



Burning Cash: How Costly Public School Failures have Charred the American Dream

Justin A. Collins

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With the Common Core poised to markedly amplify the accountability stakes in public education, the pressure to post steep outcomes gains has never been fiercer. Unsurprisingly, flashy and expensive school improvement initiatives that promise quick fix solutions have become pervasively *en vogue* across the K-12 landscape. As Justin A. Collins compellingly demonstrates in *Burning Cash*, these flashy acronym reform plans provide for abundantly vivid theatre, but offer no muscle for the heavy lifting required to transform instructional quality.

Collins pens a forceful case that despite the dizzying change swirling around the classroom walls, student engagement remains a fixture of a paramount importance. Taking a decided detour from the student engagement literature to date, *Burning Cash* spells out an entirely fresh means of numerically charting student engagement levels across all classrooms over time. Were the status quo to instead persist, a high school diploma will remain the end of the educational line for millions of schoolchildren.

By reliably quantifying the nature of student engagement at the classroom level, teachers and administrators are supplied a powerfully telling barometer by which to gauge educational quality. Also left at educational leaders' disposal are data-informed guideposts that illuminate the improvement work left to be done. As Los Angeles Schools' John Deasy champions in the book's foreword, when student higher-order thinking balloons and disengagement is eradicated, test score spikes are extreme and sustained, no matter the school district's zip code. And that means the promise of the American dream is enlivened without additionally burdening deficit-riddled budgets.

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