

# WITNESS FOR JUSTICE

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A Nation Fit for All Children

World leaders talk and talk about the importance of children in our lives. As recently as 10 years ago, the United Nations held a special session on children to review progress on their 1990 World Summit on Children. Creating a “World Fit for Children” was the theme. Since, the United States was part of the international dialogue, let’s focus on our nation’s commitment to children.

We often label children as the most vulnerable of our society. While I agree on the one hand, I would contest that notion on the other. Children are creative, they are truthful, they are joyful and they are hopeful -- until we teach it out of them. Rather than expecting our children to be resilient and withstand all the injustice thrown their way, perhaps we should consider changing the systemic conditions that negatively affect their lives requiring that they keep bouncing back.

Our children do have much to teach us if we take the time to learn from them. What children do not have is a voice on issues that deeply impact them on a daily basis. I am not proposing that children should have to make decisions about larger societal issues that they have no control over, nor that we turn them into adults before they’re ready. What I submit is that adults should consider the future of our children when we make decisions about their well-being. Our message must be that education is key to survival in our nation’s competitive and capitalistic culture. Instead we send a mixed message to our children.

The real message we send to children is that “we care about some of you, but certainly not all of you.” How else can we explain our actions to the thousands of children deprived of quality public education? For the last several years, “No Child Left Behind” rules and funding formulas have left children more than behind – it has left thousands of children completely out. The current administration’s “Blueprint for Reform” makes some improvements, but continues to pose many of the same serious problems.

There is widespread agreement among school professionals, politicians, and activists that something needs to be done about this exclusive system that requires constant testing to measure the quality of learning. Standardized testing may be an administrative convenience for the masses but it does not necessarily work for the child. Testing that is standardized for the privileged does nothing for the child whose family is facing poverty, racism, violence, and neighborhood dysfunction. We simply cannot expect that every child in every school in every community is going to look the same or learn the same. It is time to quit blaming the child for not making the grade.

We live in a nation that prides itself as a land of opportunity. Where is the opportunity for our nation’s inner city and small rural community schools? Strong and publicly supported schools are at the very heart of an enlightened society; one that is committed to the common good. We show little evidence of such a commitment. This nation should be fit for all children, not just some.

See <http://www.ucc.org/justice/public-education> for more detailed information and our response to the proposed federal legislation.

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