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*Storm Warnings for America's Public Schools*  
*by Paul A. Moore*  
*Guest Commentator*

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The nearing storm is a creation of this nation's wealthiest and most powerful corporate leaders. They are men who decided on their mission at the Business Roundtable's education meeting in Charlottesville, Virginia in 1989. They came down from that summit as the newly formed Business Coalition for Education Reform and carrying a message for their friends – evacuate the public schools!

The ensuing New Orleans-style exodus has since transformed the public schools into America's Superdome. Huddled inside of those school buildings now are the mostly Black and Latino children of poor and working-class parents. Their broken bodies and spirits will be found amid the wreckage after the very idea of universal public education has been demolished.

The bringers of the storm have a dream and a game plan for making it real. They are men unsated by billions in profits plying young people with X-Boxes, iPods, Big Macs, Air Jordans, cellphones, Sprite, MTV, and B.E.T. They want their cake and they fully intend to eat it too! Their vision of the future includes the transfer of billions of dollars in annual public school funding into their own pockets. Their goal is a downsized and exclusive for-profit school system to train and educate only the children created in their own image and likeness.

But the American people's reverence for equal opportunity stands between the corporate nightriders and their mission. Our history recalls public education as a partner of the abolition of slavery in a grand post-Civil War experiment in democracy. For that reason their designs must be concealed behind the façade of education reform and the smokescreen of school choice. The corporate agents of public school destruction can be difficult to ferret out but look and listen for their rhetoric and there you will find them.

Their game plan is being executed when you hear the men and women – parents – and the boys and girls they are raising – students – described as "stakeholders" along with the teachers and administrators. So completely enthralled are they with the business model of school management, the human beings involved are reduced to nothing more than isolated owners of a speck of a giant corporation. Public schools will be run like Enron until they meet the same fate.

## The Black Commentator – Storm Warnings for America's Public Schools

Their game plan is advanced when a crushing tedium and a spiritless boredom is inflicted on public school children under the guise of "rigor." Testing is for public schools. Start testing the pre-teen child in the third grade. Keep testing every year until the schools become testing factories and then testing sweatshops where children labor to no useful end. The music, art, dance, theater, physical education and vocational classes are for private schools. Recess and field trips are for rich kids!

Their game plan is advanced when teachers are mired in endless, mind-numbing, irrational record keeping requirements because education must be "data driven" to be effective and efficient. They count on the weight of this mountain of meaningless paperwork to contribute to the disillusionment and physical collapse of teachers before the final blows are struck.

Their game plan counts heavily on racism. While they fully intend to leave behind African-American, Latino, Native American and immigrant children, they will wring their hands in public over the "achievement gap" because it helps obscure other gaps in the nation's social fabric. America's household assets gap – the average white family owns 14 times the average Black family – is never factored into test score analysis. Nor the infant mortality gap, more than twice the rate for Black mothers, the life expectancy gap, the health care gap, nutrition gap, the employment gap....

They are forced to buy influence in the Black community. It is enemy territory and snake oil salesmen like Armstrong Williams and charlatans like Rod Paige must carry their message. The US Department of Education had to pass thirty pieces of silver to Williams for his No Child Left Behind promotion. Paige put a blackface on the phrase "the soft bigotry of low expectations" and was able to call the biggest education fraud in history "the Houston Miracle" with a straight face. He was rewarded with a spot in George Bush's cabinet.

Their game day slogan is "No Excuses" because it helps excuse away certain damning realities. Historically low levels of federal education spending and lower state funding of public schools – "No Excuses." The perfect correlation of poverty and low standardized test scores – "No Excuses." The re-segregation of America's schools – "No Excuses." Excuses are reserved for corporate downsizing, the outsourcing of jobs, escaping from pension and health care plans through bankruptcy filings, corrupt accounting practices and insider trading, offshore tax avoidance schemes, and obscene profit making.

Then there is the most potent rhetorical weapon in the CEO's arsenal. They shout it in the faces of 9-year-old children. They bludgeon parents, teachers, administrators, elected school boards and whole school districts with it. Failed! Failure! Failing! F! When the time is right they will condemn the very idea of educating all of America's children – a noble but failed experiment. On the ashes they will create their brave new education system.

Unless! Maybe we are not just stakeholders? Maybe it's not possible for a child to fail? Maybe we are the real power, millions strong and indivisible? Maybe they are just a handful of rich men who can be defeated by all of us together?

*Paul A. Moore Since graduated from the University of Florida in 1982 and has taught social studies at Carol City High School in Miami. He coached the girls' basketball team at the same school for 17 seasons. Moore retired from coaching when he was elected to the Executive Board of the United Teachers of Dade (AFL-CIO, AFT-NEA) as one of three Vice Presidents for High Schools. Moore is an active member of the Florida Coalition for Assessment Reform (FCAR).*