



50 Myths and Lies That Threaten America's Public Schools: The Real Crisis in Education

David C. Berliner , Gene V Glass (With) , Associates (Screenplay)

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Two of the most respected voices in education and a team of young education scholars identify 50 myths and lies that threaten America's public schools. With hard-hitting information and a touch of comic relief, Berliner, Glass, and their Associates separate fact from fiction in this comprehensive look at modern education reform. They explain how the mythical failure of public education has been created and perpetuated in large part by political and economic interests that stand to gain from its destruction. They also expose a rapidly expanding variety of organizations and media that intentionally misrepresent facts. Many of these organizations suggest that their goal is unbiased service in the public interest when, in fact, they represent narrow political and financial interests. Where appropriate, the authors name the promoters of these deceptions and point out how they are served by encouraging false beliefs.

This provocative book features short essays on important topics to provide every elected representative, school administrator, school board member, teacher, parent, and concerned citizen with much food for thought, as well as reliable knowledge from authoritative sources.

50 Myths and Lies That Threaten America's Public Schools: The Real Crisis in Education Details

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Author : David C. Berliner , Gene V Glass (With) , Associates (Screenplay)

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From Reader Review 50 Myths and Lies That Threaten America's Public Schools: The Real Crisis in Education for online ebook

Steven Peterson says

To start, I will say that I dislike the title very much: "Myths and Lies. . ." Come on! On the other hand, the authors are on to something. There is often a sense that privatization is inherently superior to public provision of goods and services. In the central Pennsylvania area, we get results of "report cards" on schools. Public schools aren't rated terribly high overall--but charter schools are even worse. Yet one claim is that what we need is more charters. The reality is: We need good schools--whether public or private.

This book lists 50 "myths and lies" about public schools in the U. S.. Then the authors examine available evidence about each.

Let's look at some examples. "Charter schools are better than traditional public schools." The authors look at a variety of research sources and suggest that the evidence is mixed. "School choice and competition work to improve all schools." The authors argue that the evidence does not fully support this. Indeed, I presented a paper at a professional conference once and observed that whether or not privatization worked depended on one statistical assumption. If you assume one approach, choice improves student performance; if one accepts another assumption, choice schools have no impact. "Teachers are the most important influence on school success." The authors answer in the negative. Indeed, if one looks at actual research, most of the success of students is based on their family socioeconomic status, their ethnic background, and students' previous performance. There is not a lot of "variation" left over for teachers, class size, methods of teaching, parental involvement in schools, and so on.

I do not like the title. Questions are answered in a somewhat dismissive way. But the book is provocative and raises worthwhile questions to think about. . . .

Jaime K says

One of the best things about this book is that it was written in 2014, making it current. I recognize a few names, events, and trends. What I also like is that the authors recognize the fluid nature of education and realize that there will need to be an updated version in a few years.

The U.S. has been considered to be "behind" in education since the 1960s or '70s. Yet we value other things for our youth and base the data results on tests that include all students (from all socioeconomic backgrounds) and therefore show the average. Therefore, poverty - and not education - is the real issue, since the nation's climate affects school achievement.

What Berliner, Glass, and their 19 associates do is focus on 50 myths (of which there are more, but they wanted to condense it for a few reasons) that the American public as a whole tend to believe due to misinformation and skewed truth. They stress the need to look at parts of data in relative groups instead of always looking at data as a whole. They also include both sides of the political spectrum and don't blame any one party, group, or person. I knew most of these, but having them fleshed out with data to back up my beliefs/thoughts was very helpful. The numbers relate to the given myth.

1) We never did well with international tests, which aren't even all that great as they do show the mean

scores, have translation issues, are not all aligned with curricula, and have other discrepancies between countries.

2) Private schools seem to be doing better only because they usually attend to those of higher socioeconomic status (SES), but in truth, public school students of the same caliber do the same or better on the same tests.

4) It is difficult to determine the effectiveness of charter schools because, even though they ARE public, each attends to different needs, curricular objectives, and have varying mission statements. They also don't answer to all of the same authorities as traditional public schools.

5) There are higher dropout and fewer graduation rates in cyberschools because they offer much less than traditional schools. Such education is also of lower quality since teachers are expected to do more, which has increased the turnover rate.

