

THE PRIVATIZATION PLAYBOOK

Advocates for privatizing public education systems and turning them into profit-making opportunities face a major challenge: public schools are the cornerstone of our communities. Public education is 'the great equalizer' and most people instinctively appreciate public education's role in creating vibrant, prosperous and diverse societies.

To get past this challenge, privatizers have a tried-and-true strategy. Wherever privatizers use the strategy their core goal is the same: undermine public education to open the door for profit.

1 SET THE STAGE AND FIND SOMEONE TO BLAME

Exaggerate the problems facing the system while finding someone to blame for those problems.

THE FORD GOVERNMENT IS SETTING THE STAGE:

- Using hand-picked reports: Managing Transformation report by Ernst & Young and the Report of the Independent Financial Commission of Inquiry to inflate the deficit and create fiscal panic.
- Creating anti-teacher snitch lines
- Proposing pedagogically irrelevant and unhelpful math tests for teachers

2 UNDERMINE SUPPORT

Select one or more strategies for creating uncertainty and distrust.

- Create unrealistic accountability systems with a focus on standardized testing.
- Create 'winners' and 'losers'; vilify schools and education workers that don't meet the unrealistic standards.
- Create a public campaign targeting public schools.
- Create a narrative. Tell parents their rights aren't respected in schools. Tell parents their children are trapped in a government system. Blame educators, unions, past governments and anyone else who supports comprehensive public education for holding kids captive.

THE FORD GOVERNMENT:

- Has suggested parents need a Bill of Rights
- Is building a narrative—disguised as public consultations and already vilifying groups that disagree with them

3 CREATE ALTERNATIVES TO THE SYSTEM

Start talking about magic bullets that will 'rescue' the public system. Privatizers talk about choice and partnerships. At this stage, expect to start hearing about vouchers, tuition tax credits, charter schools and corporate involvement in the classroom.

THE FORD GOVERNMENT:

- Cites its Ernst & Young Report, which advocates saving money by introducing choice into public education

4 ADJUST THE MESSAGE BASED ON REALITY

Education privatizers have had a huge head start in the United States and this is the step they're on today. After nearly two decades, American charter schools have a clear track record and it isn't good.

Privatization is never about improving public service or public education; it's always about making a profit. So, when profit-making fails to improve learning, privatizers simply flip the script and start again.

5 HAVE A LEGAL STRATEGY

Most voters actually like the public education system. In the U.S., nearly every effort to introduce 'choice' through school vouchers has been defeated at the polls. Voters also consistently reject proposals to raise or eliminate caps on charter schools.

When campaigns to undermine public support don't go far enough, well-funded privatization advocates take their battle to the courts. Sometimes they go after access to public dollars for private institutions directly. Other times, they target public education's biggest defenders: public education unions.

6 NEW FORMS OF PRIVATIZATION

The charter school movement—in the United States at least—appears to have run its course. Although U.S. privatizers continue to push for charter school expansion, they experienced major defeats in the recent U.S. mid-term elections. This is likely because charter schools promised the impossible and predictably failed to deliver.

But that doesn't mean they're giving up. Companies such as Pearson, K-12 Inc. and others see new opportunities for profit through 'personalized learning,' artificial intelligence, on-demand learning and other forms of corporate intrusion into the classroom. The specifics vary, but the effect is always the same: putting profits ahead of students.