

## gadflyonthewallblog

"To sting people and whip them into a fury, all in the service of truth."

# Bernie Sanders Explains Puzzling Education Vote – It's Because Accountability

□ [August 15, 2015](#) [August 16, 2015](#) □ [stevenmsinger](#) . [Accountability](#), [Bernie Sanders](#), [Corporate Education "Reform"](#), [Democrat](#), [Education](#), [Election](#), [ESEA](#), [Politics](#) □ [#blacklivesmatter](#), [#LetTeachersTeach](#), [#StandUpForPublicSchools](#), [annual testing](#), [badass teachers association](#), [Bernie Sanders](#), [Budget](#), [charter schools](#), [Civil Rights](#), [Corporate Education Reform](#), [Democrats](#), [education](#), [education reform](#), [Election](#), [Elizabeth Warren](#), [ESEA](#), [standardized testing](#)



(<https://gadflyonthewallblog.files.wordpress.com/2015/08/screenshot-2015-08-15-at-3-24-57-am.png>).

Photo: Alex Garland

When teachers asked, [Bernie Sanders](https://berniesanders.com/) (<https://berniesanders.com/>) answered.

*Why, Bernie? Why did you vote this summer against everything you seem to stand for on education policy?*

*You stood against President George W. Bush's disastrous No Child Left Behind (<http://blackagendareport.com/content/ten-years-no-child-left-behind-disaster-capitalism-schools>) legislation in 2001. Why did you vote for almost the same thing in 2015 (<https://gadflyonthewallblog.wordpress.com/2015/07/17/the-democrats-may-have-just-aligned-themselves-with-test-and-punish-we-are-doomed/>)?*

The answer is in from the Vermont Senator turned Democratic Presidential Candidate, but it's not entirely satisfactory.

The short version: Accountability (<http://www.the-american-interest.com/2015/08/03/the-costs-of-accountability/>).

In education circles, it's a buzzword meaning opposite things to opposite people. And determined in opposite ways.

Ask a representative of the standardized testing industry, and more than likely he'll tell you accountability means making sure public schools actually teach students (<http://curmudgucation.blogspot.com/2014/09/reforming-accountability-does-crpe-have.html>) – especially the poor and minorities (<https://gadflyonthewallblog.wordpress.com/2015/07/19/we-shall-overcome-our-lack-of-standardized-tests/>). And the only way to determine this is through repeated, rigid, standardized assessments. Let's call that **TEACHER ACCOUNTABILITY**.

Ask a real live educator, and more than likely she'll tell you it means making sure local, state and federal governments actually provide the funding and resources necessary to teach students (<http://www.nationaljournal.com/thenextamerica/education/analysis-how-much-states-spend-on-their-kids-really-does-matter-20121016>) – especially the poor and minorities (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/local/wp/2015/06/08/inequitable-school-funding-called-one-of-the-sleeper-civil-rights-issues-of-our-time/>). And the best way to determine this is simple math. Let's call that **LAWMAKER ACCOUNTABILITY**.

These seem to be the central disagreements: Are lawmakers providing equitable resources to all our public schools (<http://www.alternet.org/education/gap-between-rich-and-poor-schools-grew-44-percent-over-decade>) or are teachers just not doing their jobs? Are student test scores the best way to measure accountability (<http://blogs.wsj.com/economics/2014/10/07/sat-scores-and-income-inequality-how-wealthier-kids-rank-higher/>) or should we rely on something as rock solid as elementary math?

**TEACHER ACCOUNTABILITY** is hard to determine. You have to spend billions of taxpayer dollars (<http://www.alternet.org/education/corporations-profit-standardized-tests>) buying tests, scoring tests and on test prep materials. And then you have to ignore all the evidence ([http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/post/why-faith-in-standardized-testing-industry-is-misplaced/2011/04/10/AFXIkSHD\\_blog.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/post/why-faith-in-standardized-testing-industry-is-misplaced/2011/04/10/AFXIkSHD_blog.html)) that this proves nothing (<https://gadflyonthewallblog.wordpress.com/2015/01/30/why-we-should-have-zero-standardized-tests-in-public-schools%E2%80%A8%E2%80%A8/>). You could instead just poke your head into any public school across the nation and actually see teachers working ([http://www.huffingtonpost.com/diane-ravitch/a-new-paradigm-for-accoun\\_b\\_6145446.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/diane-ravitch/a-new-paradigm-for-accoun_b_6145446.html)) their butts off. Heck! You could stop in after school hours and count the numbers of teachers still at work ([http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/09/09/oecd-teacher-salary-report\\_n\\_5791166.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/09/09/oecd-teacher-salary-report_n_5791166.html)) and tabulate the amount of their own cash they spend on class materials (<http://thejournal.com/Articles/2015/07/23/Survey-Average-Teacher-Spends-500-Out-of-Pocket-on-Classroom-Supplies.aspx>). But that won't work – there isn't an industry profiting off you using your own eyes and brain.

On the other hand, determining **LAWMAKER ACCOUNTABILITY** is easy. Just [compare school budgets](http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2011-11-07/news/ct-met-school-funding-gaps-20111107_1_spending-gap-taft-s-district-poorest-schools) ([http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2011-11-07/news/ct-met-school-funding-gaps-20111107\\_1\\_spending-gap-taft-s-district-poorest-schools](http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2011-11-07/news/ct-met-school-funding-gaps-20111107_1_spending-gap-taft-s-district-poorest-schools)). Greater than and less than. You'll find that none of our lawmakers provide equitable funding. Rich kids in wealthy districts get Cadillac funding while poor and minority kids in impoverished districts get bicycle funding. Strangely, this is never discussed.

