

## **Trish Gorham, OEA President, responds to March 4 New York Times Article**

The New York Times article on March 4 by Motoko Rich paints a fairly accurate picture of the conflicting visions for a quality public education between educators in the classroom and philanthrocapitalists in the boardroom.

The headline, "Oakland District at the Heart of Drive to Transform Urban Schools" lays out the challenge ahead for those who wish to strengthen and support democratically run public schools.

Even more telling is the headline of the print version of the story on March 5: "Oakland Is Flash Point in Billionaire's Push for Charter Schools". The goal of increased privately run charter schools is clearly advanced in the policies rampant among those superintendents trained by the Broad Academy, the central administrators implanted with salaries paid for by Broad, and the school board members across the country whose campaign coffers are filled by "businessmen with grand ambitions to remake public education."

Assigning motives to Superintendent Wilson is a diversion from focusing on policies, no matter who brings them to the table, which promote disruption and decreases support; it's not the man, it's the plan. But, if he is actually unaware of Broad's ambitions, I suggest he read Broad's handbook on closing schools referred to in the article and the leaked strategy to take over fifty percent of Los Angeles public schools.

Have we seen great success as a result of the business model, top down decision making? Has a decade of school closures, disruptions of leadership and staff, mandated curriculum that is undone by a new mandated curriculum every other year, redesign after redesign, and more and more standardized tests produced the results of the stated "grand ambitions" or has it made the public schools more vulnerable to charters cherry picking students away from them? Have the four Broadies out of the seven superintendents in the last 13 years made a significant difference with their "reforms"? If the answer is no, then we clearly need to ask why they are still seen as viable? Deep pockets and Broad's assessment that the placement of his minions "has been a worthwhile investment".

The only positive stated was the increase in achievement levels on the state test (a dubious metric). But one accomplished **not** by administrators but by teachers.

And a common enrollment system will bring about some promised outcomes? It sure hasn't in Washington and New Orleans. It has promoted growth of charters and other non union schools in Denver. And it is being resisted in Boston with as much fervor as in Oakland. The OUSD School Board will have absolutely no legal authority to enforce promises made by charter schools in order to become part of this process. They will continue to enroll students with learning disabilities at a lower rate, will continue to counsel out students with challenging behaviors, and will continue to push out students with low achievement levels.

These "Charter Compacts" and "One Application" procedures did not come about as a result of a study of what works but as a result of being financed and promoted by those noted experts in education: Bill Gates and the Walton-Walmart Foundation.

The California charter law is mightily flawed and is clear on how easily a charter can be approved. Because of that, there has not been a large resistance in Oakland mounted to combat charter applications. Given their now apparent campaign to supplant rather than supplement the public school system, maybe we were too kind. Supporters of an accountable and transparent education system are not worried about competition. What we will continue to fight is a system with its thumb on the scale in favor of balkanizing our schools, segregating our students, and privatizing public services.

Sorry, but there will be no, as Dean Pianta stated in the article, "moving past the polarized sense of reform that we have right now". In most areas of school improvement, the lines are clearly drawn. Which side are you on?