6) The data on homeschooled children rarely involves even half of the population. There are also gaps in data. Many homeschooled students do not have the readily available resources that we see in high success stories, including at least one parent with an adequate background.

What I do like is that Berliner et.al. don't knock homeschooling, but instead show that it's not usual for it to be superior to public schools...especially after elementary and (at times) middle school. They also explain that thinking of any alternate system as superior can be detrimental to students, teachers, and families.

7) School choice and competition have decreased equality for low SES and minority students, and don't reflect higher academic achievement among similar populations. Instead, they've increased school segregation where public schools may flounder.

8) Magazines that rate schools don't gather all or enough data. While I knew to take their findings with a grain of salt, I didn't realize just how skewed data could be.

9) Teachers are important, but not as much as neighborhoods, families, and environments. Saying that teachers are the most important influences in a child's education holds them accountable for factors completely out of their control.

10) It is one thing to know that U.S. teachers are paid less than their counterparts in other countries; it's another to read just how staggering the differences are. This country's low-tax philosophy along with other conditions means that teachers here are paid 15% (or more) lower than those in other countries relative to education and time teaching. The authors compare U.S. salaries to those in Canada, Korea, Japan, Estonia, New Zealand, and Scotland (among others).

11) Race to the Top increased pressures of No Child Left Behind with merit pay. Merit pay promotes corruption and impedes collaboration; fosters mistrust and a restricted curriculum; believes what teachers teach is akin to selling cars. Policymakers don't understand the complex nature of teaching.

12) Talented teachers are in schools with low SES but are hindered by factors out of their control, like incomplete prep programs and not having much support in the schools themselves. Good teachers who stay in these schools are often overlooked.

13) One of the Associates is an alum from Teach for America, and offers excellent insight on both good and bad aspects of the program. It considers bad teachers and unions to be the enemy, not business leaders and politicians for low-taxes. The program also assumes new teachers are better than experienced ones. Yet it offers support teachers may not receive in low income schools.

14) While subject matter is important, it's not the most important asset a teacher possesses. There are skills by which teachers pass on their knowledge that aren't inherent to everyone. The authors also mention the importance of pedagogical content knowledge.

15) Teacher unions have helped improve pay and conditions and oppose destructive models of teacher accountabilities. Overall, they're beneficial in retaining good teachers, leading to higher student achievements. Tenure protects teachers when there are disagreements about policies and advocating for students.

16) Student standardized test scores are no way to judge teacher education programs, particularly there are many other [non-education related] factors that impact testing. Also, most subjects aren't tested, not all grades are tested, and all novice teachers learn from experience (meaning their students' scores will be lower overall).

18) Studies show that holding a child back has little impact on future academic achievement and can have negative outcomes.

- 19) Tracking, especially at the lower levels (seriously, kindergarten?!), has little to no benefit for low-achieving students and modest academic benefits for high achievers. It limits education to one characteristic of many and is likely to segregate classes with non-academic characteristics.
- 20) There is little evidence that immersion programs are better than bilingual programs; in fact, there is more data that shows the reverse is true in terms of academic achievement and literacy skills for ELLs.
- 22) Many abstinence-only programs provide false/incomplete information and have little effect on sexual activity. What I found interesting is that more than 85% of Americans want students to have a comprehensive sex ed program, with information that includes abstinence, health issues associated with sexual activity, and contraception options.
- 25) There is little evidence that uniforms improve achievement and attendance. Implementing such policies tend to occur at the same time as other changes, making the data more muddy.
- 26) Lengthening the school day and year won't change curricula or resources, unless it's extended for a 12-month period. Therefore, there will be little impact on student learning.
- 27) Education is very complex with many variables and an unpredictable flow. Thus, programs that work in other districts, states, or countries may not work at another school, especially because they're not "prescriptions". The quote on page 130 sums this up very well.
- 28) Zero tolerance policies don't make schools safer since most crimes are from outside influences. The policies are also generally inflexible with regards to helping students.
- 29) There are very strong cases that support the benefits of pre-school and kindergarten programs, even more than I was aware of.
- 30) Programs for social and character development don't really have a benefit on behavior or academics, since character is learned and not taught. Also, these needs may be only met at school and not at home.
- 32) There is a belief that students are being dumbed down and that America is suffering. Yet more are taking tests for different reasons. The same/respective groups are doing the same, if not better, than they have in the past.
- 34) "Racially concentrated" schools exist, mainly because of school choice. Forcing integration has a positive impact on academic achievement and social interactions.
- 35) It is very important to keep in mind that school monies go to special education, not just general education. Thus, we can't say that more money isn't helping if the gen ed students are the only ones being tested/analyzed.
- 37) Some religious schools in the country receive public funds in the form of tax credits & vouchers. Because of this government financial support, the line between church and state is muddled and public schools may receive less money.
- 38) People believe that education is an individual/private benefit and not a public one. THIS BAFFLES ME!!! Students learn work-related skills (which helps the economy) and instills a common identity of "we" through social and collaborative interactions.
- 40) Tax credits and vouchers may be given to the poor...but they often can't afford the additional tuition fees beyond the given scholarship.
- 42) Not everyone can master all topics, and schools can't even teach full mastery. It can also be tough to determine those levels because of differences in how information is taught.
- 43) STEM skills can be discussed at length and used in non-STEM jobs due to the nuances within each skillset. But there are ambiguities in the data and different reports may be skewing the truth of the "shortage" of graduates and employees. STEM information also tends to disregard those with STEM degrees who aren't in such careers.
- 45) State exams are very poor indicators of student understanding. The authors also really showed just how much of the testing industry Pearson owns.
- 46) AP exams are rooted in elitism, since minorities may not have access to resources and/or courses.
- 47) College admissions are not based on grades and SAT or ACT scores, but many do look at sports and even more look at legacy.
- 48) Public education won't fix poverty (even though it helps the economy) without social and economic reforms. The authors delve into five reasons why they feel this is true.

