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VIRTUAL LEARNING FOUNDATION FOR EDUCATION REFORM

Analyses of Obama’s Proposed Reform of No Child Left Behind; Race to the Top Grants

Paul E. Peterson, Author

Saving Schools: From Horace Mann to Virtual Learning

(Cambridge, MA) --Paul E. Peterson’s new book, *Saving Schools: From Horace Mann to Virtual Learning* (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press; March 30, 2010; \$25.95) traces the story of the rise, decline, and potential resurrection of American public schools through the lives and ideas of six mission-driven reformers: Horace Mann, John Dewey, Martin Luther King Jr., Albert Shanker, William Bennett, and James Coleman. For more information, see savingschools.net

Peterson’s book culminates with an analysis of virtual learning, which tells the story of the trials and triumphs of Julie Young, CEO of Florida Virtual School in Orlando, Florida,

“High school continues to be one of our more troubled educational institutions; nationwide, today’s average 17 year old performs no better on math and reading tests than those attending school in 1970. To address this urgent need, we must give students a choice between online and classroom opportunities,” Peterson says.

Saving Schools explains how past reformers have tried to customize education to each child, but instead they have centralized power in the pursuit of that goal. As a result, control has shifted away from families and communities to states, collective bargaining agreements, courts and the federal government. In the end, “learning has stagnated,” the author says.

But the good news, he reports, is that powerful computers, internet games, broadband, open source platforms, three-dimensional visualization and multiple other innovations give us a chance to customize learning to the needs of each student. At the high school and the middle school level, online learning can become a major complement to the brick-and-mortar school. Education can be finally customized to the needs of each student.

Peterson says that federal policy needs to find ways of encouraging states to give students the chance to choose the online or classroom courses and teachers that work best for them. “The goals of past reformers will then be pursued in a new and meaningful way,” he concludes.

Paul E. Peterson, Shattuck professor of government, is the director of Harvard University’s Program on Education Policy and Governance, editor-in-chief of the journal *Education Next*, and a senior fellow of Stanford University’s Hoover Institution. In addition to discussing the prospects for virtual learning, he is available to speak on:

- Obama Administration’s proposal for **new legislation to replace No Child Left Behind**
- **Merit Pay, Teacher Tenure and Teacher Certification**
- **Race to the Top Grants** and impact for each state’s educational policy
- Impact of past reforms—**progressive, civil rights, accountability**—on today’s schools.

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