

Charter Schools, More Money and the Elephant in the Room

By Carole Richards

Betsy DeVos, the new Secretary of Education is pro charter schools. A Plain Dealer article, "DeVos Open to New Education Data?"(David Leonhardt, May 3, 2017), raises some questions to ponder:

How do we fix -- improve our U.S. education system?

- Charter schools
- More money
- Improve literacy

Charter Schools

I am not opposed to charter schools. There are some very good ones where children are thriving. In Cleveland, we have the Breakthrough Schools. U.S. News lists 2017 top ranked public charter high schools. The top five are called Basis Schools in Arizona cities. Kipp Schools have two top ten mentions, one each in New York City and California.

Yet, charter schools struggle with literacy issues just like public schools. In addition, urban children struggle with literacy in huge numbers everywhere. Many urban parents choose charter schools because they think they are safer not because the education is better.

Charter schools must perform with less money, and some do very well. Some public schools do successfully educate our children too. I am for any school that is effective, public, charter or private. Are charter schools the panacea?

No, but there are some very good charters in and near most major cities.

More Money

Collectively the federal, state and local governments spend \$530B (half a trillion plus) annually on education. Will pouring more money into schools fix the problem? Will smaller classes, Common Core, more testing improve our schools? All of these initiatives cost lots of money. So, is more money really the answer?

So far, spending more money has not changed results.

Illiteracy -- The Elephant in the Room

Illiteracy is seldom discussed. The DeVos article, does not even mention it as a piece of the puzzle. While, most people agree, without the ability to read it is difficult to do well in school, hold a good paying job, go to college, learn a trade, or feel successful. Yet, it is seldom mentioned as the real crisis in education.

According to the National Assessment of Education Progress, our nation's report card, our literacy levels have remained stagnant since the 1970's. NAEP scores include 100,000+ urban and suburban children. This literacy problem exists in every school.

Our clients: an urban 14-year-old teen with a 2nd grade reading level. A suburban teen with a 1st grade reading level. They are not able to read prescriptions, fill out a job application, or open a checking account. Without remediation, where would they be as adults?

At least these determined parents found us, and we can help.

While the answer to improving our education system is complex, should literacy at least be part of the discussion? Should we work to figure out why so many children cannot read? Would better reading skills help all children perform better in school, on tests, and in the working world?

ABSOLUTELY, but this is a topic for another article.

Go to www.cei4learning.org to learn about the Richards Learning Systems literacy project. Join our literacy efforts. You can reach Carole Richards at: caroler@cei4learning.org.