

Like Spokes to a Hub: Chiefs for Change in Bush's Service

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Jeb Bush has a vision to impose his will nationwide, and he enjoys nothing more than doing so in the arena of educational reform. To this end, Bush used his Foundation for Educational Excellence (FEE) to create the offshoot, reform-exclusive club of Bush-serving state superintendents known as Chiefs for Change. The “chiefs” are merely spokes revolving around Bush the hub.

Indeed, if the name “Chiefs for Change” could be reduced to a single word, that word would be Bush. Bush’s FEE created Chiefs for Change, [“to rally behind a common agenda.”](#) highlighted in short form on the Chiefs for Change [member page](#):

Chiefs for Change is a program operated by the Foundation for Excellence in Education, a national 501(c)(3) nonprofit, nonpartisan organization, focused on education reform, state-by-state.

These days, if an organization advertises itself as both nonpartisan and nonprofit, beware: You have stepped into the world of corporate reform, and their agenda is difficult to scrape off of your shoes. Bush is [closely connected](#) to a number of ALEC corporations, including both K12 and Connections Academy (now a Pearson company), which promote virtual education; Charter Schools USA, and APEX Learning.

Forget the kids. There is a LOT of money to be made in education, especially if you’re the Hub.

Bush’s “agenda” is also highlighted in [this 2010 ALEC mailout](#) to legislators and corporate members of its education task force:

*In passing their **comprehensive, linked reforms** beginning in 1999, Florida lawmakers embraced a comprehensive, multifaceted approach to improving academic achievement focused on early childhood literacy as the gateway to learning. **The central Florida reform involved increasing transparency: assigning all schools and districts a letter grade of A, B, C, D, or F.** The other reform elements **combined to spur** improvement as well. **Parental choice** programs for children attending failing schools, low-income students and children with disabilities gave potential exit power for the least advantaged children. **A strong charter school law and virtual education statutes** provide universally available options. Florida embraced **far-reaching alternative teacher certification** paths to improve teacher quality, and curtailed the social promotion of children.*

*Florida lawmakers have continued to update their reforms over time. **Those interested in the latest policy innovations in Florida can contact the Foundation for Excellence in Education.** The Foundation can assist with technical issues, **provide sample rules** created by the Florida State Board of Education and other assistance. [Emphasis added.]*

Bush created Chiefs for Change, an organization for state school superintendents, so that Bush could control reform efforts through those superintendents. Bush wants these superintendents to promote the previously-mentioned reform agenda lauded by ALEC in Washington, DC, in 2010:

*The new policies have many champions, but **a little-known common denominator behind sweeping measures in nearly a dozen states is [Jeb Bush](#)**, the former Florida governor, **who has re-emerged as an adviser to governors and lawmakers, mostly Republicans, who are interested in imitating what he calls “the Florida formula” for education.***

***Mr. Bush, for example, has been closely involved in new education bills and laws in Arizona, Florida, Indiana, Minnesota, Missouri, Nevada, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Utah.** One out of five state school superintendents have joined a group that his national foundation created, [Chiefs for Change](#), to rally behind a common agenda.*

Let's talk about [the “chiefs,”](#) beginning with Tony Bennett formerly of Indiana and now of Florida.

“Chief” Tony Bennett

Of Bennett's time in Indiana, note that [Jeb Bush is the voice behind](#) Indiana school reform:

The most complete adoption of Mr. Bush's approach has been in Indiana, where Gov. [Mitch Daniels](#)'s education talking points in his State of the State speech closely echoed a mission statement of Mr. Bush's foundation.

So, Governor Mitch Daniels “borrowed” Bush's notes, which, as is noted above, are also considered ALEC models.

***“We were able to really use many of their policy positions and implement many of their policies to drive pieces of our reform agenda,”** said Tony Bennett, Indiana's schools superintendent. [Emphasis added.]*

“Driving” reform. Bush is in the driver's seat via Tony Bennett.

In late 2012, Bennett moved from Indiana [to Florida](#), with the same Bush-induced reforms:

*The State Board of Education voted unanimously Wednesday to hire Bennett to oversee the Florida's public schools and colleges. **Bennett is expected to carry over his school***

reform agenda from Indiana that focused on the Common Core State Standards, a set of national benchmarks for reading and math. ...

Bennett's time in Indiana was defined by [a number of initiatives that mirror Florida's school reform efforts](#), including grading schools on an A-F scale, expanding charter schools and voucher programs, evaluating teachers based on student performance and pushing for turnaround efforts in failing schools. [Emphasis added.]

“Chief” John White

How about Chiefs for Change member John White? Before White was a state superintendent, [Jeb Bush used Chiefs for Change](#) to promote this Jindal-selected, former TFAer by influencing the 2011 Louisiana state board of education election in order to “ensure” that the board composition would favor Jindal allies.

The following [October 2011 email](#) was part of a public records request by Donald Cohen of [In the Public Interest](#) and is from [FEE Chief Executive Officer Patricia Levesque](#) to Chiefs for Change members and staff:

Chiefs,

An article on Louisiana state board of education (BESE) races– that will impact selection of the next chief in Louisiana. Gov. Jindal wants John White as next state chief. Governor Bush is lending his support/endorsement to the candidates Gov. Jindal is supporting for the State Board of Ed.

Patricia

Attached to the above email is [this Baton Rouge Advocate article](#) regarding the fundraising of the BESE candidates.

Jeb Bush wanted John White as state superintendent in Louisiana. He used his influence to make it happen. As it turns out, the 2011 Louisiana BESE election was [a monumental example](#) of the power of reformer money; the education reform candidates raised \$2,368,786, compared to the \$199,878 raised by the remaining candidates.

John White is not only now a state superintendent; he is also now a member of Bush's Chiefs for Change, as [this January 30, 2012, email](#) from Bush attests. In this email, Bush underscores his support for Jindal and White.

