

SPECIAL ISSUE
David Berliner's Legacy

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**Continuing the Conversation:
“Life is Good”—David Berliner's Legacy¹**

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¹ Author order corresponds to the sequence in which the essays are presented: guest editor introduction, followed by the essay by David Berliner's children, after which author contributions are ordered alphabetically by surname.

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Abstract: Throughout his journey from applied researcher to world-renowned scholar, David Berliner was committed to education research that matters—not just within academic circles, but within classrooms and communities. As a public intellectual and a fierce advocate for public education, David expertly and courageously engaged in education debates, bridged research with practice, debunked myths and exposed misinformation, and in the process, reshaped how we understand education. This special issue of *EPAA/AAPE* celebrates David Berliner's legacy as a scholar, and more importantly, as someone who was deeply respected and cherished. What follows are personal essays by family members, friends, and colleagues that engage with David's ideas and inspire us to continue the conversations that David valued and fought for.

Keywords: David Berliner; education research, public education; public intellectual

Continuando la conversación: “Life is Good”—El legado de David Berliner

Resumen: A lo largo de su trayectoria, desde investigador aplicado hasta académico de renombre mundial, David Berliner se comprometió con una investigación educativa que realmente importa—no solo dentro de los círculos académicos, sino también en las aulas y las comunidades. Como intelectual público y firme defensor de la educación pública, David participó de manera experta y valiente en los debates educativos, tendió puentes entre la investigación y la práctica, desmontó mitos y expuso la desinformación y, en el proceso, transformó la manera en que comprendemos la educación. Este número especial de *EPAA/AAPE* celebra el legado de David Berliner como académico y, más importante aún, como una persona profundamente respetada y apreciada. Lo que sigue son ensayos personales de familiares, amistades y colegas que dialogan con las ideas de David y nos inspiran a continuar las conversaciones que él valoraba y por las que luchó.

Palabras clave: David Berliner; investigación educativa; educación pública; intelectual público

Continuando a conversa: “Life is Good”—O legado de David Berliner

Resumo: Ao longo de sua trajetória, de pesquisador aplicado a acadêmico de reconhecimento internacional, David Berliner esteve comprometido com uma pesquisa educacional que realmente importa — não apenas nos círculos acadêmicos, mas também nas salas de aula e nas comunidades. Como intelectual público e firme defensor da educação pública, David participou de forma experiente e corajosa dos debates educacionais, construiu pontes entre pesquisa e prática, desmistificou mitos e expôs a desinformação e, nesse processo, transformou a maneira como compreendemos a educação. Este dossiê especial da *EPAA/AAPE* celebra o legado de David Berliner como acadêmico e, mais importante ainda, como alguém profundamente respeitado e estimado. A seguir, apresentamos ensaios pessoais escritos por familiares, amigos e colegas que dialogam com as ideias de David e nos inspiram a continuar as conversas que ele valorizava e pelas quais lutou.

Palavras-chave: David Berliner; pesquisa educacional; educação pública; intelectual público

Introduction to the Special Issue

Jeanne M. Powers & Gustavo E. Fischman, Arizona State University

David Berliner loved a good bagel, a glass of red wine, gathering with friends around a good meal, and having a hearty laugh. He also loved teachers, hated nonsense, and couldn't stand when arrogant and powerful people tried to pin America's problems on public schools. When he passed away on September 26, 2025, at age 87, the field of education lost a man who was “just dad” to his children BethAnn and Brett, but whom many of us in the field of education knew as a giant who never stopped fighting for what mattered.

This special issue of *EPAA/AAPE* celebrates David's legacy as a scholar, but more importantly, it celebrates David as a person who was deeply respected and cherished by his friends and colleagues. He was, in the words of his friends, a tiger, a lion, a godfather, a mensch. He was also that rare scholar who could publish more than 400 academic articles (15 of those in *EPAA/AAPE*) while also making you giggle at his “Bunkum Awards” videos, where he gleefully skewered terrible education policy reports in a tuxedo. He started his career in applied research in the organization now known as WestEd. He wrote textbooks that educated generations of educational psychologists, then co-authored *The Manufactured Crisis* to call out politicians who scapegoat teachers and public schools rather than address poverty. He believed research should be rigorous and reach people outside of the academy. As his colleague, Carole Basile, the Dean of Arizona State University's Mary Lou Fulton College for Teaching and Learning Innovation noted, David wasn't satisfied “with only writing for academics in academic journals.” He had a particular talent for making the findings from scholarly research not only accessible but also engaging for non-academic audiences.