Moreover, none of this relies on opinion. All it takes is empirical evidence to see the truth. *Lawmakers are not accountable at all. Teachers are accountable for too much and judged by unscientific and untrustworthy methods.*

Unfortunately, few politicians have fully figured this out yet. Even you, Bernie.

This summer it's all come down to a series of votes on the [Elementary and Secondary Education Act](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elementary_and_Secondary_Education_Act) ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elementary\\_and\\_Secondary\\_Education\\_Act](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elementary_and_Secondary_Education_Act)) (ESEA).

The law the governs K-12 public schools was written in 1965 [to ensure all schools received the proper resources](http://progressive.org/news/2015/07/188241/battle-over-education-and-civil-rights) (<http://progressive.org/news/2015/07/188241/battle-over-education-and-civil-rights>). – **LAWMAKER ACCOUNTABILITY.**

However, under President George W. Bush and throughout the Obama years, it's become about [punishing teachers and schools](http://www.rethinkingschools.org/special_reports/bushplan/index.shtml) ([http://www.rethinkingschools.org/special\\_reports/bushplan/index.shtml](http://www.rethinkingschools.org/special_reports/bushplan/index.shtml)) for low standardized test scores – **TEACHER ACCOUNTABILITY.**

And the champions of **TEACHER ACCOUNTABILITY** this summer have been primarily Democrats including liberal lions like Elizabeth Warren and Sanders.

**LAWMAKER ACCOUNTABILITY?** No one's talking that.

Most troubling is the [Murphy Amendment](http://dianeravitch.net/2015/07/16/murphy-amendment-did-not-pass-fortunately/) (<http://dianeravitch.net/2015/07/16/murphy-amendment-did-not-pass-fortunately/>) – an attempt to double down on **TEACHER ACCOUNTABILITY**. [Keep testing and punishing because it's working soooo well](https://deutsch29.wordpress.com/2015/07/16/senate-esea-amendment-voice-vote-update-for-july-15-2015/) (<https://deutsch29.wordpress.com/2015/07/16/senate-esea-amendment-voice-vote-update-for-july-15-2015/>). Thankfully, the move was defeated by Senate Republicans. [But Sanders and Warren both voted for it](http://www.senate.gov/legislative/LIS/roll_call_lists/roll_call_vote_cfm.cfm?congress=114&session=1&vote=00241) ([http://www.senate.gov/legislative/LIS/roll\\_call\\_lists/roll\\_call\\_vote\\_cfm.cfm?congress=114&session=1&vote=00241](http://www.senate.gov/legislative/LIS/roll_call_lists/roll_call_vote_cfm.cfm?congress=114&session=1&vote=00241)). Warren even co-sponsored it!

That's why a group of respected education professionals and union leaders (including myself) wrote [an open letter to Sanders](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/arthur-goldstein/open-letter-to-senator-sa_b_7842776.html?utm_hp_ref=tw) ([http://www.huffingtonpost.com/arthur-goldstein/open-letter-to-senator-sa\\_b\\_7842776.html?utm\\_hp\\_ref=tw](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/arthur-goldstein/open-letter-to-senator-sa_b_7842776.html?utm_hp_ref=tw)), asking him to please explain, himself.

We aren't exactly a hostile crowd. We like a bunch of things that Sanders represents in his presidential campaign. We want to support him, but we need to know why he voted to keep the worst aspects of the current law.

And Bernie answered! Or his staff did.

I'll reproduce [the entire letter](https://www.facebook.com/arthur.goldstein.5/posts/930172063705750?pnref=story) (<https://www.facebook.com/arthur.goldstein.5/posts/930172063705750?pnref=story>), we received from staffer Phil Fiermonte below this blog. But first I want to focus on Bernie's specific reasons for voting in favor of the Murphy Amendment:

As you mentioned, Senator Murphy introduced an amendment on the Senate floor that would have required states to hold schools accountable for the academic performance of low-income, minority and disabled students. Senator Sanders voted for this amendment because he believes states must do more to protect every student's right to a quality education, and that from a civil right's perspective, the federal government has an important role to play in protecting low-income, minority and disabled children. As you pointed out, the mechanism this amendment would have used to identify struggling schools resembles the failed policies of No Child Left Behind. This was a significant concern to the Senator, and one that he shared with the sponsors of the amendment.

Senator Sanders cast his vote on this amendment to express his disapproval with aspects of the bill that were insisted upon by Chairman Alexander and Senate Republicans and that do not reflect the best interests of vulnerable populations, or a progressive view on the distribution of education resources. He has made clear to Chairman Alexander, Ranking Member Murray, and Senate Leadership that his vote was not an endorsement of the accountability mechanism included in the amendment, but rather as a statement of his intent that other measures must be put in place to protect low-income, minority and disabled students.

So Sanders voted for the Murphy Amendment for these reasons:

1. He was mad that there is nothing about **LAWMAKER ACCOUNTABILITY** in the ESEA.
2. He believes in **TEACHER ACCOUNTABILITY** – at least in part. He thinks the federal government needs to make sure teachers and schools are actually educating kids, **BUT** he doesn't believe standardized tests are the best way of determining this.