And what of the “change” that “Chief” White (by way of ALEC, and Bush, and Jindal) is promoting? The showcase of all of this Louisiana reformer money was Louisiana's [Acts 1 \(teacher evaluation\) and 2 \(vouchers\)](#), both of which have been [declared unconstitutional](#) in state court and are currently under appeal.

“Chief Emeritus” Paul Pastorek

John White is not the only Louisiana “Chief” on the Chiefs for Change roster. Former Louisiana State Superintendent Paul Pastorek is an emeritus member of Chiefs for Change. An interesting story about Pastorek: When Jindal replaced Pastorek with White, the word among teachers was that Pastorek had fallen out with Jindal and was being replaced. As a Louisiana teacher, let me say that my fellow teachers and I had no idea just how steeped in corporate reform Paul Pastorek was and continues to be. We did not know that Pastorek was involved with Bush’s Chiefs for Change. (What was Chiefs for Change, anyway? We had no idea. We had no reason to have any idea. We had not yet been ambushed as a profession.)

[This Chiefs for Change bio](#) on Pastorek is laden with Bush-promoted propaganda:

Paul Pastorek fought for a vast amount of education reforms while Louisiana Superintendent of Education, but transforming K-12 education in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina is arguably his most significant accomplishment. After the disaster, Pastorek created the Recovery School District (RSD) to reimagine and revamp the schools under its control, more than 100 of which were failing. In March 2007, while the RSD was working through the aftermath of Katrina and unable to reopen schools, Pastorek worked relentlessly to create more charter schools, increase private funding in education and keep control over state-run schools that other leaders argued should be returned to local control. His efforts to strengthen school accountability have led to a decrease in the dropout rate and the number of schools labeled as academically unacceptable in Louisiana.

Let me quickly address the lies in this bio: RSD was not created by Pastorek, nor was it created after Katrina. RSD is also not comprised of over 100 schools (not sure how Pastorek or Bush would justify the statement, “more than 100 of which were failing”). The dropout rate did not decrease, nor did the number of C, D, and F schools (the current reformer definition of “academically unacceptable”). The first RSD school, Pierre Capdau, was designated as such pre-Katrina and continues to be an RSD school (it received a D in 2012). The one truth here is that RSD is overtaken by charters. However, given the sheer number of RSD schools labeled as D or F in 2012, it is clear that the charters are very much a part of the “failing” designation. For more information on RSD, including the details supporting the assertions in this paragraph, please see [my recent post](#) on the history and issues of RSD.

Like Bush, Pastorek is anti-traditional-public-education, including anti-traditional teachers. At the Teach for America 20th Anniversary Summit (2011), Paul Pastorek participated in a panel discussion of [The Future of School Systems](#). Here is his assessment of the likes of me, the veteran teacher, based upon the blogging of a TFA alum who no longer supports the TFA mission of replacing traditionally trained teachers:

Hungry to please the crowd, he (Pastorek) claims that Teach for America teachers in Louisiana are better than other veteran teachers in Louisiana. He doesn’t mention any data, but he swears it is fact. Everyone is applauding. There’s nothing like

applauding an outright insult to teachers who have dedicated their lives to educating children in Louisiana. The arrogance of this man is shocking. [Emphasis added.]

Why would Pastorek be so biased towards TFA? Well, Pastorek sits on the Broad Foundation board of directors [with TFA founder](#) Wendy Kopp, and TFA is funded by Broad [to the tune of \\$25 – \\$49 million](#). In fact, the Broad Foundation has had [“the Chiefs to dinner”](#) at a time when Pastorek was in New Jersey and meeting with the New Jersey Department of Education. In short, reformer ties overlap to produce a twisted reformer strength.

In [this set of emails](#) obtained as part of a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request in 2011, one can see that Bush’s FEE promoted the Bush education reforms as a model for Louisiana via this email excerpt to Paul Pastorek of a Jeb Bush op/ed. (Reformers are notorious for utilizing op/eds. For more on the reformer use of op/eds, see [this link](#) and [this link](#).)

At the end of this op/ed excerpt, Bush suggests that 50% of a teacher’s evaluation be based upon students’ “empirical evidence.” In 2012, the Louisiana legislature passed [Act 1](#) (mentioned above), which involves basing 50% of a teacher’s evaluation (and, by extension, the principal’s evaluation) on student test scores.

Jeb Bush, governor of Florida from 1999 to 2007 and chairman of the Foundation for Florida’s Future and the Foundation for Excellence in Education, responds to The Times’ March 31 editorial on the state’s new education law, ‘An Average Grade on Tenure Reform.’

What is a great teacher? Today, many people across the country– lawmakers, educators, editorial boards, business leaders, moms and dads– are asking that question.

*Here are a couple of characteristics that all great teachers share. A great educator believes all students can learn. A great educator does whatever it takes to motivate students to learn, and **what is learned by their students is quantifiable and measurable**. A great educator **doesn’t accept excuses, and doesn’t make excuses**, for lack of learning. **If you accept this fundamental premise, then evaluating, rewarding and retaining teachers based on student learning is just plain common sense. This year in Florida, common sense ruled the day....** The result is landmark legislation that recognizes that great teachers make great students. The Times editorial board panned Florida’s landmark legislation to modernize the teaching profession as “average.” It also stated there is no silver bullet for improving public schools or increasing student achievement.*

*Florida has proven the latter point to be true. **Over the last decade, the state has introduced and implemented sweeping reforms to transform education from being at the bottom in the nation to a national model for quality schools.***

*Now, it is forging the path for modernizing the teaching profession by **identifying and rewarding great teachers**, Under the new law, teacher evaluations are no longer purely*

*subjective peer reviews treating those who go the extra mile the same as those who only meet the bare minimum. **For the first time, an objective measure of teacher effectiveness— standardized tests that measure student learning— will be part of annual evaluations.***

Fifty percent of teacher evaluations will be based on what matters most: students' knowledge and skills. Essentially, do students know more at the end of the school year than they knew at the beginning? This common-sense evaluation system provides a healthy balance of empirical evidence and valuable peer feedback. Principals are evaluated based on the same student data. [Emphasis added.]