Memorable Quotes

“Our public schools are about the last institution where children and families of different wealth, ethnicity, and cultural values come together.” – page 5

“Our nation and our children need a well-funded public school system that provides equal support to all its schools.” – page 46

“Teachers have become the punching bag for all sorts of problems faced by our nation, but these are problems teachers cannot influence. It is illogical to lay so much blame for so many of the ills of society on a profession with so little power to affect much more than the lives of 30 or so students in a class.” – page 50

“America’s public education system is one of its most valuable civic institutions—and the ones who understand its operations better than any outsider possibly could, the teachers, deserve to be treated as professionals. And if they are accorded that courtesy, they are expected to behave like professionals.” – page 82

“As a nation we would be well served if the question about ELLs was reframed, away from, ‘Why don’t they just learn English?’ to, ‘How can we develop a multilingual society to live peacefully and cooperate economically in our highly interdependent world?’” – page 109

“Blaming teachers for a failure to replicate effects may be convenient, but it also may be misleading (Weiss, Bloom, & Brock, 2013). It is akin to blaming a patient who does not get better with a drug that is supposed to work.” – page 130

“To believe that education will achieve what politicians lack the will to achieve is to make our schools, their teachers, and even our children the scapegoats for society’s ills.” – page 233

Nathaniel says

This is a book written by two senior faculty at the Arizona State University School of Education and their "associates" (Ph.D students). The profs get about 10 "myths" each, and their stable of doc students handle the rest. As such, this is a book with close to 30 authors, and as a result it's a very inconsistent reading experience. The essays vary wildly in quality; the best are chiefly in the "general myths" and "myths about college and career readiness" sections, while the worst are undeniably the exclamation point-and-enthusiastically-bias-laden "myths about teachers", which read more like the talking points of an NEA publication than they do objective research. There are also a few examples of simply awful scholarship (e.g. an essay trying to make a point about the modern educational system by using an article written in the 1970's as its primary source); or essays that directly contradict each other (e.g. one of Berliner's early essays argues that PISA scores are bunk, but one of his students later cites them directly as evidence in his argument; which one is it?) Finally, there are instances where it seems as though the profs are just pushing their own opinions rather than citing balanced fact, such as Berliner's far-too-short and inadequately cited article about group work.

Overall, I thought some of this information was relatively useful scholarship, especially when it talks about corporate disinformation campaigns to change public education for the sake of making money (e.g. hyperbole about international competitiveness and STEM graduates). However, it also overall demonstrates the low quality of research that comes out of schools of education; I couldn't help regularly thinking back to

Labaree's critiques of ed schools as I read this. The authors' decision to avoid citing all of their sources is also odd, and seems suspicious, as though they're hiding something. While the more solid essays paint a good picture of the 21st century American educational system that anyone with children or who works in education should know about, this is still very much a book that I can't take seriously past a certain point.