Okay. First of all, he has a point. There is next to nothing in the whole ESEA rewrite about **LAWMAKER ACCOUNTABILITY** (<https://gadflyonthewallblog.wordpress.com/2015/07/15/in-esea-debate-education-is-caught-in-the-middle-between-the-state-and-fed/>). When I was on Capitol Hill earlier this summer lobbying my lawmakers (<https://gadflyonthewallblog.wordpress.com/2015/07/25/down-and-out-and-lobbying-for-public-education/>) on this very issue, in general the Democrats blamed the Republicans and the Republicans changed the subject.

However, I don't see how voting for an amendment you don't believe in is going to make a point about something entirely unrelated. How would voting for the Murphy Amendment get us **LAWMAKER ACCOUNTABILITY**? The Amendment had nothing to do with that. There are places for it in the ESEA but this amendment was focused almost entirely on **TEACHER ACCOUNTABILITY**.

Was Sanders trying to convince Republicans to add **LAWMAKER ACCOUNTABILITY** elsewhere in the bill by voting against them on **TEACHER ACCOUNTABILITY** here? That seems a stretch. Both parties appear to love **TEACHER ACCOUNTABILITY**, but during this ESEA process the Republicans have been more concerned with stripping the federal government of its power over education. It's not that they don't like **TEACHER ACCOUNTABILITY**, they just want to leave it up to the states.

Then we come to Sander's position on **TEACHER ACCOUNTABILITY**. He's certainly right that schools need to teach students. However, as a public school teacher, I find it ludicrous to think that there are any schools out there that don't.

Are there really schools in our country that don't even *TRY* to educate their students? Really!? Are there hospitals that don't try to heal their patients? Are there defense attorneys who don't try to defend their clients? Are their airlines that don't even try to get passengers to their destinations?

It's absurd. Certainly if there were such places, we should do something about them, but the fact that our education policies are obsessed with something that almost never happens is asinine. It's like going to Ireland and spending the majority of your vacation budget looking for a leprechaun! (At least, this doesn't happen in non-cyber. (<http://www.philly.com/philly/blogs/attytood/Pa-cyberschool-that-educated-Santorums-kids-targeted-in-probe.html>), non-charter (<http://www.alternet.org/education/who-profiting-charters-big-bucks-behind-charter-school-secrecy-financial-scandal-and>), not-for-profit (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2014/08/08/how-will-charter-schools-deal-with-their-corruption-scandals/>), traditional public schools. But I digress...)

Then we get to Bernie's suggestion that he's against using standardized tests to measure if schools are functioning properly. At least here he is justified. But how will voting for the exact thing you're against get you what you want? It boggles the mind. I want Pizza, that's why I'm voting for chicken. Huh!?

However, Sanders is responsible for an innovation in the ESEA along just these lines. He proposed a 7-state pilot program (<http://www.sanders.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/senate-panel-advances-education-bill>) that would allow **TEACHER ACCOUNTABILITY** to be determined on more holistic methods than test scores. Schools could use multiple measures such as student portfolios, classroom projects, or other means to be determined by the states.

This could be a step forward. But even under the best of circumstances, it is limited to a maximum of 7 states. It's not a long term solution. The majority of the country could still be stuck with test and punish.

So we're left with some good news and bad news.

**GOOD NEWS:** Bernie actually took teachers open letter seriously enough to have a staffer answer it. That's something. I'm sure there are plenty of presidential candidates who wouldn't even do that much.

**GOOD NEWS:** Bernie has some thoughtful ideas on education. His pilot program holds – limited – promise. He understands that the measures usually prescribed to determine **TEACHER ACCOUNTABILITY** are bogus.

**GOOD NEWS:** Bernie acknowledges that **LAWMAKER ACCOUNTABILITY** is important and says he'd like to address it.

**BAD NEWS:** He doesn't mind focusing on **TEACHER ACCOUNTABILITY** when there is very little need for it. Moreover, **TEACHER ACCOUNTABILITY** without **LAWMAKER ACCOUNTABILITY** is actually harmful. Imagine if NASCAR fired a driver because the Pit Crew didn't gas up the car. If schools have inadequate money and resources, putting a gun to all the teachers heads isn't going to help.

**BAD NEWS:** Some of his answers don't make sense.

**BAD NEWS:** He isn't addressing us personally. Will it take teachers storming his campaign speeches and swiping the microphone (<https://gadflyonthewallblog.wordpress.com/2015/08/10/why-are-black-lives-matter-activists-targeting-bernie-sanders-because-he-gets-it-almost/>) before he does more than limited reforms and pays us lip service? It's one thing to say #BlackLivesMatter. It's another to make sure our black and brown kids get an equitable education.

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*The following letter was sent to Arthur Goldstein (<https://www.facebook.com/arthur.goldstein.5/posts/930172063705750?pnref=story>), one of the teachers who signed the original open letter to Bernie Sanders:*

*Sen. Sanders views on the Every Child Achieves Act, standardized testing, and school accountability* [SEP] Rand Wilson Add to contacts 4:59 PM Keep this message at the top of your inbox [SEP] To: Arthur Goldstein Cc: Philip Fiermonte, Cwa Cohen [SEP] laborforbernie2016@gmail.com

Dear Brother Goldstein:

Senator Sanders has asked me to respond to your email, and share his views on the Every Child Achieves Act, standardized testing, and school accountability.

