

# HOW TO SPEND \$100 MILLION TO REALLY SAVE EDUCATION

- IT'S NOT AS EASY AS ZUCKERBERG THINKS / By Anya Kamenetz
- 13 RADICAL IDEAS, FROM CHARLES BEST, RANDI WEINGARTEN, DIANE RAVITCH, AND MORE
- FORGET \$100 MILLION—MICHELLE RHEE WANTS TO SPEND \$1 BILLION / By Jeff Chu

**T**HE ELITE HAS BECOME OBSESSED with fixing public schools. Whether it's Ivy League graduates flocking to Teach for America or new-money foundations such as Gates, Broad, and Walton bestowing billions on the cause, "for the under-40 set, education reform is what feeding kids in Africa was in 1980," Newark, New Jersey, education reformer Derrell Bradford told the Associated Press last fall.

Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg is the latest entrepreneur to join this rush. He announced in late September that he planned to donate \$100 million to the city of Newark to overhaul its school system. Zuckerberg, a billionaire by age 23, has little experience in philanthropy and no connection to Newark; he met the city's mayor, Cory Booker, at a conference and was impressed with Booker's ideas for school reform. Plans are still sketchy, but Zuckerberg has endorsed merit pay for teachers, closing failing schools, and opening more charters.

So will this princely sum produce a happy ending? Unlikely. The Zuckerberg gift, like all social action, is based on a particular "theory of change"—a set of beliefs about the best strategy to produce a desired outcome. The United Way has one theory of change about the best way to feed the hungry (direct aid funded by international private donations). Che Guevara had

a very different one (self-help through armed revolution). Unfortunately, the theory of change behind the recent infusion of private money into public schools is based on some questionable assumptions: First, public schools will improve if they harness more resources. Second, charter schools and strong, MBA-style leaders are the preferred means of improvement. And third, a school's success can be measured through standardized testing.

The Newark Public Schools already belie the first assumption. They allocate \$22,000 per year per student, more than twice the national average of \$10,000. Yet Newark graduates only half its charges. Private-sector education crusaders often counter that it's not just money they bring to the table—it's a mind-set. Whether from Silicon Valley or Wall Street, they believe that empowering the chief is the key to a school's success. These execs are expected to foster competition, raise expectations, emphasize metrics, and take on the unions. It's a logic embraced by Mayor Michael Bloomberg, for one, in his decision to appoint a magazine publisher, former Hearst Magazines chairwoman Cathie Black, as the chancellor of the New York City Department of Education.

Zuckerberg wants to follow this playbook by insisting that Newark install Mayor Booker as the head of its school







system, which would require skirting state law. Already, local activists have threatened a lawsuit, a move Zuckerberg shrugs off. "For me, this is more like a venture-capital approach where you pick the entrepreneur, the leader that you believe in, and then give them a lot of leverage," he told the blog TechCrunch.

Venture capitalists, and those who take the VC approach to school reform, love the independently run public schools known as charter schools, another trend Zuckerberg is likely to promote in Newark. Charters function like an educational startup. They give ultimate power to leaders, freeing them from many district rules, including union agreements, and they depend on a round-the-clock work ethic. Sadly, charters fail at similar rates to startups—and when they do, children can be the casualties. A 2009 national study from Stanford's Center for Research on Education Outcomes found that 37% of charter-school students performed worse than their counterparts at public schools: 46% matched up, and just 17% showed clear gains.

Of course, such "performance" stats hinge on one central metric: standardized test scores. And it's here, I believe, that the philanthropic narrative of school reform breaks down. A growing chorus of educational iconoclasts, including Diane Ravitch and Sir Ken Robinson, argue that such scores are exactly the wrong gauges of success. What do they really measure? "Taking tests again and again does not make kids smarter," Ravitch says. "Their motivation does not improve, their interest in their education does not increase, and their achievement does not improve." Judging schools based on test scores means pushing students to conform to a single standard deviation, rather than cultivating their individual passions.

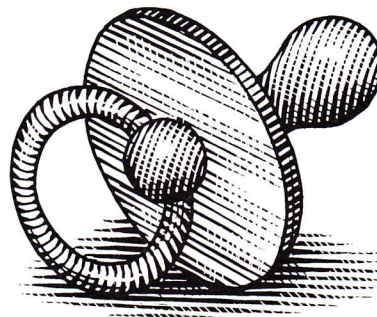
Many of the people who disagree with Ravitch and Robinson (and me, for that matter) are smart and dedicated. The face of their movement is former Washington, D.C., schools chief Michelle Rhee, who is profiled on page 94, revealing why she's pushing her new billion-dollar program. Also included in this package: suggestions from a wide range of experts, from elementary-school principals to philanthropists and union chiefs. Put it together, and you've got a foment of ideas all aimed at benefiting children. Whatever your policy position, that's a good thing.