Doug says

A very uneven book which has enough pluses to warrant reading but you have to look past the agendas. Some essays are well-reasoned and well-written. Several are neither. Many raise at least as many questions as they answer.

The comparisons to Finland may be unfair but the author only mentions normalizing American results to account for poverty levels. What happens if the same is done for Finnish students. Does the gap reappear? I don't know because he didn't mention it one way or the other.

Another essay claims that there is an abundance of STEM grads because he could not identify where all of the grads work. Did he include STEM grads who went to work on Wall Street, became lawyers, get logically demanding jobs in many other non-STEM fields? Many go into sales. Did those jobs get counted for or against the count of STEM job holders. Apparently that idea never occurred to the authors. It never gets mentioned. I know STEM grads who followed each of those career paths. I have a degree in math and another in applied mechanics so I know exactly what STEM is and what grads can aspire to with their tech degrees; do the authors? I'm not convinced they do.

The most irritating might be the attempts to dispel one myth by perpetuating an alternate myth. Attempting to attack legacy preference as wicked, one essay ignores that W. soundly trounced both his Presidential opponents in college performance. The author insists he got in to Yale only because his Pa was running for the Senate (not a 90th percentile SAT score; the test baseline shifted in the 70s) but never mentions that Gore may have been allowed to stay at Harvard only because his Pa actually was in the Senate. I can't imagine having a freshman average lower than W's lowest class grade impress anyone.

Claudia says

This is a book every teacher and parent should own...and if nothing else, should study the table of contents. Berliner and Glass (and associates -- makes me wonder how much Berliner really wrote) organize the myths and lies we hear every day from critics and reformers, and debunk them with research. I have learned the hard way, often research is frowned upon by people who've already made up their minds, but I keep sharing anyway.

Several of the issues -- testing, charters, funding, TFA, vouchers, resegregation of schools, tax credits, homework, flunking based on test scores, longer school days and years, unions, are discussed at length. It's quote-able, and I've quoted.

I will keep this book close at hand as the next Legislative Session begins. I'll be able to turn immediately to lots of issues and counter their silly arguments. Will I change their minds? Probably not. But they'll know I was there.

C. Varn says

Berliner and Glass and their research assistants set this book to show "many citizens conception of K12 public education in the United States is more myth than reality." While it does it admirably in parts, some of the answers some myths are also incongruent with answers given for other myths. The style and research support actually varies greatly between the various myths because of the large number of research assistants involved in the authorship. Each individual myth is basically an article on topic running down history and research quickly--and it is sourced. However, the sourcing is kind of bias and assertions made by researchers are often treated as conclusive to the research even if those assertions are more arguments than data or really editorializing.

The panoply of standard controversies are in the book: vouchers, charter school, homework, STEM focused education, PISA scores, teacher pay, etc. Many of the individual issues covered are sound, and many of the criticisms of I have seen leveled at this Berliner and Glass are conservative and stem from people anecdotal experience or fairly outdated views from Charles Murray and co. Yet there are serious issues with many of the assertions in the book. For example, the book indicates that not all students can learn everything and be expected to have same results, but then it denigrates both tracking and IQ tests. I agree with many of its criticisms of IQ tests, but the Flynn effect does indicate that peer groups do effect IQ and that people can learn beyond those limitations. Still the careful reader will see my frustration, and its not just on intelligence plasticity: Berliner attacks PISA scores, but it is crucial to several other myths in the book.

The strongest sections were "Myths about College and Career Readiness," which tackles hyperbole about STEM qualifications and the job placement (including that in many STEM fields we are already over-saturated almost as much as in the humanities), etc. This book, however, tackled no myths that are popular in Education schools but debunked outside of it: learning styles, while not mentioned, is not dealt with and many psychological myths held by teachers aren't dealt with as well. Special Education students being unsuccessful academically in general is not dealt with, and this too is a common myth among teachers--despite it being a plank of "progressive education" and the movement towards inclusion since the late 1990s. This book pretty much solely aims itself at myths about education but not commonly held by educators.

