

Op-Ed Responding to David Brooks’ column

Target Audience: New York Times readers

Message goals: support statement defending vision of “broader, bolder” group

Original Op-Ed: <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/13/opinion/13brooks.html>

Pitch

In the interest of continuing the vital debate about education, the *New York Times*’ readers deserve to hear a better description of the Economic Policy Institute’s “broader, bolder approach” than how columnist David Brooks has characterized it.

In a June 13, 2008 editorial, columnist David Brooks dismissed a statement from the Economic Policy Institute (signed by 60 superintendents, former White House officials, and other education experts—including PTA National President Jan Harp Domene) as being dedicated to the “status quo.” In a July 29, 2008 op-ed, Mr. Brooks returns to the issue of education, correctly identifying it as “the biggest issue.” Mrs. Domene would like to highlight that EPI’s “broader, bolder approach” is not advocating for spending more money on “what we’re already doing,” but in fact is suggesting a largely unimplemented policy—significantly so in the communities where it’s needed most. Furthermore, EPI’s recommendations are based on decades of research—research that Mr. Brooks himself then lauded on July 29, but strangely did not acknowledge as being central to the EPI’s ideas, and whose author (James Heckman) is also one of the EPI statement’s signatories. In fact, the EPI’s approach is focused greatly on narrowing the very gap that Mr. Brooks has justly pointed out as something that “will shape the destiny of the nation.”

Piece

Re-imagining a 21st century education

*A response to David Brooks’ recent columns on ‘A Broader, Bolder Approach to Education’
-By Jan Harp Domene, PTA national president*

There is nothing ironic about the name *A Broader, Bolder Approach to Education*. There is nothing “status quo” about providing quality early childhood education to millions of kids who are currently without it. And there is nothing to suggest that new curriculum, instruction, assessment, and teacher development—based on what actually helps students learn—are “the same old things.” Contrary to what you may have read recently in David Brooks’ column, the *Broader, Bolder Approach* is not dedicated to spending more money on things already being done, but rather re-imagining what a 21st century education should encompass.

As PTA national president, I signed the *Broader, Bolder Approach* statement without hesitation; what it proposes are education policies rooted in decades of research showing the connection between a student’s achievement and their environment, including family involvement, early learning, health, poverty, and a child’s development outside the school walls. Those years of research are now telling us that our concept of education existing solely in the classroom is a terribly outdated one.

By encouraging our families, schools, and communities to work together—supporting learning at home, in the classroom, and in our neighborhoods—we will be providing children their best chance to develop into great citizens and productive members of the workforce. Our current national education policies too often ignore the impact environment has on student achievement; focusing only on school improvements and test-based accountability will merely address the symptoms of a suffering system, not its root causes.

Opponents of our approach would have you believe that we—I and the other co-signers: education experts, superintendents, and other school advocates—are uninterested in improving our nation’s schools or implementing any form of accountability. In truth, an aggressive school improvement policy is the very first pillar of the *Broader, Bolder Approach*, and I assure you that the millions of PTA parents whom I represent are most certainly looking for accountability in their schools.

What my co-signers and I call for are education reforms that improve our schools, but also acknowledge and respond to the environments that our diverse students come from. Too many American children are entering our schools unprepared to learn—whether that’s due to lack of parent involvement, limited access to quality pre-K schooling, insufficient healthcare, or cultural barriers.

Yet students of parents with all levels of education experience excel when their families support them. Students of all ethnic backgrounds have demonstrated higher achievement when given access to pre-school, after-school, and summer programs. Students from across the socio-economic spectrum show greater cognitive development when given access to quality healthcare. Our nation’s achievement gap exists, in part, because these proven strategies have not been implemented in the communities where they’re needed most.

If we are truly committed to providing every child with an equal opportunity to succeed, then we must accept that we all have a part to play in their education. Families, schools, and communities, nurturing all of our children’s development, and not just that which takes place during school hours—this is how we will ensure that truly no child is left behind.