As you know, Senator Sanders has long opposed the blame-and-shame approach to school accountability embodied in No Child Left Behind. He voted against No Child Left Behind in 2001 because he believed then, as he does now, that the legislation's narrow focus on standardized test scores ignores a broad range of factors that determine how well a school is meeting the needs of its students. Since the passage of this legislation, we have seen the devastating impact that high stakes standardized testing has had on schools all over the country. In the Senator's home state of Vermont, nearly every school is identified as "failing," and is threatened with increasingly proscriptive federally-determined interventions.

No Child Left Behind's narrow focus on standardized test scores has tragically led to a significant culture shift in our nation's schools. An obsession with testing and test preparation has taken over in countless school districts in America, and educators are being forced to dedicate hours of class time getting students ready for exams rather than teaching them new material, or strengthening essential skills and qualities like critical thinking, teamwork, and problem solving. And the worst thing is that students from low-income, urban school districts spend more time in test preparation than students from the suburbs. These hours and hours of test preparation have no educational value, and the fact that poor and minority students are disproportionately subjected to test prep at the expense of lesson time is a huge problem that must be addressed.

Last month, the senate passed the Every Child Achieves Act, which would fundamentally reform No Child Left Behind, and end its system of high stakes testing and draconian interventions. Senator Sanders supports this legislation, and believes it represents a very important step forward.

As a member of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, the Senator had an opportunity to shape this legislation at every stage of its development. For example, he was one of the leading advocates on committee for the inclusion of a "multiple measure" accountability system that allowed states to include factors other than test scores when determining a school's effectiveness.

In addition, he worked to provide states with significant flexibility when it comes to assessment. This legislation includes a provision written by Senator Sanders that would create a groundbreaking alternative assessment pilot program which would allow states to implement alternatives to standardized testing. If the legislation passes, these new assessments would eventually reduce the number of statewide tests children are forced to take, while providing educators with timely information on student performance.

However, this legislation is far from perfect, and there are several aspects of the Every Child Achieves Act that have caused the Senator great concern. For example, there is no requirement that states focus resources or attention on schools that are meeting the needs of middle class children, but not meeting the needs of minority, low-income and disabled children. In addition, the Senator is

concerned that the bill does nothing to address resource equity, and was deeply disappointed when an amendment offered by Senators Kirk, Baldwin, Reed and Brown to address resource equity failed on the Senate floor.

As you mentioned, Senator Murphy introduced an amendment on the Senate floor that would have required states to hold schools accountable for the academic performance of low-income, minority and disabled students. Senator Sanders voted for this amendment because he believes states must do more to protect every student's right to a quality education, and that from a civil right's perspective, the federal government has an important role to play in protecting low-income, minority and disabled children. As you pointed out, the mechanism this amendment would have used to identify struggling schools resembles the failed policies of No Child Left Behind. This was a significant concern to the Senator, and one that he shared with the sponsors of the amendment.

Senator Sanders cast his vote on this amendment to express his disapproval with aspects of the bill that were insisted upon by Chairman Alexander and Senate Republicans and that do not reflect the best interests of vulnerable populations, or a progressive view on the distribution of education resources. He has made clear to Chairman Alexander, Ranking Member Murray, and Senate Leadership that his vote was not an endorsement of the accountability mechanism included in the amendment, but rather as a statement of his intent that other measures must be put in place to protect low-income, minority and disabled students.

As congressional leaders move toward the next step in consideration of this bill – negotiating differences with the House – Senator Sanders has urged the future leaders of the conference committee to include protections for low-income, minority and disabled students, and to do so in a way that addresses the needs of the whole child. We must ensure low-income, minority and disabled children have the same access to educational resources that their wealthy suburban peers have. In addition, we must ensure that struggling students have access to adequate supports including health, mental health and nutrition services and after school programs that help level the playing field.

For many years, educators across the country have been the loudest, strongest voices against the corporatization of our nation's education system and for the increased funding and wraparound services that will make a difference for our children. This is a fight that Senator Sanders has been waging at the national level for 25 years, and one that he will continue to pursue.

Sincerely,  
Phil Fiermonte  
Bernie 2016

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**NOTE:** *This article also was published in the [LA Progressive \(https://www.laprogressive.com/bernie-sanders-education-policy/\)](https://www.laprogressive.com/bernie-sanders-education-policy/).*

## 32 thoughts on “**Bernie Sanders Explains Puzzling Education Vote – It’s Because Accountability**”

1. **antiquepowergal1** says:  
[August 15, 2015 at 2:39 pm](#)

Reblogged this on [Notes from a Frazzled Teacher](#) (<https://notesfromafrazzledteacher.wordpress.com/2015/08/15/bernie-sanders-explains-puzzling-education-vote-its-because-accountability/>), and commented:  
 Bernie, you're killing me!

[Reply](https://gadflyonthewallblog.com/2015/08/15/bernie-sanders-explains-puzzling-education-vote-its-because-accountability/?replytocom=1185#respond) (<https://gadflyonthewallblog.com/2015/08/15/bernie-sanders-explains-puzzling-education-vote-its-because-accountability/?replytocom=1185#respond>).