In that the agenda is shown--"Myths about Teachers" while often true reads like an NEA pamphlet--which makes moderates and conservatives distrust the book. Furthermore, some of the myths being debunked haven't even been dominant in the popular media for twenty years: Ed Hirsch's background knowledge and minimal literacy gets unfairly attacked and attacked as if it is mentioned often currently.

Jessica Zolotsky says

A good primer for discussions on the politics of education. Good in conjunction with other resources. I'm using it in a course I teach.

Jeanne says

Most of these are arguments that I have read before, but it was good to read this so I would be familiar with the chapters for assisting students who do education topics for their research papers. As with Berliner and Biddle's earlier work, it all boils down to the fact that the complexities of teaching and education just make it difficult to make any types of comparisons whether it is by country, state, district, school, or classroom. One

is hardly ever comparing apples to apples. While I feel that this book sometimes distorts data and reports to their own purpose at times just as do the reports they criticize, at least it should make people question whether or not the corporate influences on education are about students or money. I especially was intrigued by the longest chapter in the book which had to do with the scarcity or not of STEM-ready candidates. Whether you agree with the positions or not, this is a good book to start difficult and complex conversations about educational policies and more people should be questioning the soundbytes that are served up by groups that claim to be supporting education but just might be supporting their own interests instead.

Justin says

This book is horrible; the authors mock anyone who disagrees with their obvious agenda, all the while claiming that everyone ELSE is in the wrong for doing so. They call into question statistics that disagree with their obviously preformed conclusions, but then essentially tell the reader to trust, without question, the statistics that they provide that support their agenda. Very agenda driven, very poor interpretation of facts, very dishonest approach. I'd give it less than a 1-star rating, but Goodreads does not have a -1,000 star rating.

Patricia Gasser says

I recommend this well-researched book for educators, parents, and anyone who has an interest in public education. This book gives objective and researched backed information about everything from homework to testing to school funding and ratings. In an era when public education and educators are under scrutiny (and in some cases, outright attack), this book is a breath of fresh air as it helps to debunk much of the criticism leveled at our schools.

Mary Anne says

A really interesting and concrete collection of short, concise essays that demystify some crucial misconceptions of education. I picked up this book because my pedagogy professor was reading it and recommended it to me. I really appreciate the organization and appearance of the book: you don't really know who wrote which section, but each section stands on its own, and there isn't a sense of repetition here (except to call attention to other myths previously discussed). There are at least two or three citations for each myth. A lot of the citations nod back to the main author, which could really go either way in terms of how it turns you, but he seems highly qualified, and we do need to publish.

There are a lot of the topics you would expect; vouchers, charter schools, private and public schools, testing, merit pay, etc. There are also a lot of refreshing topics that connect to tax credits, savings accounts, portfolio management, STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics), limitations of learning, poverty, and equality. The sections about finances and equality really made my blood boil.

One thing I really appreciate is how the authors focus on America's fixation on competition and being the best. With globalization comes competition, or so it seems, and it really seemed to heat up after WWII/Cold War. I also like that the authors go into the purpose of education, particularly while looking into claims that state-funded education should stop at the 6th or 8th grade (Not their claims, obviously.) and the idea of education serving as job training.

Obviously people who are engaged in teaching and administration should read it, and I think they will. But I think the book also exceeds this audience, and it should. It's well-written in addition to being scholarly, but this book takes the research out of the academic journals and into language for everyone. Voters need to read this when politicians make claims about how education isn't working. I read this book pretty soon after the CA court ruled against teacher's unions and tenure. The authors get into this topic very minimally, but I'd be interested to see how they would react. (I'm not a K-12 educator, but I certainly know enough of them.)

James Carter says

I've picked up *50 Myths and Lies That Threaten America's Public Schools* just to learn what the myths were and the arguments for them.

I do agree with many of them, and many of the arguments have been good. However, some of them are really weak and unprofessionally written (has the feel of a student paper with no supporting evidence; more like rah rah). It has been obvious the authors were pushing an agenda. Anyway, I want to point out some of the myths whose arguments aren't sound or wholly convincing.