When David gave talks, he was *funny*. His insights amused yet the entertaining stories with which he often began his talks served as powerful tools to promote the issues he cared about and, in many cases, critique harmful practices. He was a master storyteller and social critic.

David understood something fundamental: education is beautifully, maddeningly complex. “Somebody teaches something to someone else,” he'd say. These four variables somehow generate endless variation: the teacher, the lesson, the student, and the context for teaching and learning. He spent decades observing classrooms; their complexity fascinated him. While others searched for silver bullets and scalable solutions, David insisted that we look at the whole picture: poverty, housing, healthcare, racism, food security, the minimum wage, neighborhood segregation, and the like. David deeply cared about questions such as: What really makes teaching effective? How do we bridge political divides to support good schools? Why do we keep ignoring evidence and manufacturing crises? How do we protect public education as a cornerstone of democracy?



David taught us to embrace complexity without losing our sense of humor or our moral compass. He believed you could be a serious scholar and still make little children giggle—his favorite word, by the way. David wrote the only peer-reviewed article that we know of that contains a picture of a gorilla to illustrate the claim that “poverty constitutes the unexamined 600-pound gorilla that most affects American education today” (Berliner, 2006, p. 952). He showed us by example that scholars could publish in top journals, attend school board meetings, and explain complex educational problems to community groups in down-to-earth, accessible language. He could defend educational research as “the hardest science of all” while also acknowledging its often-pompous tone and limitations. And he could love the ideals of democracy and public education even while being frustrated with their messy, imperfect realities.

The short pieces that follow honor David's legacy by recalling what he did best: combine rigorous research with clear writing, moral clarity, passion for justice with appreciation for joy. All the authors knew David personally and wrote from that relationship, engaging with his ideas and striving to extend his work in new directions. All of them share his conviction that education research matters—not just for what happens within academic circles, but also for what happens in classrooms and communities, and for its potential to contribute to democracy.

As we collected these pieces, we kept thinking about how David would take them. He'd probably crack a joke, question something we took for granted, remind us to think about poverty, and then encourage us all to get together, organize to defend our ideals, share a good conversation (with plenty of appetizers and good Montepulciano) because “Life is good.” Most of all, he would want us to keep fighting, with joy, with evidence, and with unwavering commitment to public education.

So, here's to David: scholar, mensch, social critic, champion of public education, and friend who is sorely missed and fondly remembered. Indeed, “Life is good,” and the conversation continues.

A complete list of David Berliner's *EPAA*/*AAPE* articles may be found at: **[David C. Berliner Collection | Education Policy Analysis Archives](#)**

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David C. Berliner**March 15, 1938 – September 26, 2025***Beth Ann Berliner & Brett Berliner, his children*

As a young boy, David Berliner's life circled around several blocks in a working-class neighborhood in the Bronx, attending public schools, playing stickball with kids from the apartment, and hanging out at Archie and Romeo's barber shop. His world expanded during his teenage years by delivering prescription medicine to neighbors for the local pharmacist, making egg creams at the candy store around the corner, and transporting fur coats to and from refrigerated storage for wealthy Manhattanites. Always a reader, he also spent his time lost in the hijinx world of comic books and adventure novels. His first summer after high school graduation he and his best friend opened and closed a bar and grill in the Borscht Belt, and when he returned in fall he audaciously pretended to be a docent at the Museum of Modern Art, hoping unwitting visitors would like his tours enough to invite him to a downtown lunch. With no professional path in sight, he halfheartedly enrolled in a business college but mostly he dreamt about becoming a merchant marine, wanting to sail around the world, a fascination he held his whole life.

When he found himself married and a parent at age 20, he left New York City behind and chased a new dream in California. He quickly fell in love with the sunshine and palm trees but accidentally fell even harder for being a college student. Working nights at a print shop paid the bills for his growing family, but it wasn't fulfilling. In college, he discovered that he was smart, despite his history of being an unmotivated student, and he became a passionate learner. Surprising even himself, he turned out to be a quick study and masterful test taker, insatiably curious about everything, and filled with questions and ideas. He discovered a love for learning that he wanted to share with everyone, and that's when he decided to become an educator.



Years later, after earning advanced degrees, he became a university professor, and eventually learned to write. He always had something to say, whether to students in class, to faculty he worked with, to peers through scholarship, and later in life to the public by bringing good research to conversations and debates. And he relished every opportunity to support public education.

