Say #ByeBetsy – and organize now to fight against Biden's education policies

written by Lois Weiner | November 9, 2020

Vice President Biden Statement on the Resignation of Secretary of Education Arne Duncan

Arne Duncan has been one of the best Secretaries of Education in our nation's history. Over the past 7 years, he has been a dynamic leader who brings unparalleled energy to his work. During his time as Secretary, Arne has made almost unprecedented strides in changing the direction of education in this country through his work to improve graduation rates, expand access to community colleges and raise academic standards for students all across the country. He has also done tremendous work through Title IX to make campuses safer for women and girls. He's a man of great character and principle and he has become a close friend to Jill and me. We wish him all the best and we will miss him dearly.

Social media is abuzz about what teacher activists can expect from Biden's education policy. Alas, much of it is wishful thinking, on the order of hoping Jill Biden, a teacher, will shape her husband's views on education. Other speculation has been about Biden's likely choice for Secretary of Education. One candidate many liberals consider a progressive possibility, Linda Darling-Hammond, has said she doesn't want the post. We should expect and demand far better.

The fact that Darling-Hammond, who often collaborates with both national teachers unions, is considered an advocate by activists who have led resistance to charter schools, standardized testing's stranglehold over curriculum and teacher performance, and marketization of public education shows a dangerous political blind spot about the Democrats. Darling-Hammond's connections show her embrace of "reformy" policies, in organizations like New Classrooms Innovations Partners, which is funded by a "who's who" of billionaire-funded foundations, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Bezos Family Foundation, and the New Schools Venture Fund.

While Trump's election exploded the bipartisan consensus about how to privatize schools and control what was taught and how, the outline of what Biden expects to do is quite clear if we do not flinch from examining Biden and the Democrats critically, without blinders or wishful thinking. The Center for American Progress (CAP) has endorsed the Trump/DeVos policy of continuing standardized testing during the pandemic. As a group of researchers noted in their analysis of CAP's report "School closings and the ever-increasing number of deaths provide the backdrop" for CAP's proposal "to deny waivers of the federally mandated administration of standardized tests in spring 2021. Further, the federal government proposes to add to those assessments in ways that CAP argues would make the test results more useful… CAP sides with the Department of Education's policy of denying such requests for waivers, and it calls for **additional assessments** [emphasis added] that 'capture multiple aspects of student well-being, including social-emotional needs, engagement, and conditions for learning' as well as supplementary gathering of student information."

Biden’s victory now requires confronting his advocacy of disastrous education policies during the Obama administration, enacted under Obama’s Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan. While we say #ByeBetsy with pleasure, there is little time to celebrate Biden’s victory if that means shutting our eyes to what is in store for us. In another article I’ll explain what that project is, already begun under Trump, with Democrats’ support. The new privatization onslaught, rooted in Silicon Valley and Wall Street collaboration, is even more sinister than what preceded it.