Myth 10: The whole argument about comparing the salary of teachers between US and other countries is hogwash. Taxes in other countries, especially in Europe, are way too high, eating a lot into the teacher's salary. USA has some of the lowest tax rates in the world, eating a bit of the teacher's salary. It's not clear to me who wins in the end; I just don't know anything about the cost of living internationally compared to here. On the other hand, teachers here don't make enough money to make ends meet; they work too much, are not paid for overtime hours, and still need a second job. Being a teacher is one of the hardest jobs in the nation, and it takes a huge toll on the teacher's physical, emotional, and mental health. It costs a lot of money for the teacher to take care of them. In short, if you've never been a teacher, then you aren't qualified to talk about what's it like to be one.

Myth 19: Sorry, tracking is the best thing that has happened to schools. It has everything to do with IQ, not grit or anything else, which DOES MEASURE INTELLIGENCE. Those who can handle the pace and learn as much do well in academics, and those who can't have no place being in the same classroom with academically disciplined students. They ruin the learning environment with their "me, me, me!" The top students don't want to be in the same room as them. That's why they end up attending elite schools to get away from them. It's just a fact of life. I think the authors mean the tracking system for the students before 4th grade (which is completely fine with me), but my position is for 7th grade and above, that's all.

Myth 23: You can safely throw this one out of the window. Ok, I have a simple experiment: algebra, 1 year, no class/homework, and you take the final exam. Can you do it? How about biology? chemistry? physics? calculus? You can't do it. Impossible. So, don't give me the rubbish that homework does not boost achievement. The authors are just cherry-picking simple scenarios. By not doing the homework and getting used to it, the student is absolutely doomed when he gets to college. Just think about it: you start working out; the greatest gains are made in the first 3 months. Afterwards, there is a slow growth year in, year out. What happens if the person stop working out and does nothing for a month? He would have lost most of the gains. The same analogy applies to homework.

Myth 24: Yeah, throw this out too. Just about everybody, from high school to graduate school, hates group projects. I've been there and have been through them all. They are a damn nightmare and are what I dread the most in every class I take because of the quality of the team members. Group projects, especially in work or volunteer, are fine if THE PEOPLE INVOLVED ALL HAVE THE SAME GOALS, MOTIVATION, BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE, AND FINANCIAL (AND OTHERWISE) INCENTIVES. In school, it's

just really, really near impossible to make this to work, and YES, IT PUNISHES THE MOST TALENTED AND KNOWLEDGEABLE STUDENTS BECAUSE THEY END UP DOING MOST OF THE WORK SINCE THEIR GPA DEPENDS ON GETTING AN A IN THE CLASS.

Myth 29: That's okay, but let's be clear: they don't work in closing the IQ gap if that's the goal. You might hear statements such as "they will produce smarter students," "students will get a leg up in academic achievement over the others who don't," etc., but these programs, especially Head Start (only 3 hours a day, taught by nonprofessionals, and totally nonacademic in content), don't work for that purpose. IQ is pretty much fixed, although it can get worse for different reasons, and the students become, over time, separated based on their cognitive abilities. It becomes more clear around 4th and 5th grade. It's just an inevitable fact of life.

Myth 46: The argument is weak here. I taught AP Calculus in a Title I School, serving low-income African Americans and Whites, so I am qualified to speak about this subject. Basically, most of them don't belong in an AP Calculus class. Why? The simple answer is: they shouldn't have been promoted out of the General Math class in the first place. That's the trouble with schools nowadays. Just because a student has a decent grade in a math class like algebra doesn't mean he should be automatically promoted to algebra 2 or geometry. His foundation is just not good enough unless there is clear and convincing evidence that he actually knows the subject well enough to move up, and that's done through a comprehensive final exam; hence, he should have stayed in the course for another year and for as long as possible. If he still can't master algebra, that's it. He has hit the plateau, and that's just the way it is. Like the book says, there are winners and losers in life, and life is not fair.

Myth 47: Who cares if more people are taking the SAT? What's relevant is that the average score among the top scorers is actually declining. This does mean that the people are getting dumber every generation. It's very clear by the evidence in the output quality of social media, television sitcoms, and movies and overall academic achievement, literacy rate, etc. The reason why is that more intelligent people are producing less babies than less intelligent people. As a teacher, I'm just not seeing real intelligence among my former students compared to what I've seen 20 years ago. The top students aren't really that smart as they think, but they are just good enough to rise a bit above the average.