Throughout his life, in his private moments, he was amazed that somehow, he had made it. He pulled off being a single parent of teenage children (and all their friends) while his career was taking off and that his many courses, research studies, articles, and books made important contributions to the field. He giggled that he was revered by so many. Of course, to us, he was always just dad. Smart, hardworking, kind, generous, goofy, playful, and always our biggest champion.

You can take the boy out of the Bronx but not the Bronx out of the man. In his last days he wanted a bagel and a seltzer and his family with him as he said goodbye to a life well lived. He was grateful that his last book of professional reflections would be shared with all of you. He'd truly love that you collected the following remembrances and have dedicated a special issue to him.



Just before his final hospitalization, he received treatment at a skilled nursing facility for a raging infection that cost him his life. While there, he was kind to everyone, patients, janitors, physical therapists, nurses, and doctors. When he was finally released to go home, the entire staff sang to him “For he’s a jolly good fellow,” which he was. At age 87, this really jolly good man left us all to carry on the struggle to defend public education and to live our lives with zest and kindness.



My Academic Father: Remembering David C. Berliner

Audrey Amrein-Beardsley, Arizona State University

It is an honor to write about my “academic father,” Dr. David C. Berliner, even with great sadness at losing him from our lives, our academics, our conversations, and our tables.



I began working with David as a PhD student at Arizona State University (ASU) in 1998. That is when he became my forever “academic father.” Dr. Gene Glass was also on my dissertation committee, and together they shaped my academic spine, through to today. My dissertation examined the intended and unintended consequences of high-stakes testing over the 20 years leading up to No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2002).

This work became an article in this now international, still high-impact, and foundational educational policy and open-access journal, *Education Policy Analysis Archives* (EPAA, Amrein & Berliner, 2002), a journal Gene started, and David championed as the former dean of ASU’s College of Education, now-named the Mary Lou Fulton College of Teaching and Learning Innovation (MLFC).

Not long after this piece was published in EPAA, the *New York Times* (Winters, 2002) ran a story about my dissertation, which David immensely influenced as my dissertation chair. This study was published “in print” and “above the fold,” back when those distinctions actually meant something and when many of us still unfolded physical newspapers over coffee in the morning. And by coffee, I mean regular coffee, not a venti half-caff oat-milk caramel something-or-another.

And it was then that David taught me to ride the wave, with both skill and gratitude, to appreciate the momentum when meaningful scholarly work caught public attention. The work mattered. Its impact mattered. David persistently reminded me that moments like that were not just about visibility but about responsibility, given our goal as academics was to ensure that our scholarship remained careful, honest, and in service of something larger than ourselves, and certainly *not* our egos as academics.

But riding such waves also requires that when the wave carries you to shore, you must step off, steady yourself in the sand, and begin again, preparing for the next wave that might also move the field of education forward.

David rode many waves: *The Manufactured Crisis: Myths, Fraud, and the Attack on America’s Public Schools*. (Berliner & Biddle, 1995), *Collateral Damage: How High-Stakes Testing Corrupts America’s Schools* (Nichols & Berliner, 2007), and *50 Myths & Lies That Threaten America’s Public Schools: The Real Crisis in Education* (Berliner & Glass, 2014), among them, each one reshaping the shoreline of educational policy and leaving the field better than he found it.

The Manufactured Crisis challenged the dominant political narrative of the 1980s and 1990s that American public schools were broadly failing, with David and Bruce Biddle documenting how

selective statistics, misinterpretations of data, and political rhetoric had manufactured a sense of crisis that was not supported by the empirical evidence. It was, rather, a political spectacle (Smith, 2003). More than a critique, it persists today as a foundational scholarly intervention that has, now for decades, encouraged researchers, policymakers, and the public to pause and then more critically interrogate claims about educational decline. This reminds us of the long-standing caution that statistics do *not* lie, but people *can* and *do* lie with statistics (Levitin, 2019).

