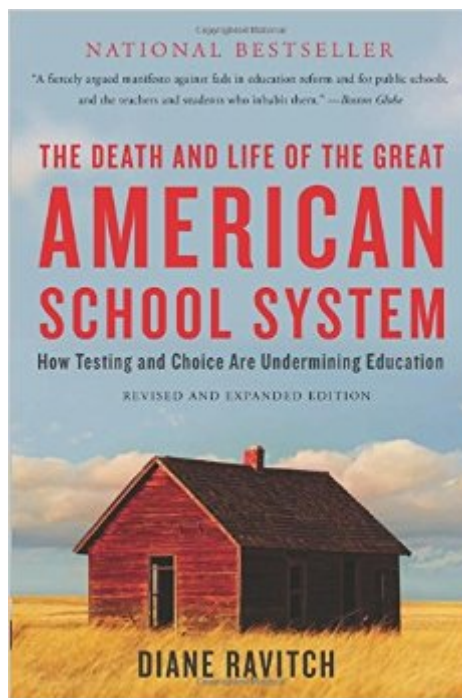


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# The Death And Life Of The Great American School System: How Testing And Choice Are Undermining Education



## Synopsis

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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The first publication of this bestseller was a scathing review of the "accountability" and privatization movement taking place in the school system. In this second edition, Ravitch deepens her criticisms of top-down changes to education, no longer advocating for the national standards and common curriculum that she still championed before Race to the Top (RttT) really took off. In-line with other social scientists, she concludes that the past decade of federal and state marketization of schools wreaked havoc on schools. We are now faced with an impending teacher shortage, "demoralized" existing faculty, and widened achievement gaps within and across states. It is definitely worth picking up this revised edition, even if you read the first one. This isn't one of those new editions of a book where they updated a few dates or renamed or re-organized some chapters.

Diane Ravitch's 'The Death and Life of the Great American School System' expertly discusses the 'reform' movement that has upended K-12 public education during the last quarter century-- 'No Child Left Behind,' Common Core, Race to the Top, charter schools, standardized testing run amok, teacher evaluations based on those standardized tests, 'privatization' of schools, closing non-performing schools, etc. Ravitch convincingly argues that most - perhaps all - of these reforms have had minimal effect on the quality of education that K-12 students receive or on what those students actually learn. She archly refers to most of these 'reforms' as (correctly) 'fads,' with little or no empirical evidence to support them. Three things that Ravitch does not treat, or discusses only briefly, are changes in K-12 education over (say) the past 50 years. First is the role of the student. At page 172, she offers this brief comment, but does not elaborate this critical factor. "...the federal accountability scheme (has no) measures ...of students' diligence, effort, and motivation. Do they attend school regularly? Do they do their homework? Do they pay attention in class?" In terms of the deterioration of American public education over the past 50 years, if it has deteriorated, this topic deserves attention, but Ravitch does not deal with beyond the brief quotation. Second is the effect of changes in the teaching profession between (say) 1965 and 2015. In the sixties, teaching was one of the few professions open to intelligent and qualified females. Beginning in the seventies, females increasingly began to migrate toward careers in law, medicine, and business. Has this sea change affected the \*quality\* of the K-12 teaching profession? Ravitch does not discuss this issue. Finally, Ravitch does not discuss the 'political correctness' factor that transformed K-12 public education beginning in the seventies. During the sixties, middle schools in New York State (where I grew up) were routinely stratified by perceived student capability-- class 8-1 was for the incipient Einsteins, class 8-9 was for the dolts. In high school, the higher tiers were moved onto a 'college

preparatory' track, and the class 8-8 and 8-9 students were shunted to a 'vocational' track, where the high school courses were (mysteriously) called 'shop.' (This is still the prevailing model in Europe and much of Asia.) In the seventies, New York State, in a spasm of political correctness, abolished stratification. Thereafter, everyone was potentially a college student, and everyone took college preparatory coursework in high school. Did the old system work? Certainly, it was unfair to 'late bloomers,' those students stuck in vocational training who simply had not demonstrated college-level aptitude by grade eight. On the other hand, if you belonged in the vocational curriculum, you had a useful skill set upon the end of grade 12. That is no longer the case since stratification disappeared.

Excellent job filling in happenings from first edition. Unfortunate this is necessary.

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