Bush writes that Florida has had its miracle. But as this Florida teacher attests, [there is no Florida miracle](#). And the [Palm Beach Post](#) isn't buying it, either. Here is an excerpt:

*Former Gov. Jeb Bush has an undeserved reputation as an education reformer. **Florida's recent education progress has come not from implementing Mr. Bush's policies but from cleaning up after them.***

Mr. Bush has been visiting legislators in Tallahassee to talk about education policy. Get out the mops and buckets. Taxpayers also should reach for their wallets, since the former governor's new big ideas involve transferring more public dollars to the for-profit companies behind him.

Mr. Bush's biggest idea, enacted immediately after taking office in 1999, was to give each school an A-to-F grade based on student scores on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test. That misuse of the FCAT continues. The test's many shortcomings were even more serious when Gov. Bush initiated FCAT tyranny. The test covered only a few subjects, students took it long before the end of the school year, and half of elementary and high-school students didn't even take it. Yet the entire school received a grade, on which parents, students and Realtors fixated.

*Gov. Bush also instituted **one voucher program the courts ruled unconstitutional and another "corporate voucher" program that, ironically, lets low-income students avoid taking the FCAT.***

*The Legislature gradually is replacing the FCAT with end-of-course exams. In yet another revision to the grading formula Gov. Bush perversely and prematurely treated as infallible, **Florida made FCAT scores count less in some school grades. Still, Florida in 2011 also required teachers to be evaluated based on FCAT scores, even if a teacher had no students who took the FCAT.*** [Emphasis added.]

[Another critic](#) of Bush's conflict-of-interest-laden "reforms, comments,

*...lobby groups like FEE have too much access and influence with state legislators that allow them to pursue their [financial](#) interests, **like ensuring that the FCAT and charter***

schools continue to be at the center of Florida's education system. [Emphasis added.]

Jeb Bush, creator and commander of Chiefs for Change, is being foolishly and blindly followed by superintendents from several states as he leads them down a destructive road he calls "reform."

"Chief" Stephen Bowen

Let's examine Bush's influence upon [Maine Chief Stephen Bowen](#). In [this set of emails](#) dated October 2011 and obtained by [In the Public Interest](#), Bowen solicits and receives Bush's and other FEE assistance in promoting the reform agenda. Also included in this set of emails is Patricia Levesque's giving Bowen the "heads up" on October 7, 2011, about "requiring new chiefs" to "participate in Partnership for Assessment for Readiness for College and Careers ([PARCC](#)) assessment":

Steve,

I am guessing that Maine was part of Smarter Balanced prior to your becoming state chief. Just wondering if you have had any thoughts about moving to PARCC?

I'm asking because there are some Chiefs for Change members who want to pose the issue in your 2012 planning meeting on whether or not PARCC participation has to be a requirement for new Chiefs for Change members.

Just giving you a heads up.

Patricia

Translation: If you want to be a part of our club, know that we plan to dictate even the assessments your state administers. And the test being not-so-subtly promoted, PARCC, has [recently become its own nonprofit](#). No money-making, [potentially ALEC-connected](#) testing monopoly here....

The benefit of Chiefs for Change membership is its offering of canned legislation for the corporate reform agenda. Feeling overwhelmed, Mr. Bowen? Not to worry. Bush and FEE are happy to run Maine's education system for you. Note the following emails. First, [one from Bowen](#) dated October 18, 2011:

Hi, Patricia.

I am... a bit daunted by what we have coming— the governor wants to do a major push on teacher effectiveness and on school choice as well. I want to do the ABC grading as well this time around, but I don't know that we can pull all of this off. When you suggested that there might be a way for us to get some policy help, it was all I could do not to jump for joy.

I have one person here on policy, and she really does more in the way of bill drafting, etc. I have no political policy staff who I can work with to move all this stuff through the process.

So please keep me posted as you move forward and if you need help with a donor or anything, let me know.

Thanks!

Steve

It's like ordering from a drive-thru menu: "I'll have some teacher effectiveness legislation with side of school choice... no, make that two sides... add ABC grading... and I'd like to supersize it with some policy help."

"Thank you. That'll cost a heap of taxpayer money. Drive to the next window, please, and, as always, thank you for using FEE."

But Bowen offers something interesting in his last statement: "If you need help with a donor...." To what would Bowen need to "donate"? To those Bush wants "on board." (Reread the section on John White for an example of Bush solicitation.)

On October 20, 2011, [Bush emails Bowen](#). Here is an excerpt (obtained by [In the Public Interest](#)):

*During the last year, Digital Learning Now! developed the Roadmap for Reform: Digital Learning, a comprehensive policy guide that provides **specific steps for states to systematically and systemically transform education**. Our goal is to provide you with the strategies and support— such as **model policies**, research, and expert advice from a national network of advocates— **that will allow you to advance and accelerate reforms**. [Emphasis added.]*

And as to that extra FEE assistance, [Patricia Levesque is there to offer help](#) in this October 19, 2011 email:

Let us help.

Matt Ladner can assist with drafting school choice legislation— we should already have model legislation depending upon what type of choice you want to do (e.g. scholarships for kids with disabilities).

Our team can reach out to Sandi Jacobs with NCTQ to see if they have model legislation on teacher quality. Just let us know what you want to put in the bill.

Re: school grading. We already have two versions of model legislation depending upon how much you want to put in statute vs. administrative rule.

Nadia Haberg is our point person on the state of Maine. I'll let her work with your assistant to set up a time for us to have a team call you and hear your thoughts before we start work.

Patricia

Reading emails like the one above galvanizes for me the idea that corporate reform is in it for the approximately half of a trillion dollars in annual public education dollars, nothing more.

Bush definitely is calling the shots when it comes to education policy [in Maine](#):

[Gov. Paul LePage](#) plans to host a conference this month showcasing the controversial education reforms developed by former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush and promoted nationwide by a foundation that Bush founded.