A decade later, *Collateral Damage* turned a similarly rigorous lens on the era of high-stakes accountability, with David and Sharon Nichols further illustrating how test-based policies, often justified in the name of improving schools (i.e., given their purported educational decline as debunked in *The Manufactured Crisis*), produced a lack of intended but a plethora of unintended consequences for teaching, learning, and equity across schools, and especially those schooling America's most marginalized, neglected, poor, and racial minority students. This book gave scholars and practitioners a more comprehensive vocabulary and language for understanding how high-stakes accountability systems, especially those incentivized by NCLB (2002) and a similar round of federal test-based educational policy forms happening at the time this book was published (i.e., *Race to the Top*, U.S. Department of Education, [2009]), could distort educational practice. Indeed, student learning and achievement were distorted by such policies, which narrowed what counted as "meaningful learning" to what could be measured by what students achieved on large-scale standardized tests. In subsequent reforms, most notably under the aforementioned *Race to the Top* initiative, the federal government's logic similarly extended to teaching as well, with "meaningful teaching" being defined through statistical estimates of teachers' alleged contributions to student learning, again, as calculated from students' growth on those same standardized tests over time.

Finally, in *50 Myths & Lies That Threaten America's Public Schools*, David and Gene, with others, distilled decades of educational research and then positioned it, by topic, into a clear and accessible examination of the most persistent misconceptions about America's public education system. They examined claims, reflecting many recurring education trends, ranging from renewed declarations about failing schools to persistent misunderstandings about teachers, teachers' unions, international achievement comparisons, and the supposed superiority of privatized alternatives such as charter schools and vouchers. This book, accordingly, equipped educators, scholars, and policymakers with the evidence they needed to challenge misinformation as it resurfaced, again, in U.S. (and, in many cases, international) public debates.

Across these works, David and his colleagues did more than critique educational policy. They helped many from the larger field of education, including practitioners as public-facing scholars, learn how to navigate big waves, grounding public discourse about education in careful research and with great intellectual and moral courage. They showed how scholarship can both withstand the tides of political rhetoric and gradually reshape the shoreline of educational policy itself.

The same qualities that defined David's scholarship also defined David the person, although he rarely divided his scholarly and personal selves. David was a mensch.

A mensch is not just a good person but a person of integrity and honor. A mensch is someone who does the right thing when it is difficult, who pairs passion with principle, and who remains steadfast in both conviction and humility. David fully embodied these qualities daily. Indeed, with every breath he breathed life into such qualities for others. He cared fiercely about America's public education system, as noted, but just as fiercely about the canons of good and rigorous educational

scholarship. For David, the defense of America's public education system was never merely ideological; it was grounded in a deep respect for evidence, careful, rational, and logical reasoning, and the responsibility that scholars must carry, as public scholars, when their work enters the public arena, as it should.

For David, scholarship was never meant to remain safely within the walls of the academy, nor in the proverbial "ivory tower." Rather, David believed it was our obligation to bring the best of our research, our methods, and our intellectual honesty into public spaces, into public conversations, and especially into and in partnership with those working in America's public schools. This was to be especially important when evidence is being misused (or abused), when rhetoric overwhelms reason, and when the future of America's public education is at stake, especially in support of a healthy, functioning democracy like that in the still great country of America (a commitment that, especially during the Trump years, kept David more than a little fired up and occasionally reaching for some decidedly unacademic adjectives). But at David's core was a simple conviction that research matters most when it is both methodologically sound and morally purposeful and when it shines light on problems honestly, while endlessly helping (or striving to help) safeguard the democratic promise of public schooling, even in the face of politics.

And what other waves we rode together, on a more personal level. Annual conferences of the American Educational Research Association (AERA) were, quite literally, an "academic ball," with loads of fun *and* academic memories of traversing sessions, presenting, collaborating, debating, networking, and then attending those legendary university conference gatherings sponsored by ASU (in partnership with the University of Arizona [UofA] and Northern Arizona University [NAU]), as well as Stanford (David's PhD alma mater) and Michigan State (my husband's alma mater, which always had a faculty-led band). There was dancing, and there was laughter, and there was David's favorite: red wine.

There was also New York City: Katz's Deli and the Carnegie Deli, two of New York City's most famous Jewish delicatessens, adding that David just loved, or rather, cherished great food, as he did great Broadway shows. Some of his favorites were *Rent*, *Hamilton*, and *West Side Story*. From the latter, David loved the song "When You're a Jet." He would sometimes sing, *not* under his boisterous breath, "When you're a Jet, you're a Jet all the way, from your first cigarette to your last dyin' day." But for David, this song was *not just* nostalgia or theatrics. It was about conviction, akin to the conviction he held, again, about our democracy and the essential role of America's public schools within it. He lived this conviction like *a Jet all the way, until his last dyin' day*. In fact, David's final book, *Public Education for Our Nation's Democracy: Commentaries on schooling in America* (Berliner, 2025), was published on the very day David passed away, on September 26, 2025. David was 87 years old.

