

# RAVITCH RALLIES SUPPORT FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION TEACHERS AND OUR UNIONS

By Linda Sneed

In late January, Diane Ravitch, former Assistant Secretary of Education and author of *The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choice Are Undermining Public Education*, rallied an enthusiastic crowd at the Sacramento Convention Center (at \$5 a head, all donated to a children's leukemia foundation) to recognize the nature of the current "crisis" of public education: "The real crisis," she insisted, "is that public education is under attack." Those promulgating the alarmist narrative of "failure" of America's schools, Ravitch argued, are corporate reformers pursuing the twin goals of privatization of public education and de-professionalization of public school teachers.

Clearly, anyone with children should care about this trend. But why should community college educators pay special attention to K-12-focused debates about the quality of America's public compulsory school system?

**We face the same pressures and the same carrots and sticks, justified within the same misleading narratives, that are being used against K-12 educators and their allies.**

Corporate-driven reform movements, legislation demanding greater "accountability," and the demand for "student success" as measured by performance on standardized tests have manipulated and bullied the public school system for decades. What these corporate "reformers" want for K-12—privatization and de-professionalization, translating to increased profit for a select number of individuals and industries—is what they want for community colleges and other public colleges and universities.

According to Ravitch, teachers' unions are both the reformers' primary target and the greatest hope for our nation's besieged system of publicly funded, free-to-affordable education for all. The profit-driven, self-appointed saviors of public education who attack K-12 teachers' unions are attacking ours, also.

Therefore, if we care about our students and our communities, we must recognize the rhetorical splitting of teachers' and students' interests as a false dichotomy



between "us and them." We must refuse the insidious characterization of teacher and faculty unions as undermining quality education and students' well-being, pointing out the dearth of evidence that privatizing education and weakening teachers' employment rights actually improves it. We must counter this ideology by informing ourselves and the broader public about documented correlations between quality education and strong teacher and faculty unions. Indeed, we must reframe the discussion, helping others see what we live every day: teachers' working conditions are students' learning conditions. They are neither separable nor in competition.

How do we do this? According to Ravitch, we "speak out," "act up," and "write, write, write: blog, write letters and emails." And if that doesn't work? "We use direct action," Ravitch argued. We channel our passion for affordable education into compelling, creative public action demanding social and economic justice and equality of opportunity for all. ■