

# The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choice Are Undermining Education

By Diane Ravitch

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## The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choice Are Undermining Education By Diane Ravitch

A passionate plea to preserve and renew public education, *The Death and Life of the Great American School System* is a radical change of heart from one of America's best-known education experts.

Diane Ravitch—former assistant secretary of education and a leader in the drive to create a national curriculum—examines her career in education reform and repudiates positions that she once staunchly advocated. Drawing on over forty years of research and experience, Ravitch critiques today's most popular ideas for restructuring schools, including privatization, standardized testing, punitive accountability, and the feckless multiplication of charter schools. She shows conclusively why the business model is not an appropriate way to improve schools. Using examples from major cities like New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, Denver, and San Diego, Ravitch makes the case that public education today is in peril.

Ravitch includes clear prescriptions for improving America's schools:

- leave decisions about schools to educators, not politicians or businessmen

- devise a truly national curriculum that sets out what children in every grade should be *learning*


- expect charter schools to educate the kids who need help the most, not to compete with public schools

- pay teachers a fair wage for their work, not “merit pay” based on deeply flawed and unreliable test scores

- encourage family involvement in education from an early age

*The Death and Life of the Great American School System* is more than just an analysis of the state of play of the American education system. It is a must-read

for any stakeholder in the future of American schooling.

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## The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choice Are Undermining Education By Diane Ravitch Bibliography

- Rank: #11670 in Books
- Brand: Basic Books
- Published on: 2016-06-28
- Released on: 2016-06-28
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.25" h x 1.00" w x 5.50" l, .75 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 400 pages

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Review

***Los Angeles Times***

“*The Death and Life of the Great American School System* may yet inspire a lot of high-level rethinking.”

**Valerie Strauss, *Washington Post***

“Her credibility with conservatives is exactly why it would be particularly instructive for everyone—whether you have kids in school or not—to read *The Death and Life of the Great American School System*.”

***Booklist*, starred**

“For readers on all sides of the school-reform debate, this is a very important book.”

***Library Journal*, starred**

“[A]n important and highly readable examination of the educational system, how it fails to prepare students for life after graduation, and how we can put it back on track.... Anyone interested in education should definitely read this accessible, riveting book.”

**Howard Gardner, Hobbs Professor of Cognition and Education, Harvard Graduate School of Education**

“Diane Ravitch is the rarest of scholars—one who reports her findings and conclusions, even when they go against conventional wisdom and even when they counter her earlier, publicly espoused positions. A ‘must’ read for all who truly care about American education.”

***Wall Street Journal***

“Ms. Ravitch [is] the country's soberest, most history-minded education expert.”

***Christian Science Monitor***

“Ravitch's hopeful vision is of a national curriculum—she's had enough of fly-by-night methods and unchallenging requirements. She's impatient with education that is not personally transformative. She believes there is experience and knowledge of art, literature, history, science, and math that every public school graduate should have.”

***National Review***

“The book intelligently and readably addresses today's education controversies, using a combination of anecdotes, case studies, and statistics.... [I]t's a must-read for education policymakers at all levels of government.”

***Time Magazine***

“Ravitch's critique is an essential one—passionate, well considered and completely logical.”

**Jay Matthews, *WashingtonPost.com***

“Ravitch is our best living historian of education. In my view she is the best ever.”

### ***Boston Globe***

“The book that follows is, if not a mea culpa, perhaps something more valuable—a fiercely argued manifesto against fads in education reform and for public schools, and the teachers and students who inhabit them.”

### **Linda Darling-Hammond, Charles E. Ducommun Professor of Education, Stanford University, and Founding Executive Director, National Commission for Teaching & America's Future**

“Diane Ravitch is one of the most important public intellectuals of our time. In this powerful and deftly written book, she takes on the big issues of American education today, fearlessly articulating both the central importance of strong public education and the central elements for strengthening our schools. Anyone who cares about public education should read this book.”

### **E. D. Hirsch, Jr., author of *Cultural Literacy*, *The Schools We Need*, and *The Making of Americans***

“No citizen can afford to ignore this brave book by our premier historian of education. Diane Ravitch shines a bright, corrective light on the exaggerated claims of school reformers on both the left and the right, and offers an utterly convincing case for abandoning quick fixes in favor of nurturing the minds and hearts of our students from the earliest years with enabling knowledge and values.”

### ***New York Times***

“Ms. Ravitch...writes with enormous authority and common sense.”

### ***The Nation***

“In an age when almost everybody has an opinion about schools, Ravitch's name must be somewhere near the top of the Rolodex of every serious education journalist in this country.”

### About the Author

**Diane Ravitch** is Research Professor of Education at New York University and a historian of education. She is the former Assistant Secretary of Education and a former member of the National Assessment Governing Board, which oversees the National Assessment of Educational Progress, the federal testing program. The author of ten books, including *Reign of Error: The Hoax of the Privatization Movement and the Danger to America's Public Schools*, Ravitch lives in Brooklyn, New York.

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