This steadfastness makes perfect sense when one recalls or gets to know David, especially given his roots. David was a Bronx kid who once owned and tended bar in New York City. He liked to say that listening to his bar patrons was some of the best training he ever had in psychology. Indeed, David the bartender eventually became David the educational psychologist and scholar, who forever thereafter studied and deeply understood human beings and human behaviors in socially and culturally complex places, like schools and classrooms within schools. As David often reminded us, if we truly want to understand teaching and learning, we must study them in the real complexity of classrooms, where the effects of teaching depend on the contexts in which teaching occurs (Berliner,

2002). He never lost that streetwise instinct to read the room, to separate bluster from truth, and to call things exactly as he saw them.

In that same spirit, he helped me conceptualize *Inside the Academy of Education*, a project designed to capture the intellectual biographies of major scholars so the public could understand not just what they argued, but why they believed it. David was my first guest. During his interview (see videos at Amrein-Beardsley, 2009), which was filled with what I often called “Davidisms,” he cautioned us against the seductive phrase “data-driven decision-making.” He said plainly, *Data should not drive us anywhere*. We must collect data rigorously. We must analyze it carefully. And we must never detach ourselves, our ethics, our humanity, our agency, or our professional judgment from the very evidence we produce. Data should inform us, he insisted, but they should never steer us anywhere.

He reminded us, also in Berliner (2002), that education research is “the hardest science of all.” Not because it lacks rigor, and certainly not because it is soft, but because it asks us to study human beings in all their glorious, messy, and contradictory complexity. Classrooms are not laboratories with controlled conditions; they are living, breathing ecosystems shaped by history, language, culture, policy, disparity, poverty, and hope. To do “educational research” work well requires methodological precision, intellectual honesty, and, again, intellectual and moral courage. That piece remains required reading for all of my students. It teaches them that rigor and compassion are *not* opposites. In educational research, they must go hand in hand.

At the end of the day, and since his passing, I have often asked myself, “What did we contribute together, albeit always under his steady leadership as my ‘academic father’?” I like to believe that we helped reshape how our nation thinks about high-stakes testing and, more specifically, about using, misusing, and abusing tests and test outputs across a wide range of test-based educational policies. We documented the damage, as did many others, including my current and former students, all of whom David explicitly considered members of his academic family. Whereby I was his “academic daughter,” they were his “academic grandchildren,” and these grandchildren include Dr. Noelle Paufler (Associate Professor at Clemson in South Carolina), Jessica Holloway (Associate Professor at the Australian Catholic University in Melbourne), Clarin Collins (former Director of Scholarly Initiatives at ASU who recently became a high school English teacher), Tray Geiger (Assistant Director of Analytics for Operational Data Analysis at ASU), and others.

Together, and regardless of where we are or in what educational settings we work, we continue to challenge the myths, especially those that continue to reduce students to numbers, diminish teachers’ work to data points, and claim that pressure, through rewards and sanctions, will produce excellence, particularly for those who are the most marginalized, across educational institutions and across the globe.

My own commitment to this work, in most if not all ways, began with David. Across all of these years, as noted, David was my “academic father,” now deeply beloved and very much missed.

At the end of nearly every long dinner we shared, especially when Gustavo was in the kitchen preparing his Brazilian culinary delights, which were David’s favorites, David would lift a glass of his favorite red wine, flash that unmistakable Bronx smile, and say in his distinctive Bronx voice, “Life is good!”

In remembering David, one cannot help but raise a metaphorical glass, to a scholar who rode the waves with courage, to a true mensch, and to a Jet all the way to his last dyin' day.

David, you were right. Life *is* good, and life was made better because of you!!

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In Appreciation of David Berliner

