

Competency Based Education / Strawberry Mansion Testimony

The power players of Philadelphia want to eliminate Strawberry Mansion as a comprehensive high school and replace it with a “complex.” I am here to stand with the community and affirm their three demands: 1) No complex, retain the school’s comprehensive status 2) ensure there is an incoming class of freshmen for the 2018-19 school year and 3) restore the programs and resources that have taken from the school.

The Workshop School, which employs a competency-based education model, wraps up the Ed Reform 2.0 agenda in a pretty package. Don’t be distracted by the custom JAWN ornaments and escape room fundraisers, look closer. Their start up funds came in 2013 as a “Next Generation Learning Challenge” school. The [money](#) for this initiative comes from ed-tech and privatization interests including: Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg (Cambridge Analytica), and Eli Broad. Partners include the Council of Chief State School Officers, promoters of Common Core State Standards, and iNACOL, the International Association of K12 Online Learning.

If Gates and Zuckerberg have their way, in fifteen years students will consume their “education” via digital devices, deprived of human contact. The devices will extract data about their academic knowledge and their behaviors. That data will be used to profile them. In a world with fewer and fewer living wage jobs, a world of increasing automation, that data will be used to shut them out of opportunities, not open doors.

There will be drop-in centers where students might consult with a mentor about securing digital skills badges. They will be treated as human capital, investments, data to be managed for profit by global financial powers like the Rockefeller Foundation, JP Morgan, and Goldman Sachs. Public-private partnership education will allow human resource managers to cream candidates and pay the lowest wages, flooding the market with talent custom-trained for a just-in-time, gig-economy workforce.

Simon Hauger, principal of the Workshop School, consulted for Big Picture Philadelphia and has relationships with Drexel’s Excite Center, home of the Digital OnRamp badging program. Will Big Picture get space in the complex? What about Outward Bound? Many of the new project-based learning programs are keen to monitor and assess urban youth for their grit, resilience and bravery. It’s tied to behavioral economics, an area of intense interest for Wharton and Angela Duckworth. These students need the chance to build a better economy for themselves and their children.

In this year of W.E.B DuBois, do not return to a Booker T. Washington model of education. Strawberry Mansion’s students deserve an engaging academic training that encourages them to be thinkers, challengers, questioners, and visionaries. Restore what you have taken from this school; give these children the teachers they deserve; and incorporate hands-on learning into the existing curriculum. Do not hand the heart of this community over to those who are beholden to the interests of industry, technology and impact investing. I applaud the resistance and stand with Strawberry Mansion.