

An Analysis of the 2005 National Technology Plan: Better for Business than for Children

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

by

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In January 2005, then-Secretary of Education Rod Paige submitted the Department of Education's revised National Education Technology Plan (NETP) to Congress in compliance with the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). The plan, titled *Toward a New Golden Age in American Education*, recommends seven "Action Steps" urging schools to strengthen leadership for technology, to consider innovative budgeting, to support e-learning and virtual schools, to encourage broadband access, to move toward digital content, and to integrate data systems. NETP also urges improved "teacher training" to enhance teachers' ability to use technological products.

This report identifies, analyzes, and critiques assumptions underpinning NETP's recommendations. Assumptions are crucial to any policy; invalid assumptions create an unreliable foundation for any plan. In addition to identifying flaws in key assumptions, this analysis concurrently uncovers embedded advantages for business and privatization supporters.

This report examines four specific assumptions in terms of their roles as components of NCLB. The first assumption is that education ought to be run more like business. This precept is based on the idea that test scores equate to a traditional business

“product,” an equation that has been challenged by many critics. The second is that more technology will reliably result in increased student learning. This assumption lacks credible evidence and is undermined by recent large-scale research. The third, that extensive technological infrastructure is already in place, rests on a report with questionable methodology and is contradicted by an arguably more credible report. The fourth assumption, that students’ advice to NETP planners was reliable, is found unwarranted because of severe methodological weaknesses, including the fact that children too young to read were asked for advice on such issues as budget priorities.

Following this extended critique of the plan’s assumptions, a review of the proposed action steps within the context of groundwork laid by NCLB uncovers several ways government policy is opening new “markets” and providing other advantages for business and support for privatization. The analysis concludes that NCLB and NETP provide more benefits for business than for children—especially poor children. Educators who are considering expanding technology in light of NETP recommendations should proceed with great caution, insisting on evidence to support claims of improved learning and considering other consequences of a shift to primarily online instruction.