- o **Heidi N** says:  
[September 7, 2015 at 11:39 am](#)  
 agree

[Reply](https://gadflyonthewallblog.com/2015/08/15/bernie-sanders-explains-puzzling-education-vote-its-because-accountability/?replytocom=1378#respond) (<https://gadflyonthewallblog.com/2015/08/15/bernie-sanders-explains-puzzling-education-vote-its-because-accountability/?replytocom=1378#respond>).

2. **mathcs** says:  
[August 15, 2015 at 2:45 pm](#)

One criticism of the process by which we got the Common Core is that it was never tested to get the kinks out. Is his 7-state pilot program an improvement on that?

[Reply](https://gadflyonthewallblog.com/2015/08/15/bernie-sanders-explains-puzzling-education-vote-its-because-accountability/?replytocom=1186#respond) (<https://gadflyonthewallblog.com/2015/08/15/bernie-sanders-explains-puzzling-education-vote-its-because-accountability/?replytocom=1186#respond>).

- o **stevenmsinger** says:  
[August 15, 2015 at 9:06 pm](#)

It's hard to say since so much is up in the air with the ESEA. However, the pilot program holds potential. Certainly Bernie deserves points for coming up with a new approach and being brave enough to try it out.

[Reply](https://gadflyonthewallblog.com/2015/08/15/bernie-sanders-explains-puzzling-education-vote-its-because-accountability/?replytocom=1198#respond) (<https://gadflyonthewallblog.com/2015/08/15/bernie-sanders-explains-puzzling-education-vote-its-because-accountability/?replytocom=1198#respond>).

3. **Frances Carman** says:  
[August 15, 2015 at 3:06 pm](#)

There are more area of "accountability" that figure into learning. Parents' Accountability to make sure their children are "ready" for school each day. That means getting enough sleep at night-(no cell phones TVs lap tops etc. after a set time) up in time for a proper breakfast, encouragement with their homework and allow time to do it and to play. Electronics should be a reward for good results and completed homework. Also there should be Student Accountability—they should learn that doing as well as they can in school is their "JOB" Almost everyone works these days so it should be easy to convince them that they doing their part by trying hard to do well in school and treat their teachers and others with respect.

[Reply](https://gadflyonthewallblog.com/2015/08/15/bernie-sanders-explains-puzzling-education-vote-its-because-accountability/?replytocom=1188#respond) (<https://gadflyonthewallblog.com/2015/08/15/bernie-sanders-explains-puzzling-education-vote-its-because-accountability/?replytocom=1188#respond>).

- o **stevenmsinger** says:  
[August 15, 2015 at 9:12 pm](#)

You have a point, Frances. Parents and students are part of the equation, too. So are communities. However, I wouldn't rush to blame these groups en mass. In my experience, most parents are trying the best they can, but especially in impoverished neighborhoods working multiple minimum wage jobs means they aren't around much. Children try their best if we can reach them,



but kids today are dealing with things we never dreamed of. And they have less places to turn for help. No. More than anything I blame lawmakers who have no interest in providing the resources these young people need to succeed.

[Reply \(https://gadflyonthewallblog.com/2015/08/15/bernie-sanders-explains-puzzling-education-vote-its-because-accountability/?replytocom=1200#respond\)](https://gadflyonthewallblog.com/2015/08/15/bernie-sanders-explains-puzzling-education-vote-its-because-accountability/?replytocom=1200#respond)

o **dmaxmj** says:

[August 17, 2015 at 10:43 am](#)

bingo...Push for tests = cheapest, most easily contracted out and profitable, least thought and collaboration, most efficiently gamed and shaped for desirable result and scapegoating. Doing the hard work that truly needs to be done is left to the pros, the blame and shame game comes from the test-or-else camp.

[Reply \(https://gadflyonthewallblog.com/2015/08/15/bernie-sanders-explains-puzzling-education-vote-its-because-accountability/?replytocom=1210#respond\)](https://gadflyonthewallblog.com/2015/08/15/bernie-sanders-explains-puzzling-education-vote-its-because-accountability/?replytocom=1210#respond)

4. **Lloyd Lofthouse** says:

[August 15, 2015 at 4:23 pm](#)

“Ask a representative of the standardized testing industry, and more than likely he’ll tell you accountability means making sure public schools actually teach students – especially the poor and minorities.”

The accountability movement forgot—probably on purpose—to make the students accountable to learn what they were taught, and even if the students paid attention and did the work, how does the accountability movement measure what’s lost from memory every night when that automatic process goes to work while the student is sleeping and automatically decides what to delete and what to move from short term memory to long term where it will stagnant and vanish if it isn’t used daily.

Back in the late 1980s, I started to focus on how the brain and memory works. I read books and attended workshops—a lot of them—and then I started to plan my lessons accordingly so what I taught built on a foundation layer by layer with every assignment including some of the most important elements of the first layer of learning. But this method limits how fast you can cram new ideas and concepts into a young brain and make sure it sticks. For this to work, it means going slower and focusing on fewer new concepts added to the old. The only honest way to test this is the measure increase in literacy and writing skills—-not specific remembered facts.

The goal was to increase imagination, critical thinking and problem solving skills with the ability to communicate orally and in writing what the student was proposing and/or writing with facts from a variety of sources including personal experiences.

The Common Core Crap high stakes agenda that punishes without impunity does not do this at all. In fact, the Common Core Crap reverses the process of literacy growth, problem solving and critical thinking.