Our continued prosperity in a postindustrial economy depends on creativity and innovation. And that's why Zuckerberg's decision to follow the popular script disappoints me. I wish he had taken his \$100 million, and some of his smartest people, and designed a new framework for education from the ground up, much the way he built Facebook from a dorm-room idea to a global brand. Is it possible to craft an education platform that's as participatory, offers as much opportunity for self-expression, and is as magnetic to young people as Facebook itself? That would be a theory of change worth testing. —Anya Kamenetz

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# 13 RADICAL IDEAS

HOW WOULD YOU SPEND \$100 MILLION? THE ANSWERS ARE AS VARIED AS THE EDU-EXPERTS WE ASKED.

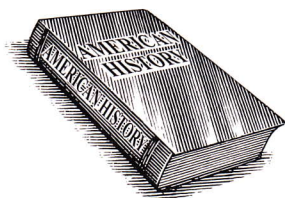


"In the first few years of life, there are 700 new neuron connections formed every second. The achievement gap between a child born into extreme poverty and one of the professional class is evident by age 3. Yet public policy doesn't engage the first five years of life. We still think of those years as belonging to the family, though this period is crucially important to the development of our workforce. With \$100 million, I would build **new centers for preschoolers, infants, and toddlers, with three teachers per classroom.** Data show that kids with this level of instruction and focused play enter kindergarten in a position to compete."

—Daniel Pedersen, president of the Buffett Early Childhood Fund

Illustrations by STEVEN NOBLE

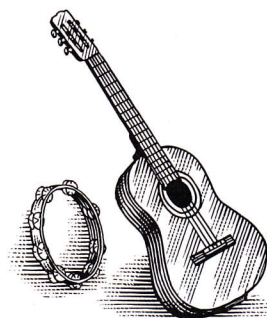




"I can't believe that in all the furor over testing, people aren't debating the test itself, like whether the questions are any good. One hundred million dollars should be used to **empower Joy Hakim to write from scratch standardized tests for all the subject areas and grade levels.**

Ten years ago, Hakim decided to write her own American-history textbook, *A History of US*, directed at middle-schoolers. Textbooks by definition are supposed to be dry and boring, and it's presumed they can never be riveting because they're written by committees of people whose objective is not to offend any groups and to check off state standard 1B and state standard 2D, etc. The result is that textbooks are never fascinating reads. But *A History of US* is fascinating. Hakim brings characters to life in a way that a novelist can. It's politically progressive but also patriotic in a well-reasoned way. You would read this book for fun, even though technically, it's a textbook. What if a standardized test were written not by a bureaucrat but by somebody who deeply loves the subject? If there were such a thing as a standardized test that wasn't crazy boring and dry, then we might actually have a test worth teaching to."

—Charles Best, founder of DonorsChoose

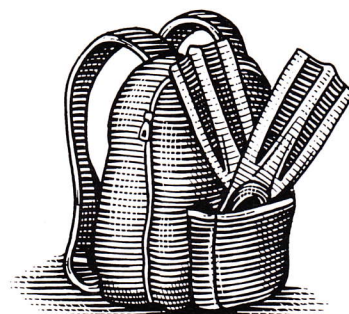
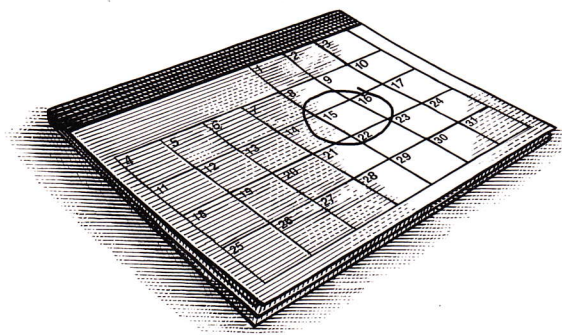


"I'd **focus on the arts—music and visual arts and dance,** all the things that make kids joyful. Kids need a reason to come to school, and testing is not a good reason."

—Diane Ravitch, NYU education historian and author of *The Death and Life of the Great American School System*

"What's missing is more time for parents and teachers to meet. Everyone talks about how important that relationship is, but these 10-minute conferences are of no value and we handicap teachers by having them do this type of work on their own hours. **Give parents time off for parent-teacher conferences,** just as we do for jury duty—it could be an employment policy. And have the student there; it makes the whole meeting more powerful."