The daylong Governor's Conference on Education March 22 at Cony High School in Augusta gives senior officials at Bush's Foundation for Excellence in Education prominent billing, including executive director Patricia Levesque, a registered Florida lobbyist for digital education companies who has helped shape LePage administration policies in ways favorable to that sector.

The foundation has played an influential behind-the-scenes role in shaping the governor's education agenda, a Portland Press Herald/Maine Sunday Telegram investigation found last year. [Emphasis added.]

And here's the huge Bush payoff:

Bush, who is considered a presidential prospect for 2016, has been promoting a set of reforms he championed while governor of Florida. [Emphasis added.]

Bush-driven reform as a nationwide mandate from a 2016 Bush White House. Is there any sadder thought for public education in America?

Fortunately, [the March 2013 publicizing of](#) the conflict of interest presented by lobbyists/FEE promoters Patricia Levesque and Deirdre Finn in influencing Maine education legislation has resulted in Levesque's becoming "full time employee" of FEE (which, from the volume of and content in the emails released to In the Public Interest, it seems she already was) and is ceasing to be a contracted employee with the lobbying firm Meridian Strategies:

Florida media reported that Patricia Levesque is also becoming a full-time employee of the Foundation for Excellence in Education rather than a contractor paid through her lobbying firm, which represents a number of for-profit education concerns in Florida.

A Maine Sunday Telegram investigation published Sept. 2 revealed the considerable influence that Levesque and other officials in Bush's foundation had over the development of the LePage administration's digital education policies for Maine, including the draft text of a key executive order on the topic.

It also showed the entanglements the Tallahassee-based foundation had with for-profit education providers that stood to gain from the agenda they pushed in Maine and other states, including K-12 Inc. and Pearson's Connections Learning, which have sought to manage virtual charter schools in Maine

Levesque and her then-deputy, Deirdre Finn, have not been employees of the foundation, federal tax returns show, but have been compensated for their work through their lobbying firm, Meridian Strategies, where Levesque has represented the foundation's Florida subsidiary and a range of for-profit education providers before Florida's legislature. ...

Last week, the Florida Center for Investigative Reporting revealed that Levesque's Meridian Strategies has the same post office box address as the foundation.
[Emphasis added.]

How close can two organizations get?

Interestingly, there is no word as to whether Deirdre Finn will also have to cut ties with Meridian. Note that Finn is also double (triple? who knows how many times?) dipping into the Louisiana public coffers via her September 2012 contract to ["manage communications"](#) for the Louisiana Department of Education to the tune of \$12,000 a month.

Here is a [revealing series of emails](#) (procured by [In the Public Interest](#)) between Bowen and Deirdre Finn. They highlight the conflict of interest noted in the article above. Notice the considerable influence FEE has over education legislation:

January 21, 2012. Bowen: *Hi, Deirdre. ... What I'm thinking we should do in Maine is have the governor do an executive order calling on the Department to undertake development of a long-term strategic plan to achieve the 10 DLN [Digital Learning Network] standards. I don't know if you have the language that has been used in another state on this....*

January 22, 2012: Finn: *Steve, that is a great plan. We can definitely help develop an executive order. I believe Governor LePage and Maine will be the first to issue an executive order on the 10 Elements which is spectacular. We do have language from gubernatorial proclamations and legislative resolutions that we can use to get us started.* [Emphasis added.]

Contact between "Chiefs" and FEE in order to have FEE advise and even craft legislation favorable to Bush and Bush-connected corporations is a recurring theme throughout this narrative.

“Chief” Hanna Skandera

The next “Chief” I’d like to examine is New Mexico’s [Hanna Skandera](#). Skandera is [not an educator](#):

*It seems obvious, given [Skandera's] complete lack of educational credentials and her political background, that [Hanna Skandera](#) is a foot soldier in an ideological war taking place right now against working people – teachers and other unionized workers. **This is the national agenda of the organizations she is and has been affiliated with.** ... Her political credentials and affiliations aside, Ms. Skandera can offer absolutely no professional qualifications to be New Mexico’s or any other state’s secretary of education.*

She has no background in curriculum and instruction, yet she feels competent enough to suggest a policy of assigning letter grades to classroom teachers as a solution. Skandera has never had the day-to-day experience of being in charge of a classroom with elementary school children herself, yet she feels competent to evaluate trained, experienced teachers.

*So, then, why is she being vetted as the New Mexico secretary of education? Most likely the answer is **because she was recommended to our new governor by people outside the state who are fronting a national political agenda that is antithetical and indifferent to the needs of the people and children of New Mexico.** [Emphasis added.]*

What “political agenda” is Skandera “fronting”? Why, [Jeb Bush’s](#):

Hanna Skandera “served as the deputy commissioner of education under (Florida) Governor Jeb Bush, where she promoted and implemented middle and high school reforms that instituted greater accountability, incentives for high performance and the end of social promotion....” [Emphasis added.]

Even though the New Mexico constitution requires that the state superintendent be a [“qualified, experienced educator,”](#) Skandera tentatively holds the position, and [amid much controversy](#). If one [follows the money](#), one again lands at the feet of Jeb Bush:

*Skandera has been a contentious figure for her educational reform ideas. But this week, a different issue came up: **Skandera’s frequent out-of-state trips, many of which are funded by nonprofits that contract with PED.***

Travel vouchers—obtained from the state Department of Finance and Administration via a public-records request by the union-funded Independent Source PAC—show that Skandera has traveled to various locations around the country and internationally during her two years in office.

Often, her travel is paid for by groups like the Foundation for Excellence in Education, a nonprofit founded by former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush, which advocates

for the same education reforms—charter schools, third-grade retention and A-F school grading—that Skandera is pushing through in New Mexico.

Here are some of the [actual forms](#) Skandera submitted to FEE for reimbursement. And here is [the September 7, 2011, email](#) in which FEE's Patricia Levesque agrees that Chiefs for Change should foot Skandera's DC trip to testify before congress [in favor of relaxed restrictions](#) for use of federal funding of virtual education:

Hanna has been asked to testify in front of congress. She needs us c4c [Chiefs for Change] to pick up costs. I told her we would. Can you reach out to her and her Asst to help with whatever she needs.

