

Why school 'reform' fails

By Robert J. Samuelson, Newsweek

As 56 million children return to the nation's 133,000 elementary and secondary schools, the promise of "reform" is again in the air. Education Secretary Arne Duncan has announced \$4 billion in Race to the Top grants to states whose proposals demonstrated, according to Duncan, "a bold commitment to education reform" and "creativity and innovation [that is] breathtaking." What they really show is that few subjects inspire more intellectual dishonesty and political puffery than "school reform."

Since the 1960s, waves of "reform" have failed to produce meaningful achievement gains. The most reliable tests are those given by the National Assessment of Educational Progress. The reading and math tests, graded on a 0–500 scale, measure 9-year-olds, 13-year-olds, and 17-year-olds. In 1971, the initial year for the reading test, the average score for high-school seniors was 285; in 2008 that score was 286. The math test started in 1973, when high-school seniors averaged 304; in 2008 the average was 306.

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