Myth 49: IQ is the single most important predictor of academic success. It does measure intelligence. To deny it is to be delusional. IQ is largely the reason why poverty exists. Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray have already proved their case in *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life*. Everybody has tried to dismiss the findings but has wholly failed in making their arguments to stick. The authors are doing the same thing again. But I am okay with one thing: it's fundamentally wrong to place the students on ability tracks before 6th grade. It's too early. Just wait until the students prove themselves on standard achievement tests by the time they are in 5th to 6th grade. That's when they start getting placed on ability tracks and rightfully so.

Throughout the book, I see a lot of empathy from the authors for the minority students and the students who live in poverty. The fact is: it's their IQ that results in dismal academic achievement. Yes, I've tried to help a lot of African Americans, ELLs, Latinos, and students in special education. It's their IQ that's holding them back which is absolutely clear when comparing them with their White and Asian peers. There is no racism involved; it's just a fact of life. Also, the mean IQ of African Americans is 1 standard deviation behind the mean IQ of their white peers which means it will take 16% of African Americans to match the average IQ of their white peers or 2.5% to match one standard deviation above the average IQ of their white peers. That's why the odds are staggeringly low for African Americans, and it does make sense when you take a look at their academic achievement overall.

Finally, as for college, I will say that only up to 30% of college-eligible students annually really belong in college. The rest of the others have no place there. Want proof? Check out the number of remedial classes

per university. What the heck are they doing there? It means that the students ARE NOT QUALIFIED FOR COLLEGE. The truth is: Colleges and universities are a big money-making business. These schools will absolutely welcome anyone with open arms because they view each student as a walking dollar sign. So, don't be worried about getting accepted at any school: they will accept the student as long as there is enough room at a certain cut-off score without letting the academic standards to fall too much. It also helps if the student can fully pay for it without financial assistance. The bottom line is: college is pretty easy to get in for anyone.

If there are myths missing from the book, it's one: Special Education students cannot succeed in academics. Trust me on this: there are many outstanding students from this population who have gone on to college and have a successful life. It's a crime to shut them out of their right to this opportunity. The reason why they do is that supports for them are expensive. They cost more to educate compared to their normal peers. That's why they get shut out from certain schools because they don't want to fork over more money for them.

The attacks on E.D. Hirsch, Jr., are unfair and irresponsible. The ideas contained in his books have been validated, and there is a high correlation between background knowledge and academic achievement/income which has been proven in psychology research. He has more credibility and extensive educational experience than all of the authors combined in this book. By the way, E.D. isn't an ultraconservative but a pragmatist. His ideas are practical, and they make total sense.

All in all, the authors need to bring evenness to *50 Myths and Lies That Threaten America's Public Schools* with more cogent arguments and more professional and better writing quality and should try not to push the agenda in an obvious way.

David Barney says

Calls BS on so many educational thoughts the public believes because of politicians, parents and other uninformed people. Educators should read this to be better informed.

Mark Isaak says

A highly valuable book for anyone whose exposure to education policy has come from the media and politicians. As the title promises, the book lists 50 false or misleading claims, followed by short responses explaining why they are wrong. Though brief, the responses usually come at the myth with multiple lines of argument and are well referenced. Topics include private and charter schools, school choice, merit pay, unions, class size, flunking, school uniforms, preschool, tuition tax credits and spending in general, college prep, IQ tests, and more. Several of the myths (e.g., "Zero-tolerance is effective", "Teachers are paid too much") had me wondering that anyone would believe them, but all the write-ups include some information about where the bad ideas come from. (Usually, they are from private special-interests.) Others (e.g. the efficacy of homework and tracking) I had until now taken for granted. I came away knowing a lot more about the American education system, and the politics that surround it, than I did before. However, this is not a book to explain the education system, nor (by design) does it offer a program of recommendations. It lists and rebuts the myths, and that is all.

Nancy says

Superb book.

Most of the arguments and research are familiar to me. Berliner and Glass (and a host of researchers) concisely summarize key myths, hoaxes and outright lies that are shaping the national discourse on education, right now.

The big advantage of this book is that the table of contents gives the reader a quick index of false political and media narratives, a brief synopsis of who's saying what--and a carefully selected (and short) list of solid and relevant research to buttress their refutations.

Want to know what research says about why we're "behind" other nations in academic achievement? Charter schools? Merit pay? It's all here, in a handy, easy-to-use form and written in non-scholarly language.

Yes, it's all been said before. But the format is great.
