

Reply to Klyczek

January 30, 2021



John Adam Klyczek's primary apprehension to the idea of community schools seems to be the threat of Big Tech infiltrating the school system. Central to his argument is the language of "pipeline services" from the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). For Klyczek, the pipeline is deterministic. While I strongly oppose the influence and control that tech companies have in my school's curriculum and beyond, I can't help but feel the reaction to community schools is a bit premature. While ESSA may very well have language that risks a privatized pipeline capitalizing on school data collection, it's important to keep in mind ESSA is a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, and there have been *eight such reauthorizations*, each with new language.¹ The language of "pipeline services," alongside language on community schools, did not exist before ESSA. Thus, it's not naive to assume the language may not *necessarily* survive the next reauthorization—especially given enough public pressure. If the language does survive, it does not mean it is the end of the fight.

This leads me to what is perhaps the most striking assumption in Klyczek's response: Union and community pressure is not just prone to but will *inevitably* succumb to corporate co-optation. Again, I find this reading deterministic and overly pessimistic. It is due to public pressure that the ESSA included language for community schools.² Teachers unions are a vital part of the labor movement; their collective action and community allies are central to teachers union wins in large districts, like the 2012 Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) struggle, which rallied community support in coalitions and persuaded nearly 90 percent of the union membership to vote to strike.³ CTU and the reform movement within teachers unions it sparked are a powerful reminder that the bitter collision between community and teachers in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville strike need not be our future. The parent involvement in school communities is often organized and ready to take on powerful entities, as I noted about the InBloom case. Now, if democratic control were to be gained in individual schools as I propose, local community members and unions could better organize around the issues that Klyczek discusses, potentially finding methods to meet the current data-reporting requirements in ways that serve the individual school and not tech oligarchs. If a suitable method cannot be found, communities can fight to change the language.

Of course, in order to provide wrap-around services, private partnerships will be a part of community schools, as, sadly, it is difficult to find social services outside of the private system under neoliberalism. Still, this is not a reason to reject a democratic form of community schools that can provide essential private services to communities, especially when it could be under the watch of an involved community and union.

Klyczek has flagged very important pitfalls that can occur as we move toward more democratic schools that serve communities. Still, I see the seeds of democracy forming even in challenging circumstances, and I think it is important for the left to focus on positive alternatives and pathways, discussing current and past initiatives that can be scrapped or pushed to transform the free society that we wish to see. This is especially true for how the left can reimagine unions and education and move toward a bottom-up and sustainable system.

Notes

1. New America, "ESSA."
2. Coalition for Community Schools, "ESEA Reauthorization," *Coalition for Community Schools - Because Every Child Deserves Every Chance*.
3. Noreen Ahmed-Ullah and Joel Hood, "CTU: Nearly 90 Percent of Teachers Vote to Authorize Strike," *Chicagotribune.com*, June 11, 2012.