

**February 16, 2014**

In memory of **Pete Seeger**, I hope you will send in appreciations and memories of Pete which I will publish next month. May his memory be a blessing to all of us and his life and work and inspire us always.



**Michael Jacoby Brown**  
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February, 16, 2014

**From: Michael Jacoby Brown**

**Who Is Organizing for Better Schools?**

A funny thing happened a few years ago. I went in for orientation to my daughter's middle school. The teacher told us that if the up-coming tax over-ride did not pass "your children are going to have 13 study halls

every week." I looked into my daughter's eyes which seemed to say, "Daddy, I don't want 13 study halls." And so I got to work organizing voters to vote yes for the over-ride. (This allows a town to "over-ride" state limits on local property tax increases.)

Then, I did what I thought was an obvious thing: I called the local teacher's union president. I thought he would be a passionate ally. No call back. I called again. Again, nothing. I kept calling. After several months I finally got a short meeting, but the local union did nothing to support the over-ride. Nevertheless we won. Hundreds of parent volunteers and others convinced enough of our neighbors to raise their property taxes to support the schools and other town services.

This got me thinking, with all the attacks on education, why aren't the teachers' unions organizing parents of children in public schools?

A few years ago I spent a couple days with the California Teachers Union that did have a few community organizers on the state-wide CTA staff. But this is not common. With the jobs of their members often on the line, you would think the teachers' unions would try to organize support among parents. Parents are likely to be supporters of smaller class size, more resources for the schools, etc.

Well, I guess some things that might seem obvious to me are not so obvious to others. What is going on?

### **BOOK REVIEW**

***Reign of Error, The Hoax of the Privatization Movement and the Danger to America's Public Schools***, by Diane Ravitch should be the bible and policy manual for anyone who cares about public schools and the future of our democracy.

Ravitch demonstrates with data and evidence how the corporate reformers and others who want to privatize our schools and make standardized testing the only measure of teacher and school effectiveness are wrong and threaten to undercut not only our schools but also our democracy.

She points how wrong it is to blame teachers and schools for all the troubles that students have and how wrong it is to place all the evidence of learning on standardized tests.

She points out that the corporate reformers send their children to elite private schools that emphasize small class size and de-emphasize standardized testing. Why then are the corporate reformers not advocating for the public schools the same things they look for in the private schools for their own children? Why is class size (which research has shown to improve student learning) not at the top of their agenda instead of more standardized testing as the sole measure of student achievement and teacher effectiveness?

Her language is clear and direct::

[Read on...](#)

### **Comments from the Field:**

**- Lisa Guisbond, Executive Director, Citizens for Public Schools, (CPS), Massachusetts.**

""There is a lot of money and corporate interests involved in public education policy. The corporate influence means there is too much testing going on, so much that it interferes with learning. All the points that Diane Ravitch makes in her book, ***The Reign of Error***, have the weight of evidence behind them. Ravitch's critique and proposed solutions all ring true for me, as a public school parent, based on my 20 years of experience and observations. As an organization, CPS doesn't have a lot of money but we have people. It's difficult to get our message out because of the influence of money and because a lot of the main-stream media has bought into these policies. That's beginning to change, though. I see parents, students and teachers coming together across the country to counter-act the corporate control of our schools. They know you can't fix the problems that come with poverty by taking money away from public schools and giving it to privately managed, publicly funded charter schools.".

We want to hear from you, your reactions, ideas, what is at the edge YOUR "envelope." Just go to...

<http://michaeljacobybrown.com/contact/>

### **Who else you will hear from.....**

We are just starting, but so far you can expect to hear what the following people are thinking:

[George Luse](#) of the Mass Teachers Assn,

[Scott Reed](#) with the PICO Network, ,

[Cathy Howell](#), in Oregon and El Salvador, formerly with the AFL-CIO,

[Ceasar McDowell](#) of the Interaction Institute for Social Justice,

[Diana Bell](#) of Community and Labor United,

[David Hernandez](#) of the California Education Assn,

[Linda Honold](#), of Wisconsin Voices

[Attica Scott](#), now an elected official in Louisville, KY,formerly with Jobs with Justice,

[Quinn Rallings](#) in Alabama with the PICO Network,

[Bob Van Meter](#) with the Local Initiative Support Corporation in Boston,

[Walter Davis](#), in Tennessee, of the National Organizers Alliance,

[Deb Askenase](#), of Community Organizing 2.0,

[Deb Fastino](#), of the Coalition for Social Justice in New Bedford, MA,

[Rebecca Gutman](#), with SEIU-1199,

[Tim Dean](#), of SEIU-1199,

[Claudia Horwitz](#), of Stone Circles in North Carolina,

[Mary Ochs](#), long time organizer in Los Angeles

and others, hopefully, including YOU

### **Other Useful Links**

<http://michaeljacobybrown.com/>

[National Organizers Alliance](#)

[Road Map Consulting](#)

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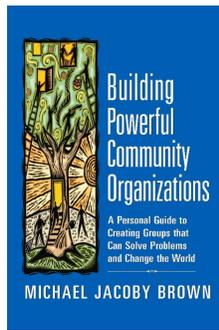
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