[Reply \(https://gadflyonthewallblog.com/2015/08/15/bernie-sanders-explains-puzzling-education-vote-its-because-accountability/?replytocom=1189#respond\)](https://gadflyonthewallblog.com/2015/08/15/bernie-sanders-explains-puzzling-education-vote-its-because-accountability/?replytocom=1189#respond)

o **stevenmsinger** says:

[August 15, 2015 at 9:14 pm](#)

Thoughtful analysis, Lloyd! We need to apply more neuroscience to education and less corporate reform doublespeak.

[Reply \(https://gadflyonthewallblog.com/2015/08/15/bernie-sanders-explains-puzzling-education-vote-its-because-accountability/?replytocom=1201#respond\)](https://gadflyonthewallblog.com/2015/08/15/bernie-sanders-explains-puzzling-education-vote-its-because-accountability/?replytocom=1201#respond)

5. **Ed Detective** says:  
[August 15, 2015 at 4:34 pm](#)

So Bernie Sanders does understand that different measures are needed, just as we've heard him state before. He doesn't know everything about education, as we should have known. And once again, your alarmist reporting is misleading people as to what he stands for, and the improvements he will put forth when he is a position to do so.

[Reply \(https://gadflyonthewallblog.com/2015/08/15/bernie-sanders-explains-puzzling-education-vote-its-because-accountability/?replytocom=1190#respond\)](https://gadflyonthewallblog.com/2015/08/15/bernie-sanders-explains-puzzling-education-vote-its-because-accountability/?replytocom=1190#respond)

o **stevenmsinger** says:  
[August 15, 2015 at 9:19 pm](#)

Ed, how is this alarmist? This is what Bernie's folks said and my analysis. Do you disagree with me about something? I didn't write this to sink Bernie's campaign. I really like the guy. Have for years. But I'm not about to accept any crumbs the Democrats deign to throw my way like I did when Obama ran. He could talk a good game, too, but look at the results? Yuck! My hope is that calling Bernie out on his missteps in education policy may improve his views. He's the only major candidate who seems willing to listen and evolve.

[Reply \(https://gadflyonthewallblog.com/2015/08/15/bernie-sanders-explains-puzzling-education-vote-its-because-accountability/?replytocom=1204#respond\)](https://gadflyonthewallblog.com/2015/08/15/bernie-sanders-explains-puzzling-education-vote-its-because-accountability/?replytocom=1204#respond)

o **Ed Detective** says:  
[August 15, 2015 at 9:53 pm](#)

For one, it is clear that Bernie is all about lawmaker accountability. You suggest he isn't, based on ONE vote — even when he has stated otherwise, and shown otherwise on many occasions.

Aside from a few minor disagreements about your accountability ideas, the bigger issue I see is the way you have presented the message to inspire comments like the one made by "Poetic Justice" below. Might be interesting to think why someone would make a comment like that after reading this blog post? Just an example: read the first two sentences of your blog post and think what kind of tone that sets for the rest of it. What message are you sending?? How are you painting him as a politician overall?

I don't want people to miss the big picture and shoot themselves in the foot due to a passionate criticism of one circumstance. Bernie's voting record has made it extremely clear that he means what he says. Give him time to act on his intent, and consider that perhaps there's more than meets the eye in these situations. If he's wrong about something, bring it up, but in the process don't assist people in becoming cynical.

6. **Martha Toth** says:  
[August 15, 2015 at 4:51 pm](#)

I admire Lloyd's commitment to brain-based instructional practice. We know (or could, if we bothered to keep up with research) so much more now about how we learn. Way too much of my own learning was based on short-term memory. Although I got outstanding test scores, much of that temporary knowledge vanished over time.

As for the senator's vote on the Murphy amendment, I get the implication that it made some sense as a parliamentary maneuver. Does anyone know enough about Senate rules to confirm this?

[Reply \(https://gadflyonthewallblog.com/2015/08/15/bernie-sanders-explains-puzzling-education-vote-its-because-accountability/?replytocom=1191#respond\)](https://gadflyonthewallblog.com/2015/08/15/bernie-sanders-explains-puzzling-education-vote-its-because-accountability/?replytocom=1191#respond)

7. **Victoria** says:  
[August 15, 2015 at 5:20 pm](#)

So, because he believes in some kind of teacher accountability he voted yes. However, this is not necessarily the right way nor a fair way to measure it? And he voted YES? What? Come on Bernie. So now we are STILL STUCK with something that is unfair, demoralizing, and punitive. How about voting NO and coming up with something better? You're just like the rest.

[Reply \(https://gadflyonthewallblog.com/2015/08/15/bernie-sanders-explains-puzzling-education-vote-its-because-accountability/?replytocom=1192#respond\)](https://gadflyonthewallblog.com/2015/08/15/bernie-sanders-explains-puzzling-education-vote-its-because-accountability/?replytocom=1192#respond)

8. **Poetic Justice** says:  
[August 15, 2015 at 6:45 pm](#)

Bernie is a disappointment – to say the least. It seems that the ongoing war on public education will continue with any of the Republican and/or Democratic candidates for president. Truly disappointing. For me, I will not vote for any candidate who is against a free and equitable public education for ALL children.