Levesque, Bush's right hand, [lobbies for the groups](#) Skandera promoted before Congress.

This is what corporate reform does: It promotes itself. Not children. Not schools.

Skandera was doing Levesque a favor by testifying on behalf of virtual education. It was the least Levesque could do to pay Skandera's way.

([These emails](#) are really worth the read. In one, FEE's Mary Laura Bragg offers a template email invitation for Skandera to send to "non-Chiefs," inviting them to the FEE Summit in San Francisco in October 2011. Bragg closes the template with, "Regards, Hanna Skandera, fancy title, blah blah.")

But FEE/Chiefs for Change is not the only group reimbursing Skandera. The [FEE-promoted](#), newly-nonprofit, [PARCC, also reimbursed](#) Skandera:

Skandera also serves on the board of the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, a consortium of 22 states "working together to develop a common set of K-12 assessments in English and math"—online evaluations Skandera plans to implement in New Mexico in 2015. Travel vouchers show PARCC paid a total of more than \$2,000 for Skandera to attend board meetings in Washington, DC, and Alexandria, Va.

PARCC, too, has ties to state money: It's run by Washington, DC-based nonprofit Achieve, Inc., which last year landed a \$39,660 contract with [New Mexico's] PED, according to the Sunshine Portal. [Emphasis added.]

In short, Hanna Skandera has no background in education, but she is willing to promote Bush's education reform agenda. In turn, Bush's FEE is more than willing to offer Skandera the same type of educational policy "assistance" that it offered Bowen. Here are some [excerpts of emails](#) between Skandera and FEE's Bragg obtained by [In the Public Interest](#):

Skandera: *Hello! Are you working for the Foundation?*

Bragg: *Yes! Just started on Tuesday, working with Mandy on State Initiatives– the implementation side.*

(Four days pass.)

Bragg: *Hey! What’s the timeline for rollout of A – F grading?*

Skandera: *We are developing rules late summer. We are providing baseline data to districts sometime this fall. We are still finalizing dates. Any chance I can get you out here this fall to help advise us on our literacy initiative?*

Bragg: *I’m at your beck and call.*

Skandera: *Sweet.*

“Sweet,” indeed, for Skandera, who reaps the benefits of appearing to know how to do a job for which she has zero credentials. And sweet for Bush and his effort to promote nationwide his version of educational reform.

Now all he needs is the White House in 2016....

Moving right along....

“Chief” Deborah Gist

Let us now consider Rhode Island’s Deborah Gist, who is [currently in the news](#) for some apparently tasteless tweets offered to her by some Rhode Island students regarding the high-stakes test, the New England Common Assessment Program (NE-CAP).

In [this email](#) obtained by [In the Public Interest](#), Gist solicits assistance from FEE’s Fonda Anderson to secure a donor for Rhode Island’s Advanced Placement (AP) project. Anderson assures Gist that the donation was already approved.

Need some money to get a corporate-reform-friendly program rolling? Just ask Jeb and his FEE.

[AP is a product](#) of the Educational Testing Service (ETS), and ETS just so happens to be an [FEE corporate sponsor](#). By promoting AP, Gist is promoting Bush. By promoting AP, Gist is stuffing public education money into Bush’s and his befriended corporations’ pockets.

In [this February 22, 2012 email](#) obtained by [In the Public Interest](#), Gist admits that ETS is costly for her state, and for guidance, she seeks assistance from her friendly FEE advisor, Fonda Anderson:

Gist: *After I received John's email about Teachscape, I discovered that they're one and the same with ETS, who we'd identified as "the only game in town." ... The problem is that it is expensive.... So, the need remains. ... Any thoughts?*

Anderson: *Deborah, let's schedule a phone call so that I can focus on all it is you need, and how we can work to make that happen.*

FEE is here for you, Deborah. We have the same goal.

Always remember: That upwards-trillion a year in US public education money is THE goal of corporate reform.

Let us not forget that Chiefs for Change and FEE form a mutual favor society. Gist receives the perks of a Chiefs for Change member, such as those "donations", and, in turn, [Chief Gist can promote](#) the previously-mentioned, Bush-pocket-lining Virtual Education Act.

[Gist's reform agenda](#) is quintessential FEE/Chiefs for Change: Virtual education; school grades; comprehensive student data collection system, and an "academy" for "transformative" leaders.

I'm sure Jeb is proud.

"Chief" Chris Cerf

Time to shift our focus to New Jersey's Chief, Chris Cerf. What a story we have here between Cerf and Bush. In 2001, Cerf became president of a company called Edison Education. As [Jersey Jazzman notes](#), Edison "couldn't produce the results it claimed it could." Edison had gone public in 1999 and was in deep trouble by 2003; not wanting corporate reform to ever appear to fail, Jeb Bush used the vast resources of the Florida teachers retirement system to bail out a company that ironically was trying to shut out public school teachers:

Whittle and Cerf needed a buyout; someone with pockets deep enough to take the company private and protect the value of their own shares. Ironically, [their white knight turned out to be funded by none other than the Florida teachers pension fund.](#)

Yes, you read that right: Florida teachers paid for Whittle and Cerf to take their company private - a company that advocated for the continuing corporatization of public schools. Understand that the fund itself was being run by a firm that was engaging in some questionable practices.

*... The deal was approved by the three trustees of the FL pension: CFO Tom Gallagher, then-Attorney General and future-Governor Charlie Crist, **and then-Governor Jeb Bush.***

... So the pensions of Florida teachers were used to rescue a failing company that advocated education policies counter to those of the teachers unions. **This buyout saved the contract of an investment firm that was doing a lousy job managing the pension by playing to the ideological predilections of a powerful governor, who just happened to be the brother of a president who ushered in No Child Left Behind, the law that set the stage for “school choice.”** [Emphasis added.]