—Deborah Meier, senior scholar at New York University and human development leader of the Coalition of Essential Schools



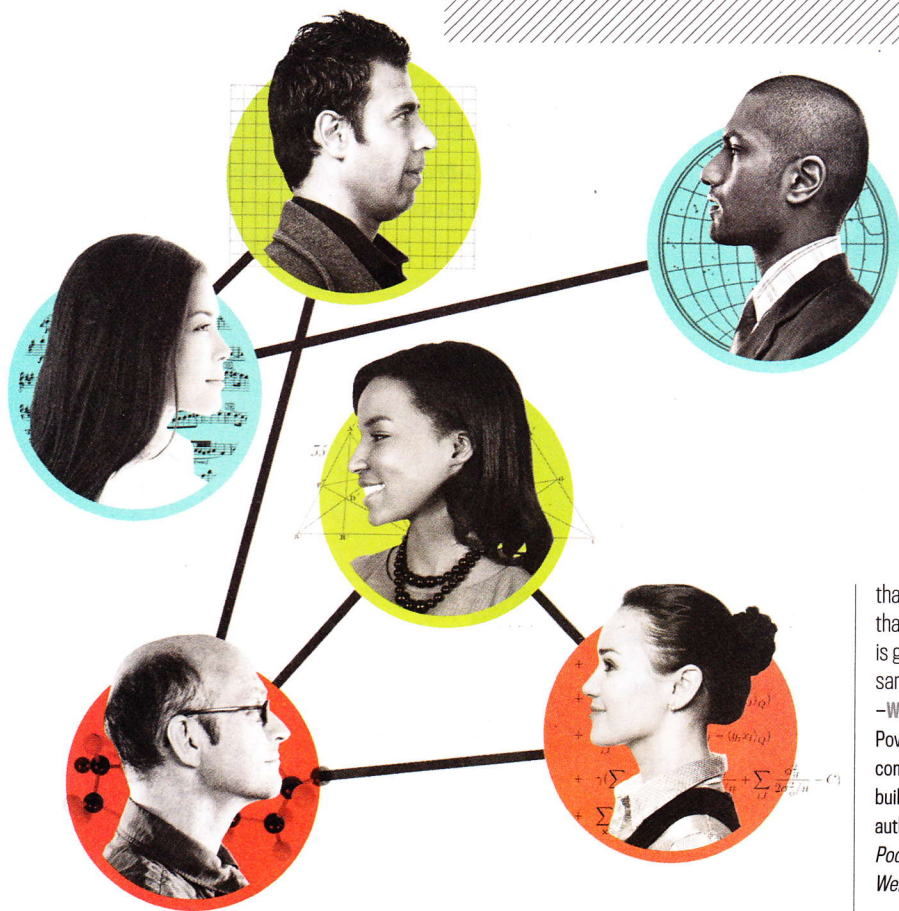
"I would use the funds to attract the best teachers for two programs. One would be a **Saturday academic program for struggling students,** and I would try to determine whether an extra three to five hours a week could drive their reading and math scores in a particular way. I would try the same thing in July, since it's clear that with poor kids, the summer is a time when they really fall behind. We could figure out that you need X hours in reading and X hours in math to make a difference. Then you work on scaling all of that up."

—Geoffrey Canada, CEO of the Harlem Children's Zone



# RETHINK TEACHING

SPENT WELL, \$100 MILLION COULD GIVE THE ENTIRE PROFESSION A BOOST.



"Unlike most professions, teachers don't get enough professional development, and the development they do get is in furtherance of learning how to use some textbook. We're not an agrarian society anymore; we're a postindustrial nation. And the thing that's coming around the corner is going to have something to do with technology or things yet unimagined. We have to do everything in our power to make kids prepared for that. The question I often ask is whether or not teachers are

prepared for it. I would **establish urban think tanks for teachers—a dedicated space to think about public education and how to change it**, to identify different approaches that teachers can bring back to their classrooms."

—Damian Jones, assistant principal at Francis W. Parker, a private school in Chicago

"I definitely wouldn't try to do what we're currently doing better. The old system is becoming so irrelevant to the way the world works. I would spend \$100 million on freeing up educators—one day a week, maybe—to talk and figure out how to create something different, not just better; how to teach learning skills, not just content; and how to **turn classrooms into laboratories, workshops, and places of performance**. What's killing us now is the standardization that's happening in schools. God,

that's *just* what we need—that every kid in the country is going to learn the same thing."

