

New book critiques 'corporate' school reform

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Neoliberal education reforms, including No Child Left Behind and Chicago's Renaissance 2010, tend to "marketize" schools and threaten to dismantle public education as we know it, according to a new book edited by a University of Illinois at Chicago education researcher.

William Watkins, professor of curriculum and instruction, criticizes the replacement of neighborhood schools with [charter schools](#) and the replacement of education leaders with corporate officials in "The Assault on Public Education: Confronting the Politics of Corporate [School](#) Reform" (Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 2012), a collection of essays by scholars across the country.

Watkins writes that free-market principles should not be applied to school reform.

"The corporate intrusion into school reform is connected to realignments in the labor market. Renaissance 2010, for example, was ideologically and politically driven, not based on informed school research. The shuttering and altering of schools torpedoed the concept of universal [education](#) and the common school as we know it," Watkins said, referring to the "tax-supported, mandatory and accessible common school" advocated by 19th-century reformer Horace Mann.

"Free-market policies and practices needlessly reposition schools in competition, where there are winners and losers," Watkins said. "Schools become more stratified and parents have little input. In many cities, children now travel miles across town as they are unable to attend the

'selective admission' school down the street from their home."

Watkins said the current emphasis on testing has created "pushouts" -- students who have not dropped out, but have not tested well enough to enter the newly selective schools.

"We must identify achievers, but not create barriers to others becoming achievers," he said. "Schools cannot be treated like chain stores, where only the 'profitable' remain open. The closing of schools is reprehensible in all cases."

The book's contributors explore related issues such as labor economics, urban renewal, unionism, race relations and religious fundamentalism as they apply to school reform. They include Pauline Lipman, UIC professor of educational policy studies; Kenneth Saltman, DePaul University associate professor of educational policy studies and research; Alfie Kohn, a Boston-based critic of standardized testing; cultural critics Malila Robinson and Catherine Lugg; teacher and union activist Jack Gerson; eugenics scholar Ann Winfield; and scholar Kristen Buras, who has written on the New Orleans schools before and after Hurricane Katrina.

Provided by University of Illinois at Chicago

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