[Reply \(https://gadflyonthewallblog.com/2015/08/15/bernie-sanders-explains-puzzling-education-vote-its-because-accountability/?replytocom=1193#respond\)](https://gadflyonthewallblog.com/2015/08/15/bernie-sanders-explains-puzzling-education-vote-its-because-accountability/?replytocom=1193#respond)

o **Ed Detective** says:  
[August 15, 2015 at 9:11 pm](#)

To all of you. Do not abandon our best political hope due to a cynical ASSUMPTION. Bernie has our best interest in mind and will continue to evolve on every issue, as he has been doing. Not only that, but as a part of this very blog post shows (and then is downplayed), we do not know all the circumstances behind the Murphy amendment vote, and it is inconsistent with his other votes and beliefs.

Be careful with your fears and doubts, that they don't sabotage our potential allies. Do not jump to doomsday conclusions based on an outlier and/or a very limited set of information.

[Reply \(https://gadflyonthewallblog.com/2015/08/15/bernie-sanders-explains-puzzling-education-vote-its-because-accountability/?replytocom=1199#respond\)](https://gadflyonthewallblog.com/2015/08/15/bernie-sanders-explains-puzzling-education-vote-its-because-accountability/?replytocom=1199#respond)

o **dmaxmj** says:  
[August 17, 2015 at 10:48 am](#)

Maybe he should come out with a statement describing the need to include the professionals in coming up with accountability to more holistic, whole-citizen shaping edu-goals, in addition to opposing market-driven edu-accountability coming from a well protected corporate class that has holistically failed us (and yet escapes accountability).

9. **camb888** says:  
[August 15, 2015 at 8:51 pm](#)

Poetic Justice, how does this show that Sanders is against a free and equitable public education for ALL children!

[Reply \(https://gadflyonthewallblog.com/2015/08/15/bernie-sanders-explains-puzzling-education-vote-its-because-accountability/?replytocom=1196#respond\)](https://gadflyonthewallblog.com/2015/08/15/bernie-sanders-explains-puzzling-education-vote-its-because-accountability/?replytocom=1196#respond)

o **Ed Detective** says:  
[August 15, 2015 at 9:15 pm](#)

It doesn't. It shows that there were other circumstances involved, and/or Bernie Sanders is not as informed on the specific issues in K-12 education as the rest of us. Anyone who has paid attention to Bernie Sanders knows that he is for equity in every circumstance, and that if he isn't informed about the particulars of implementation, he will eventually find a better way.

[Reply \(https://gadflyonthewallblog.com/2015/08/15/bernie-sanders-explains-puzzling-education-vote-its-because-accountability/?replytocom=1202#respond\)](https://gadflyonthewallblog.com/2015/08/15/bernie-sanders-explains-puzzling-education-vote-its-because-accountability/?replytocom=1202#respond)

- o **Ed Detective** says:  
[August 15, 2015 at 9:17 pm](#)

And by "the rest of us" I mean those who study the situation carefully and work in schools. He isn't an education anthropologist.

10. **tultican** says:  
[August 15, 2015 at 9:03 pm](#)

This is the issue that has left me reluctant to be all in for Bernie even though not being a hedge fund liberal has real appeal. Hillary is a hedge fund liberal and has been a proponent of federal control of education since at least the early 90's. Sadly, the Democratic party is all about privatizing public schools (charters) and controlling education at the federal level. On the other hand, the Republican party is not so much about federal control as they are about corporate control of education. They seem to believe private corporations will always do a better job than some hick parents led school board in Elko, Nevada. A friend of mine used to say, "I could have been a liberal, then I went to Viet Nam." Today, I feel like, "I could have been a Democrat, then I saw federal education reform."

[Reply \(https://gadflyonthewallblog.com/2015/08/15/bernie-sanders-explains-puzzling-education-vote-its-because-accountability/?replytocom=1197#respond\)](https://gadflyonthewallblog.com/2015/08/15/bernie-sanders-explains-puzzling-education-vote-its-because-accountability/?replytocom=1197#respond)

11. **peachymeyer** says:  
[August 15, 2015 at 9:42 pm](#)

Well, Bernie is a mainstream politician after all. You can't get too excited in the long run. But in the short run, he might be able to improve a few specifics.

[Reply \(https://gadflyonthewallblog.com/2015/08/15/bernie-sanders-explains-puzzling-education-vote-its-because-accountability/?replytocom=1205#respond\)](https://gadflyonthewallblog.com/2015/08/15/bernie-sanders-explains-puzzling-education-vote-its-because-accountability/?replytocom=1205#respond)

12. **We Are All on the Lunatic Fringe – The Centerless Battle Against Corporate Education Reform | gadflyonthewallblog** says:  
[August 18, 2015 at 6:03 am](#)

[...] we described how the definition of school accountability has changed from holding lawmakers accountable to holding teachers accountable, he talked about the [...]

[Reply \(https://gadflyonthewallblog.com/2015/08/15/bernie-sanders-explains-puzzling-education-vote-its-because-accountability/?replytocom=1223#respond\)](https://gadflyonthewallblog.com/2015/08/15/bernie-sanders-explains-puzzling-education-vote-its-because-accountability/?replytocom=1223#respond)

13. **Ed News, Tuesday, August 18, 2015 Edition | tigersteach** says:  
[August 19, 2015 at 1:01 am](#)

[...] Election 2016 Steven Singer, on his GADFLYONTHEWALLBLOG, expounds are seemingly contradictory votes Democratic presidential hopeful Bernie Sanders cast over the past 15 years on NCLB and the current rewrite of the ESEA. A key term in the [...]