—Will Richardson, cofounder of Powerful Learning Practice, a company that helps schools build online communities, and author of the book *Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts, and Other Powerful Web Tools for Classrooms*

"I would **build an online professional-development platform for teachers**. They could upload videos of their own practices and have them graded by their peers and experts against a series of rubrics. Then other teachers could log on and search for, say, group discussions and the best (or the worst) videos to watch and learn from. It'd be a tough sell for some teachers, but for those who don't have access to mentors or who teach in remote locations, it'd be the best solution. We could also make the platform more social, so whenever teachers search for a topic, they're served a

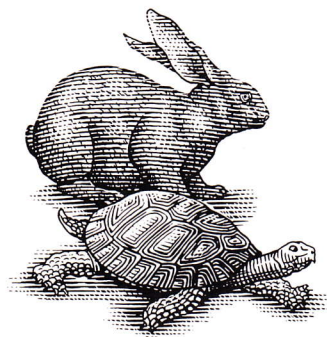
random clip and asked to critique and grade it. Just being able to define what we mean by good teaching is highly contentious, but it's a necessary step. If we're going to help some random teacher in the middle of nowhere improve his or her practice, we have to define what good teaching looks like. We have to say, 'Yeah, that's a 1,' or, 'Yeah, that's a 4.'"

—Dan Meyer, former math teacher; current PhD candidate at Stanford; and author of *Dy/dan*, a math-teaching blog

"Let's make teaching a year-round profession and **expand the school year—not the 180 instructional days for students, but the time for teachers to work and plan together**. We need more time for teachers to collaborate, so they're not so isolated in their classrooms. And I would put instructional coaches in every school. They would go into classrooms with a shared research base on what good instruction is and they would coach teachers. So when you go to these schools, you'd see similar types of good teaching taking place."

—Fred Tempes, director of WestEd's Comprehensive School Assistance Program

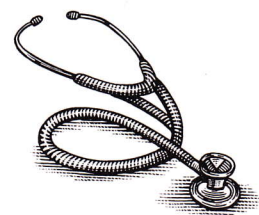




"I would build more high-performing charter schools, like the ones we've opened in Houston. Kids with a seat in these schools will average significantly higher wages over their lifetime than if they weren't at these schools. But it also creates the FedEx effect: Where FedEx's success forced the U.S. Postal Service to offer overnight delivery, something it thought couldn't be done,

charter schools force the district to compete and improve. Public schools are feeling very accountable today, but they feel very accountable to the state and federal government, their biggest funders. The main focus from **schools should be looking at the kids and parents as the customers** they're serving."

—Mike Feinberg, cofounder of KIPP, a network of free, college-preparatory public schools across the U.S.



"I would use the \$100 million to **improve coordination among different education services**. The majority of schools do not have direct access to all of the kinds of support their students need—whether it's social, like mentoring, or a health check for asthma or vision—all of the things we know affect a student's academic performance. Those resources are not always talking to each other. I would pull together a panel with representatives from each of those agencies and task them with developing a structure to channel their resources. For example, now kids who get in trouble get a probationary officer who ends up being a mentor for that child. But if we just match a student to a mentor the minute he starts to fall behind—before he gets in trouble—it'd be a lot less expensive. Today we're spending more on the students who have already fallen off the track than we do on keeping students on track."

—John Jackson, CEO of the Schott Foundation for Public Education

"Lowering class size is one of the most important things. We have 35 students in our sixth-grade classes. Breaking that size down would mean **more attention on each child and more differentiated instruction**. After that, I would love to bring on the interactive whiteboards."

—Cole Young, principal of Humboldt Elementary School in Arizona and winner of the 2010 Terrel H. Bell Award, given to a handful of principals by the U.S. Department of Education



"Keep schools open for instructional services—**before- and after-school programs, GED programs, recreational activities**—for both kids and their families."

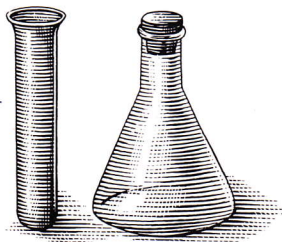
—Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers





"I don't care whether they're poor or what color they are, 14-year-olds are only making 14-year-old decisions. They're goofy. At East Side Prep, a private school in California that serves almost exclusively black and Latino students, **every student meets daily with a tutor.** Practically, it allows teachers time to plan together. It eliminates the stigma of 'Oh, you have to go to a tutor,' because everyone has to. And there's less time for kids to be left up to their own devices."