It ain't “for the children.” It never was. It is for an ideology that bankrupts most and benefits few. As for Bush and Cerf, well, they're among “the few.”

Chris Cerf has involved himself in other shady and unethical (illegal?) situations. (See this [this article](#) by Leonie Haimson for a succinct yet pointed discussion on Cerf's questionable doings.)

At least he is faithful to the reformer agenda of privatization, and after all, that is what matters, isn't it?

Jeb says yes.

“Chief” Kevin Huffman

Next, let us travel to Tennessee, where “Chief” Kevin Huffman promotes the [same demoralizing, Bush-nodded reforms](#) as his fellow chiefs, including a flawed teacher evaluation system and a pay-for-performance model that has already failed in his state. [As Diane Ravitch notes:](#)

*The Tennessee Education Association sent out this bulletin today. **State Commissioner Kevin Huffman, whose only classroom experience was two years in Teach for America, has plans to adopt every evidence-free, demoralizing tactic in the corporate reform playbook.***

*Huffman is a purveyor of zombie policies. Nothing he advocates has any evidence behind it. **“Pay for performance” has been tried repeatedly for a century and never succeeded. So he wants more of it. It failed in 2010 in Nashville, where teachers were offered a bonus of \$15,000 for higher scores. But Huffman either doesn't know or doesn't care. It's not his money he's wasting.***

***He knows that the state's teacher evaluation system is badly flawed, but he wants to push ahead with it anyway.** Apparently, he wants to break the spirit of the state's teachers. [Emphasis added.]*

In 2012, following Jeb Bush's keynote speech at the [November 2012 FEE Summit](#) in Washington, DC, (a Summit that strategically overlapped with the [2012 ALEC conference in Washington, DC](#). (Note the [sketchy Power Point](#) offered as supporting material.) The message at both conferences is the same: Grade the teachers using student test scores.

It doesn't matter that value-added assessments have a [terrible track record](#). Declare them useful:

*But [Tennessee] state education department spokeswoman Kelli Gauthier said **it's reasonable to expect teachers who do well on observations to also post high value-added scores.*** [Emphasis added.]

The previous statement is in response to [the failure](#) of Tennessee's teacher evaluation system to "identify bad teachers and provide them more training":

The data revealed:

- *More than 75 percent of teachers received scores of 4 or 5 – the highest possible – from their principals, compared with 50 percent scoring 4 or 5 based on student learning gains measured on tests.*
- *Fewer than 2.5 percent scored a 1 or 2 when observed, while 16 percent scored a 1 or 2 when judged by learning gains.*
- *Of teachers who received the learning gains score of 1, the average observational score was, on average, 3.6.*

*In this first state review of evaluations – launched last summer – **the education department suggests some principals will need to be trained again on how to observe teachers.*** It's one of numerous recommendations in a 45-page report that captures thousands of teacher and administrator responses to the evaluation program. [Emphasis added.]

It couldn't possibly be a [fundamentally flawed measurement system](#). It must be that the administrators are wrong about the colleagues they work closely with every day.

Despite the evidence, and because he is Jeb Bush, Bush [continues to promote](#) the broken reforms in Tennessee:

"What you are doing right now is leading the country," Bush told [Tennessee] Governor Haslam in the forum titled "Improving Student Achievement."

He cited Tennessee's legislation in the past few years that has loosened tenure-driven teacher pay, and moves toward tying it more to student achievement.

Many credit the former Florida governor and son of the first President Bush with raising student achievement in his state student choice programs such as vouchers and charters, along with teacher pay tied to student performance. [Let me remind readers of [this Palm Beach Post article](#) blasting Bush's "reforms."]

“Without the legislature, none of the things we did in Florida were possible, and it required a lot of courage for them to do this because I was all in already in,” Bush said before the forum.

The former Florida governor minced no words about what to do with both good and bad teachers.

*“**Pay for successful transfer of teaching to learning, this is what it’s all about,**” said Bush in his closing remarks. “I would argue for teachers who fail, who are not doing that, **get them out of classroom** as soon as possible after remediation hasn’t worked.”*
[Emphasis added.]

The Bush Conceptualization of Teaching as it is tied to Pay for Performance: Open a kid’s head. Pour in the required measure of learning. Close the kid’s head. Get paid.

Huffman also believes in charter schools, so much so that he is [willing to withhold](#) funding from districts wary of charters:

*Huffman recently withheld \$3.4 million from the Metro Nashville school system **because the school board refused to bow to state demands and approve a charter school in West Nashville.** The board claimed **the proposed charter school could not guarantee a diverse student population in the mainly white area of town,** and black community activists claimed **the school would become a publicly funded school only for affluent white children.** [Emphasis added.]*

Why, this sounds like the kind of chief Bush is after.

“Chief” Janet Barresi

Like other Chiefs for Change members, Oklahoma’s Janet Barresi relies upon FEE members such as Patricia Levesque for “help” with promoting Bush-styled reform. (And it will be Bush-styled, since Chiefs for Change was created by Bush’s FEE for the purpose of promoting Bush reform.) Below is [Barresi’s August 10, 2011, request for assistance](#) with Oklahoma’s NCLB waiver:

Patty:

Sec. Duncan called the governor and asked that Oklahoma send the framework document to him next week prior to USDE releasing guidelines. I assume other C\$C folks received the same call. I have a meeting tomorrow with gov staff to discuss. I am putting together my ideas but want to bounce some things off of you or anyone working on this.

Thanks,

Janet

A question that immediately comes to my mind is, Why is Duncan asking for a “framework” for an arguably illegal policy (can Duncan alter federal law by simply saying, We’ll let you states out of the federally-mandated NCLB?) on which he has yet to release guidelines? It seems highly questionable to seek input from a select group (Chiefs for Change) “prior to” general release of guidelines.

And what is Barresi really asking for in this email? Guidance in following an FEE-endorsed direction?

