



Celebrating and Remembering David Berliner



David in 2024

Education scholar, leader, wit, gadfly, mentor, father, friend and NEPC Fellow David C. Berliner died September 26th, 2025. He was 87.

As an academic who specialized in educational psychology, Berliner received many of the most prestigious accolades awarded to those in his field. He was elected to the National Academy of Education and the International Academy of Education, and he was given award after award:



David's Bar Mitzvah, 1951

the E.L. Thorndike Award in educational psychology, the AERA's Distinguished Contributions Award and its Outstanding Public Communication of Education Research Award, the Friend of Education award of the NEA, and the Brock Prize in Education Innovation. He served as president of AERA and Dean of the College of Education at Arizona State University. He taught at universities around the nation and the world.

Although he excelled in the Ivory Tower, Berliner



David and Ursula
March For Our Lives

was probably best known as a public intellectual who intrepidly pushed back against lawmakers and education policy that flew in the face of research and (quite frequently) common sense. This work is represented, for instance, in his general-interest books *The Manufactured Crisis* (1996, co-authored with Bruce Biddle), *Collateral Damage* (2007, co-authored with Sharon Nichols), and *50 Myths and Lies that Threaten America's Public Schools* (2014, co-authored with Gene Glass).

"In the raging battle over school reform, David wanted to fight—and fight he did," said NEPC's Alex Molnar.

In books, articles, op-eds, and speeches, he relentlessly exposed the lies and hypocrisy of neoliberal school reform advocates and the danger posed by their market-based vision of public education. He fought hard but he was a joyous warrior—dancing would have definitely been allowed at David's revolution! I have never met anyone more full of life. I will miss you terribly, my friend.



David and Ursula

The 200-plus articles, reports, chapters, and books Berliner authored during his lifetime ranged from scholarly writings on psychology, pedagogy, and assessment to accessible books that used plain language to explain how education research was applied—and misapplied—in the real world. He remained prolific to the end, publishing a book of 19 personal and reflective essays, *Public Education for Our Nation's Democracy: Commentaries on Schooling in America*, the month he passed away.



David enjoying the
waters off Hawaii, 2025

"David was an acerbic critic of the past two+ decades of what was called 'education reform,'" his friend, the education scholar Diane Ravitch, [wrote](#) upon his

death.

David laughed at the nonsensical but heavily funded plans to ‘reform’ education by imposing behaviorist strategies on teachers, as if they were robots or simpletons. David had no patience with the shallow critics of America’s public schools. He respected the nation’s teachers and understood as few of the critics did, just how valuable and under-appreciated they were.

Although his work grappled with serious topics, David was known for his lighthearted approach. He was our enthusiastic [host](#) of The Bunkum Awards, a satirical “honor” that NEPC used to bestow on the most appalling educational think-tank reports of the year. The videos, which are from [2013](#) and [2014](#), are still fun to watch, as David joyfully skewers the award recipients.



[2014 Bunkum Awards](#)

David also took great joy in the simple pleasures of life, from sunsets to seltzers to real honest-to-goodness New York City bagels, especially when enjoyed with his many friends, his children and grandchildren, and his beloved wife, Ursula Casanova.



David and Kevin in 2023

At an online memorial held October 4th in his honor, the word repeatedly used to describe him was “*mensh.*” “Just thinking of David always made my heart smile,” said NEPC’s Kevin Welner. “His presence among us, effusing decency and empathy, was a reminder of why we’re here on earth.”

“He was a great guy, in so many ways,” his daughter BethAnn Berliner told us. “We’ve heard from people how he was a giant in the field, a scholar, a teacher, a mentor, and an advocate. But to me, he was just dad and that was far greater.”

This newsletter is made possible in part by support provided by the Great Lakes Center for Education Research and Practice: <http://www.greatlakescenter.org>

The National Education Policy Center (NEPC), a university research center housed at the University of Colorado Boulder School of Education, sponsors research, produces policy briefs, and publishes expert third-party reviews of think tank reports. NEPC publications are written in accessible language and are intended for a broad audience that includes academic experts, policymakers, the media, and the general public. Our mission is to provide high-quality information in support of democratic deliberation about education policy. We are guided by the belief that the democratic governance of public education is strengthened when policies are based on sound evidence and support a multiracial society that is inclusive, kind, and just. Visit us at: <http://nepc.colorado.edu>