—Gloria Ladson-Billings, author of *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children*



"Public education right now is like telling doctors and nurses that they have to save lives without any materials: You can't have any tools, you can't have any medicines, but you still have to save lives—and if you don't, we're going to punish you in some way. That's what education feels like. We're expected to produce great citizens after students go through 12 years of school, but we're not given any tools to make that happen. I would make sure that we have **updated textbooks in the classrooms, supplies for labs, and instruments for music.**"

—Kara Smith, teacher at Lake City High School in Idaho

# BUILD A BETTER CLASSROOM

KIDS SITTING IN A GRID OF DESKS, LISTENING TO A LECTURE? HOW VERY QUAIN. HERE'S HOW TO PROPEL CLASSROOMS INTO THE 21ST CENTURY.

## A | PERSONALIZED SCHEDULES:

"The model we have now is one teacher and 28 kids in a box, and when we receive more dollars, our instinct is to hire more people. Education has suffered from a lack of imagination over the past 100 years. Personalized education means literally knocking down the walls between classrooms to create large, open spaces and 9 or 10 different stations where kids can learn—some staffed by teachers, some staffed by virtual tutors, some with kids working independently on computers or in groups. Each day, the kids come in and look at monitors to see which stations they should be working at, like the monitors you might see at an airport."

—Joel Rose, CEO of School of One

## B | TELEPRESENCE:

"A French-language class could connect with students in Paris for two-way communication or a class could invite a remote lecturer. At one pilot program in Arizona, the district delivered Calculus III to three different schools with five students per site, and it was cost effective. Learning today is not confined to the four walls of a classroom."

—Renee Patton, U.S. public sector director of education at Cisco

## C | BEAUTIFUL BUILDINGS:

"The environment in which a class is happening has a humongous psychological impact on both teachers and students. We're asking children to be in these places for eight hours a day—they're institutionalized, prisonlike, decrepit, with no lights or windows or books. It's not sending a great message about what we value—it's saying we don't value them, we don't value schools."

—Justine Haemmerli, program administrator for graduate/public-school partnerships at Bard College

## D | INTERNET EVERYWHERE:

"The idea of a computer lab is misguided. Every student should have direct access to the Internet. This changes the role of the teacher in a classroom, from a purveyor of preexisting knowledge with a frontal presentation into more of a coach. The teacher could provide a starting point for a theme, to unify and excite the class, and then spend time with individuals to see where they get stuck or motivated or excited. The transformation in education will be massive, and if we let the Internet do its thing, the textbook market could go from \$8 billion to \$800 million to \$80 million, and yet there will be more and better content and it will be available to more people."

—Albert Wenger, managing partner at Union Square Ventures

## E | DIGITAL LEARNING LIBRARY:

"The iPad is a really good platform for the classroom because you can embed curriculum-based videos and games. Having a much more interactive experience for kids makes a huge difference in getting them excited and focused. Kids are instinctively creative—it's about fostering their inventiveness, not just drills."

—Paula Kerger, CEO of PBS

## F | FLEXIBLE FURNITURE:

"We need to create a dynamic learning environment, so a lot of different kinds of things can happen that appeal to different learners at different times of the day. Students sit for seven hours a day in desks that are attached with a metal bar to chairs; they are incredibly uncomfortable. VS America designs school furniture that is flexible and allows students to move. I think creating flexible spaces that teachers can reconfigure—to encourage collaborative, project-based learning—is really effective at engaging students."

—Laura Stein, associate creative director at Bruce Mau Design and creative director and designer for the book *The Third Teacher*

—Interviews by Rachel Arndt, Elizabeth Green, Anna Phillips, and Maura Walz



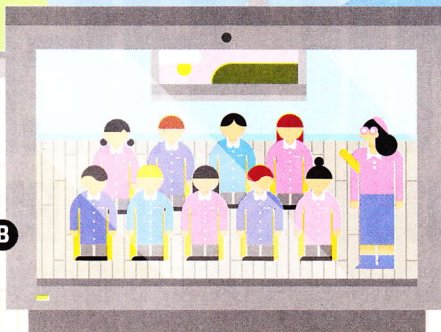
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## TODAY'S SCHEDULE

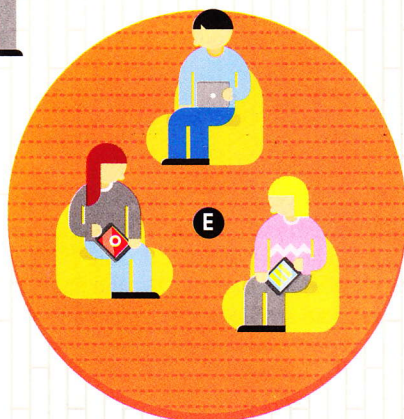
02-14-2011

Suzy Que	Morning	Tutor Time
Chris Firth	Morning	Reading
Will Dunham	Morning	Math Games
Carl Boyer	Morning	Math Games
Jill Taylor	Afternoon	Reading

B



E



D



F



C