Certainly Barresi’s composed response to Duncan ([dated August 12, 2011](#)) received FEE/Chief nods in its including the following stipulation:

*The [waiver] plan should **grant flexibility only to those states that have demonstrated bold reforms, an effort to implement rigorous standards and an emphasis on accountability.*** [Emphasis added.]

Wait. It gets better:

*In addition, **the plan should adhere to guiding principles provided by Chiefs for Change** in its Statement for Principles of Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (May 19, 2011).* [Emphasis added.]

Translation: We have the answer. We are Chiefs for Change. You want out of NCLB? Do what we say. Grant it, there really is no “out” of NCLB; we’ve only changed the letters from NCLB to RTTT. But we will benefit handsomely from being The Answer.

What if corporate reform is embarrassed by the truth? What if, for example, a report is issued by faculty from two major Oklahoma universities criticizing the capricious school letter grading system of which Bush is so proud? Well, that means that his Chief for Change Barresi might have to go the campaigning [to spread the lie](#) that the authors of the report “privately recanted.” And Bush is there to assist with the cover-up:

The Legislature approved the A-F grading system but Barresi’s department wrote the rules and imposed them with virtually no input from local school officials. Most local superintendents and principals don’t oppose a grading system, but they want it to be consistent, fair and transparent.

A report by senior researchers at OU and OSU concluded that the grading system is “neither clear nor comparable.”

With revelations that the Bush foundation would provide to Barresi “air cover — op eds, tweets, letters to the editor, and even expert testimony at the board meeting if you need it,” it’s not a stretch to conclude they’d be advising Barresi on talking points, too. ...

Wherever Bush's Chiefs for Change have set up shop – like Florida and Oklahoma – Bush's foundation drives policy. And in the event policy goes bad, they orchestrate the spin campaign, too. [Emphasis added.]

Sometimes the truth inconveniently makes itself known and Bush Himself must assist in spreading a concentrated version of the lie. In corporate reform, truth is definitely bad for business.

“Chief Emeritus” Gerard Robinson

If reality breaks through and corporate reform is really embarrassed, well, one might have to “take one for the team.” That seems to be the case for former Florida “Chief” Gerard Robinson, who continues his time with Chiefs for Change as [an emeritus member](#). Even though Robinson resigned “for family reasons,” his departure as Florida’s state education superintendent occurred [amid national humiliation](#):

*...Robinson’s tenure had been dogged in recent months by the **public-relations pounding the department took after FCAT scores collapsed, followed a few months later by the school grades mix-up.***

*The Florida Board of Education was forced to lower passing grades for the statewide writing tests in May **after the passing rate plunged from 81 percent to 27 percent for fourth graders and showed similar drops in eighth and 10th grades.***

Then, in July, the department had to reissue grades for 213 elementary and middle schools and nine school districts as part of a “continuous review process.”

*That came **after the number of schools receiving an “A” had plummeted from 1,481 in 2011 to 1,124 this year.** The new grades showed 1,240 schools getting the highest mark — a jump of 5 percentage points from the first cut of the numbers.* [Emphasis added.]

This scoring capriciousness is not unique to Florida. Regarding Louisiana’s 2012 school performance scores, I have [written](#) two [letters](#) to Superintendent John White and BESE detailing bias and chaotic manipulation of these scores. White and BESE (excepting Lottie Beebe) ignored my concerns, with then-BESE President Penny Dastugue [emailing me](#) to redirect my concerns to a generic BESE email address rather than to her publicized BESE email. Eventually, Louisiana Public Broadcasting [did pick up](#) the story, and [Dastugue resigned](#) from BESE, citing the vague reason that it was “time to pursue some other interests.” However, John White continues to ineptly hold the position of Louisiana state education superintendent.

Back to Robinson. [The article](#) cited above seems to try just a little too hard to steer focus of Robinson’s departure away from the chaos that was Florida school and teacher performance under his watch to “he wants to be with his kids.” However, according to [this](#)

[Orlando Sentinel article](#)., Robinson raised FCAT passing score thresholds in response to Bush's own wishes:

Robinson's decision [to raise FCAT passing scores] bucks the recommendations of Florida's school superintendents as well as other public school and college experts asked to weigh in on the new scoring system.

*But it meshes with the wishes of some State Board members, who said they worry the state's high school standards are too weak, given how many graduates ended up in remedial classes in college. **It also follows the suggestions of two politically influential groups, former Gov. Jeb Bush's education foundation and the Florida Chamber of Commerce.***

[Another source adds:](#)

*...Bush and the Chamber are so far dodging accountability for the FCAT Writing nightmare. **It was they who served as Robinson's backers on increasing FCAT stakes. Their silence on the three-day old story is telling as they've thrown Robinson under the bus.*** [Emphasis added.]

At least Robinson gets to stay in the Chiefs for Change club, huh? Nothing like continuing to associate with those who chose you to sport the tread marks.

“Chief Emeritus” Eric Smith

The final member of Chiefs for Change is another former Florida education commissioner, Eric Smith. [This April 4, 2012, Tampa Bay Times article](#) openly notes the (undemocratic?) influence Bush wields in promoting what Bush wants by way of educational reform:

Smith, a founding member of Chiefs for Change (an offshoot of Jeb Bush's education foundation), has found a new roost to promote his view on education reform, again under the auspices of a Bush organization. Now, he's an education policy fellow at the [George W. Bush Institute](#).

It's a post he shares with other ed reform notables including Sandy Kress and Jay P. Greene.

Smith's reemergence came [on the Huffington Post today](#), where he urges education policy makers to build upon the core principles of No Child Left Behind and not abandon “accountability, transparency and equality.”

*Smith is not the only former Florida education department leader to **hold a high profile position nationally, furthering the views of the Jeb Bush accountability model.** Others still out there include Cornelia Orr, now head of NAEP; Hannah Skandera, New Mexico's education chief; and John Winn, who has worked with several education groups including the National Math and Science Initiative.*

Longtime Bush confidante and BOE chairman Phil Handy also remains in the mix, advising on education issues with the Stanford's Hoover Institution and Harvard's JFK School of Government.

