESSA State Plans," in *Community Schools Playbook*, Aug. 29, 2018.

6. Dave Guymon, "Public-Private Partnerships: The Real Future of Education," *Edutopia*, June 17, 2014. Institute for Educational Leadership, "Coalition Funders," *Coalition for Community Schools*, 2020; Suzie Boss, "Projects and Partnerships Build a Stronger Future," *Edutopia*, Jan. 11, 2013.

7. Joan Wasser Gish and Mary Walsh, "Brown Center Chalkboard Memo: Improving Student Achievement by Meeting Children's Comprehensive Needs," *Brookings Institute*, Dec. 12, 2016; United States. *Every Student Succeeds Act.*

8. John Laidler, "High Tech Is Watching You," *Harvard Gazette*, March 4, 2019.

9. Mark Doumba. “The Great Reset Must Place Social Justice at Its Center,” *World Economic Forum*, July 29, 2020; World Economic Forum, *The Great Reset*, 2020; World Economic Forum, Saudi Aramco, Unilever, and Willis Towers Watson, “Whitepaper HR4.0: Shaping People Strategies in the Fourth Industrial Revolution,” *World Economic Forum*, Dec. 2019.

10. Kevin Granville, “Facebook and Cambridge Analytica: What You Need to Know as Fallout Widens,” *New York Times*, March 19, 2018.

11. Arvind Krishna, “IBM CEO’s Letter to Congress on Racial Justice Reform,” *IBM*, June 8, 2020; Edwin Black, *IBM and the Holocaust: The Strategic Alliance Between Nazi Germany and America’s Most Powerful Corporation* (Random House, 2001).

12. United States, *Every Student Succeeds Act*.

13. William R. Johnston, et al., “Illustrating the Promise of Community Schools: An Assessment of the Impact of the New York City Community Schools Initiative,” *RAND Corporation*, 2020.

14. Richmond Community Schools, “Return to Learning Plan,” *Michigan Safe Start Plan: Michigan’s 2020 Return to School Roadmap*, 2020.

15. Schoology, “PowerSchool to Acquire Schoology, Creating the Most Comprehensive Unified Classroom Solution for K-12 Education,” *PowerSchool: Press Release*, Oct. 24, 2019.

16. PowerSchool, “PowerSchool Partner Program,” *PowerSchool: Powering Brighter Futures*, 2020.

17. Naomi Klein, “Screen New Deal: Under Cover of Mass Death, Andrew Calls in the Billionaires to Build a Hi-Tech Dystopia,” *Intercept*, May 8, 2020.

18. Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, “To Provide Business Planning Consulting Support to InnovateEDU,” *How We Work: Grants Database*, April 2000; Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, “To Support Availability of Awareness of Resources that Support Students with Disabilities During Distance Learning Due to COVID-19,” *How We Work: Grants Database*, May 2020; InnovateEDU, “Projects,” 2019; PR Newswire, “InnovateEDU Develops Free, Open-Source Data Extraction Tool for Google Classroom During COVID-19,” *Business Insider*, May 18, 2020,

19. The Hechinger Report, “Carnegie Mellon Project Revives in Bloom’s Student Data Dream: Privacy Controversy to Be Dodged by Not Storing Student Names, Addresses or Social Security Numbers,” *US News & World Report*, July 27, 2015; “Explore: Data Repositories,” *Learnsphere: A Community Data Infrastructure to Support Learning Improvement Online*, 2018.

20. “China Is Using Coronavirus to Boost Its Dystopian Social Credit System: Mess Up Your Travel History? You’ll Be Publicly Shamed for a Year,” *Wired Magazine*, March 3, 2020; Charles Rollett, “The Odd Reality of Life under China’s All-Seeing Credit Score System,” *Wired Magazine*, June 5 2018; Journeyman TV Foreign Correspondent, “Social Credit: China’s Digital Dystopia in the Making,” *YouTube*, Oct. 5, 2018; Wall Street Journal, “How China Is Using Artificial Intelligence in Classrooms,” *YouTube*, Oct. 1, 2019.

21. Philadelphia, Penn., Office of the Mayor, “City Partners with IBM on New STEM Program in Community Schools,” July 25, 2017; Google, “How Mason City Community Schools Use Jamboards to Give All Students a Voice,” *Google for Education.*