

Let's Have a Public Debate Over the Goals of Education!

by Kathy Emery, PhD

Mke4think@hotmail.com

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Although the failure of No Child Left Behind now seems more likely than not, it is not too late for it to succeed. . . . And if the law does, in the end, fail . . . its failure was not an accident and was not inevitable, but was the outcome we chose. "What It Takes to Make a Student," Paul Tough, *New York Times Magazine*, 11/26/06

California doesn't have the choice to "cut and run" when it comes to our schools. But simply "staying the course" is also not a winning strategy. . . . At the very least, [Schwarzenegger] should convene a summit of all the key education stakeholders in the state. California needs to pursue new strategies that do not undercut reforms being implemented, but which significantly enhance them. "New strategies in Education War," editorial, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 11/26/06

I read the *New York Times*, not because I believe it's boast—"all the news that's fit to print"—but because I find it a good source of information on what the powers-that-be think. If I am right about that, then the thinking by the high and mighty about corporate-engineered high-stakes testing these days is not too different from that about the neo-conservative engineered invasion and occupation of Iraq. In both war and peace, the "stakeholders" realize they are not winning but still believe that they have the ability not to lose. The voters, however, have indicated a rejection of such thinking in the recent election. While all politics may not be local, the recent school board elections have indicated that locally-determined solutions, rather than "enhanced" federal and state top-down solutions need to be considered. In January, a new progressive majority on the school board will take over in time to consider the recommendations of the Small School Community Advisory Committee.

With the election of Jane Kim and Kim-Shree Maufas last month, San Francisco has the opportunity to go ahead with a small schools policy. While no silver bullet, such a policy, at the very least, will create the possibility of bringing in much needed foundation money to a fiscally strapped district and allowing a much needed public debate over what the goals and methods of education should be (a debate that has been squelched during last 25 years).

The newly constituted school board will also be hiring the next superintendent of schools. This will be the most important decision the board will make and one that *all* the "stakeholders" in San Francisco, not just big business, would be wise to join in on. Will the next superintendent of SFUSD, as did the previous one,

- meet with business groups regularly behind closed doors while forcing parents, students and school staff to communicate only through pickets and bullhorns outside on the streets?
- direct her staff to refuse requests for information by school board members and reporters?
- prevent district employees from speaking their minds, particularly when they are speaking "truth to power?"
- hire national corporations, instead of local community-based organizations to enhance school services?
- Spend lavish amounts of money on "consultants?"

The answers to these questions will, in large part, determine whether or not San Francisco will "stay the course" that both Bill Rojas and Arlene Ackerman set for it.