No wonder why ideas like school grading and third grade retention continue to gain traction nationally. [Emphasis added.]

Who Is the REAL Chief Here?

No wonder, indeed. Chiefs for Change is Bush's own unshaved-head cult of would-be reformers who are nothing more than yes-men and -women to a powerful man with an oversized ego and no true interest in those whose lives he manipulates *en masse*.

I wonder if they might transparently add that description to the Chiefs for Change website.

Added by comment

Please add the CT savior....Chief Stefan Pryor...see here:

Stefan Pryor, a top city official in Newark, N.J., who has a background in charter schools, has been named Connecticut's next commissioner of education.

Pryor currently serves as deputy mayor for economic development for the city of Newark, but he has extensive ties to Connecticut.

He worked as policy adviser to the mayor of New Haven, Conn., from 1994 to 1997, and was the co-founder of a widely praised charter school in that city, Amistad Academy. A group that set about to expand Amistad's model, Achievement First, has since opened additional schools in New Haven and New York City, according to Pryor's bio. For a colorful and detailed overview of Amistad Academy, which discusses its origins and its academic approach, check out Education Week Teacher's 2006 profile of the school.

http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/state_edwatch/2011/09/connecticut_picks_new_schools_chief.html

And Peltó has oodles of information on Pryor, the chief with no prior teaching experience.

<http://jonathanpelto.com/page/2/?s=Stefan+Pryor>

Other Key Players benefiting from no competition

Schools: The problem with education is not where they learn; it is what they learn and how they learn. Kids are not learning about America, Freedom and Liberty. They are learning how to be global citizens and communists.!!! Examples:

- James Clavell – The Children's Story Brainwashing.
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_ZzNVx4ZN9A
- **School Choice/Charter Schools, Race to the Top - Elite implement communism/ called Social Justice.** Youtube: Who Is Behind The Privatization Of Education: Gates, Broad, KIPP, Pearson, EdWest & The Gulen Schools <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JAeRbh1KVkg> **MUST WATCH VIDEO (even just the first 15 min).** Who controls the schools? They are all the same people one goal in mind: NEW WORLD ORDER, Global Governance
- **Bill Gates** youtube.com bill gates co2
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6WQtR17A064>
- **Eli Broad Foundation** - <http://www.broadfoundation.org/> gives Green grants to schools who promote communism
- **KIPP** - Charter School - Funded and Partnered with the same people,
<http://www.kipp.org/about-kipp/the-kipp-foundation/national-partners>
<http://jacksonville.com/news/metro/2011-06-30/story/new-jacksonville-kipp-charter-scores-bottom-fcat>
- **Pearson** -(NCS Pearson in London - International testing company, manage assessments, no oversight, personal data for profit driven, data- assesses teachers and students for corporate work training.
- **The Gulen Schools** - Gulen Islamic cult led by Imam Fethullah Gulen. There are 6 Radical Islamic Schools in FL. No oversight from Legislators.
<http://charterschoolscandals.blogspot.com/p/gulen-school-characteristics.html>
- **Communist Chinese** are funding Florida Charter Schools
<http://miamitodaynews.com/news/121004/story1.shtml>
- **STOP COMMON CORE** – Learn the truth about common core
<https://www.youtube.com/user/stopcommoncore>
- Destruction is bi-partisan
<http://www.democratsagainstunagenda21.com/1/post/2013/01/the-childrens-story.html>
- Jeb Bush – Globalist? Opportunist? Or concerned?
<http://www2.tbo.com/news/education-news/2013/mar/03/critics-rap-actions-of-jeb-bushs-education-foundat-ar-648287/>
- Rupert Murdock “wins” contract for Common Core Data mining
<http://dianeravitch.net/2012/11/30/wireless-generation-wins-common-core-contract/>
- Sir Michael Barber, CEA Pearson, common core Collaborator Sir Michael Barber of England, Chief Education Advisor at Pearson and Common Core promoter extraordinaire, is also a global education standards promoter. Sir Michael Barber, CEA of the world's largest educational sales company, is openly selling “**irreversible reform.**” <http://whatiscommoncore.wordpress.com/>
- **Arnie Duncan** - **We have tried to flip the traditional tight-loose relationship between the federal government and the states, where the federal government had been loose“** and: “...We have pursued a cradle-to-career agenda, from early childhood programs through postsecondary graduation... [the] final core element in

our strategy is promoting a career-to-cradle agenda.” Part of that agenda involves the creation of a school-centered rather than a family-centered nation. **“Our goal for the coming year will be to work closely with global partners, including UNESCO”**

- **David Coleman** lead “architect” for the English Language Arts (ELA) portion of the Common Core, is not an educator, but a [businessman](#). Recently promoted to [president of the College Board](#), he has promised to align the [SAT with the Common Core](#) that he built. He plotted education for K-12 students, and now he’s plotting it for postsecondary students, too.
<http://whatiscommoncore.wordpress.com/2013/03/21/top-ten-scariest-people-in-education-reform-9-david-coleman/>
- **Michelle Rhee** *“The last thing we’re going to do,” she replied with a chuckle, “is get wrapped up in curriculum battles.”*
<http://whatiscommoncore.wordpress.com/2013/03/20/top-ten-scariest-people-in-education-reform/>
- **Linda Darling Hammond**
<http://whatiscommoncore.wordpress.com/2013/03/25/top-ten-scariest-people-in-education-reform-6-linda-darling-hammond/>

Jeb’s correspondence with Arnie Duncan about Gov Rick Scott’s dilemma:

Ed. Sec. Arne Duncan Sought Advice From Jeb Bush Over Rick Scott’s Fear of ‘Rebellion’ Around Common Core, Result change the name keep the standards then tell the public you got rid of Common Core. <http://www.breitbart.com/big-government/2015/05/28/ed-sec-arne-duncan-sought-advice-from-jeb-bush-over-rick-scotts-fear-of-rebellion-around-common-core/>