[Reply \(https://gadflyonthewallblog.com/2015/08/15/bernie-sanders-explains-puzzling-education-vote-its-because-accountability/?replytocom=1235#respond\)](https://gadflyonthewallblog.com/2015/08/15/bernie-sanders-explains-puzzling-education-vote-its-because-accountability/?replytocom=1235#respond)

14. **While Hillary Clinton Courts Teachers, Bernie Sanders May Have Conceded The Education Vote | gadflyonthewallblog** says:

November 13, 2015 at 4:32 am

[...] Senate he voted to expand charter school funding, voted for No Child Left Behind and most recently voted to keep test and punish policies in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. However, given everything else he espouses, all [...]

Reply (<https://gadflyonthewallblog.com/2015/08/15/bernie-sanders-explains-puzzling-education-vote-its-because-accountability/?replytocom=2075#respond>).

15. **While Hillary Clinton Courts Teachers, Bernie Sanders May Have Conceded The Education Vote -**

**Uncle Sam's Blog** says:

November 17, 2015 at 9:51 pm

[...] Senate he voted to expand charter school funding, voted for No Child Left Behind and most recently voted to keep test and punish policies in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. However, given everything else he espouses, all [...]

Reply (<https://gadflyonthewallblog.com/2015/08/15/bernie-sanders-explains-puzzling-education-vote-its-because-accountability/?replytocom=2111#respond>).

16. **Does Bernie Sanders Offer Education Advocates Enough? Are We Feelin' the Bern or Just Feelin'**

**Burned? | gadflyonthewallblog** says:

December 27, 2015 at 5:15 am

[...] this legislation was still in the Senate, he – along with almost all Democrats – voted for a failed amendment that would have continued most of the worst aspects of NCLB. The bill eventually passed the chamber [...]

Reply (<https://gadflyonthewallblog.com/2015/08/15/bernie-sanders-explains-puzzling-education-vote-its-because-accountability/?replytocom=2464#respond>).

17. **Who's Your Favorite Gadfly? Top 10 Blog Posts (By Me) That Enlightened, Entertained and**

**Enraged in 2015 | gadflyonthewallblog** says:

December 31, 2015 at 6:24 am

[...] Fun Fact: This story had some legs. It inspired a bunch of education advocates like myself who are also Bernie Sanders supporters to write the candidate an open letter asking him to explain his vote. His campaign eventually responded that it was about accountability!? [...]

Reply (<https://gadflyonthewallblog.com/2015/08/15/bernie-sanders-explains-puzzling-education-vote-its-because-accountability/?replytocom=2518#respond>).

18. **Bernie Sanders Explains Puzzling Education Vote – It's Because Accountability | IEA Voice** says:

January 17, 2016 at 9:24 am

[...] Reblogged from GADFLYONTHEWALLBLOG [...]

Reply (<https://gadflyonthewallblog.com/2015/08/15/bernie-sanders-explains-puzzling-education-vote-its-because-accountability/?replytocom=2726#respond>).

19. **Teachers4Bernie** says:

February 28, 2016 at 12:55 am

This sounds like Bernie voted for Murphy's Amendment because he believed ESSA lacked sufficient language protecting minority students and students with special needs. Although Murphy's Amendment still had emphasis on teacher accountability, it also had the student protections that ESSA was lacking.

"His vote was not an endorsement of the accountability mechanism included in the amendment, but rather as a statement of his intent that other measures must be put in place to protect low-income, minority, and disabled students."

[Reply \(https://gadflyonthewallblog.com/2015/08/15/bernie-sanders-explains-puzzling-education-vote-its-because-accountability/?replytocom=3152#respond\)](https://gadflyonthewallblog.com/2015/08/15/bernie-sanders-explains-puzzling-education-vote-its-because-accountability/?replytocom=3152#respond).

20. **Dr. Jill Stein is the Best 2016 Presidential Candidate, But Can She Win? | gadflyonthewallblog**  
says:  
[February 29, 2016 at 11:57 pm](#)

[...] Moreover, when Sanders voted for the horrible Murphy Amendment of what became the Every Child Succeeds Act, several teachers including myself wrote him an open letter asking him to explain his apparent support for a Test and Punish education provision. One of his aides sent us a reply – some nonsense about accountability. [...]

[Reply \(https://gadflyonthewallblog.com/2015/08/15/bernie-sanders-explains-puzzling-education-vote-its-because-accountability/?replytocom=3175#respond\)](https://gadflyonthewallblog.com/2015/08/15/bernie-sanders-explains-puzzling-education-vote-its-because-accountability/?replytocom=3175#respond).

21. **Test-Based Accountability – Smokescreen for Cowardly Politicians and Unscrupulous Corporations | gadflyonthewallblog**  
says:  
[July 16, 2017 at 2:43 pm](#)

[...] In short, we need to stop worshipping at the alter of test-based accountability. [...]

[Reply \(https://gadflyonthewallblog.com/2015/08/15/bernie-sanders-explains-puzzling-education-vote-its-because-accountability/?replytocom=10233#respond\)](https://gadflyonthewallblog.com/2015/08/15/bernie-sanders-explains-puzzling-education-vote-its-because-accountability/?replytocom=10233#respond).

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