



Getting What We Want from Schools - Without Technocracy

Technocracy is increasingly being associated with education. Technocracy, Inc. founder M. King Hubbert wrote (1934) that education was to be a “system of continental conditioning” along the lines of Pavlov’s experiments. Nothing has changed since then, but now it is finally being recognized. □ Technocracy News Editor

Our forefathers built the education reform movement on a foundation that all reformers shared: We need to hold schools accountable, so they’ll give kids the education we want them to get. Now we’re discovering cracks in the foundation. It turns out we don’t agree on what we want, or on how we get schools to deliver it.

The recent debate over an [article](#) by Robert Pondiscio has brought this conflict further out into the open. So has Jeb Bush’s latest attempt to [cast a vision for education reform](#), in which he dramatically reverses his [earlier commitment](#) to rigid, top-down systems of “accountability” in favor of radical disruption, diversity and parent choice.

Jay Greene is right that [this is not really a debate about Left v. Right but](#)

[a debate about technocracy](#)—rigid and centralized systems of control, using narrow and reductive quantitative metrics, that give enormous power to a special class of education experts on the theory that we can trust them to be all-knowing, benevolent and apolitical. There are plenty of technocrats on the Right, and plenty of anti-technocrats on the Left.

“Accountability,” long established as the foundation of education reform, has come to mean *technocratic* accountability. Big new bureaucracies have been built, and millions spent, to grind out and analyze countless billions of data points whose connection to children’s real educational success is tenuous at best. The byzantine world of congressional sausagemaking, with its shadowy dealmaking and its forest of esoteric acronyms stretching as far as the eye can see, has become the center of the educational universe.

For those of us who reject technocracy, the fate of education reform now hinges on whether we can find a new vision of what accountability is.

Offering up such a new vision may well split the education reform movement, dividing us from old allies, but it may also attract powerful new allies from the anti-technocratic Left. And the response to Pondiscio and Greene shows that [the technocrats aren’t listening to us and don’t care about our concerns anyway](#). We’re not leaving them; [they have already left us](#).

Most people who call themselves education reformers have embraced rigid, technocratic, highly systematized and numbers-driven approaches to accountability. The great benefit claimed for this system is that it is outcomes-based rather than inputs-based.

A few of us, however, think that all this technocracy is precisely what we have been fighting against all along. It is essentially an extension of the old regime’s philosophy: We’re the education experts, and we know best! It’s just as impersonal and unresponsive to the real needs of real people as the blob. It’s as if we defeated the Soviet Union, and then celebrated our victory by imposing communism on Western Europe and North America.

However, those of us who resist technocracy have not done an adequate

job of casting a vision of what we think real accountability would look like. *Talking points and canned rhetoric about “markets” and “competition” are woefully inadequate to the needs of the present moment.*

It's not that the things we're saying are wrong. We just aren't getting to the heart of the matter because we are not challenging our nation to re-ask itself the big questions about education: What is the purpose of education? Who has final responsibility for it and why?

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