Tom Barone, Professor Emeritus, Arizona State University

I knew David Berliner for nearly three decades, as a colleague and as a dear friend. I was aware of David's prominence in the field of education for a while from afar but met him personally during my interviews at Arizona State University for a faculty position. After arriving on campus, I was surprised to later learn—surreptitiously—that David had been a vocal supporter of my candidacy. This was surprising to me insofar as our scholarly writings and research did not overlap, with mine leaning toward the qualitative and narrative, and his more the behaviorist and quantitative. In fact, years later during lunch at a hotel dining room in Charleston, South Carolina, I was bold enough to utter something slightly derogatory concerning my own view of his famous “time-on-task” research as rather narrow. David, as I recall, brushed it off with a confident grin. But then later, upon encountering his ground-breaking *Manufactured Crisis* (co-authored with Bruce Biddle) with its charts and graphs accompanied by persuasive prose, cogently debunking the prevailing dark, dour, neoconservative narrative regarding the conditions of schooling in America, I realized more fully not merely the depth but also the broad scope of his abilities. Moreover, although I was already aware of the degree to which we shared a left-leaning political ideology, I was delighted, surely with many others, to find that he was now not only publishing texts focusing on educational psychology but revealing the social consciousness of a brilliant public intellectual. And that book was followed by an equally important, stringent, quite comprehensive *Myth and Lies...* co-authored with his pal Gene Glass. And finally, there came *Public Education for our Nation's Democracy*, a work so passionate and so timely that a reader might imagine the ghost of John Dewey hovering in the background, recognizing in this compilation of commentaries a kind of *cri de coeur* for the survival of public schools as one of the last critically endangered public spaces in America. And for me the most poignant of that book's essays was easily the deeply personal one about the importance of teachers, the one that began with this sentence: “A few years ago, I lost my wife.” That is, Dr. Ursula Casanova, still alive but afflicted with Alzheimer's disease.

David's long professional journey had led from his celebrity status as brilliant researcher to masterful storyteller. And along the way he and I had become fast friends. How so? I am not sure. Perhaps it was our shared liberal worldview that supported the early growth of our personal friendship. That, maybe, and a common appreciation of a particular and indescribable brand of dark humor, as well as a shared love of good movies. At first, two couples—David and his beloved Ursula, and Margaret and I—would attend Harkin's Theaters on weekends anticipating what David called a “good story well produced.” But then, in a short time, we realized that we also shared a love of traveling. And over the course of two decades the four of us could be found exploring the scenery, music, and cuisine on four different continents, from Belize to Bali, from Bariloche to Dubrovnik. This, it seemed to me, was when David felt most fully alive. A clear recollection of mine was a tendency for David—especially in cozy foreign restaurants, once in Buenos Aires, with a medium rare succulent Argentinian beefsteak on a platter and a glass of Malbec in hand—to declare “Life ... is good.”



David Berliner as a Public Intellectual: A Standard-Bearer for Educational Discourse

Carole G. Basile, Dean, Arizona State University

Recently, I found myself in David Berliner's office, sorting through a lifetime of work—much of it typed on paper long before computers were commonplace. I was deciding what others might want, what should go to his children, and what simply needed to be recycled. As often happens when someone leaves, people began eyeing the newly available space. What struck me was that many of these educators didn't even know who he was, let alone the legacy he left behind—a legacy they benefit from every day without realizing it.

David was the first person to come meet me when I stepped into the Deanship at ASU—he had been a Dean and knew the job well. Every year, he would ask if he could stay on part-time and of course, I said yes. And about every quarter of every year for the past 10 years, he sent me his list of publications, speaking engagements, and things that were top of mind—the things people were still getting wrong about education and our education system. Why? He cared deeply and he wasn't satisfied with only writing for academics in academic journals. David Berliner was far more than an academic; he was a public intellectual on whose shoulders so many now stand.

David Berliner remains one of the most influential educational thinkers of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. His work transcended academic boundaries and reshaped how the public understands education. Long before podcasts, Substack newsletters, or social media became common tools for scholars, David was already doing the work of translating research for broad audiences. His career exemplified the public intellectual: someone who not only generates knowledge but interprets it for society, challenges dominant narratives, and insists that education cannot be separated from the social and economic forces that shape it. His impact came not only from the quality of his scholarship but from his commitment to making that scholarship matter.



His most influential public-facing work, *The Manufactured Crisis: Myths, Fraud, and the Attack on America's Public Schools* (1995), coauthored with Bruce Biddle, marked a turning point in educational discourse. At a time when political leaders and media outlets were declaring that American schools were failing—often citing the 1983 report *A Nation at Risk*—Berliner and Biddle demonstrated that many of these claims were exaggerated or simply false. They argued that the so-called crisis in public education was largely manufactured for political purposes, and that the real challenges facing schools were rooted in poverty, inequality, and broader socioeconomic conditions.

This was not just a scholarly critique. It was a public intervention.

Almost everything he wrote was for general readers, not just academics. He used accessible language, clear data, and compelling narrative to show that education does not exist in a vacuum. David insisted that test scores, teacher performance, and school outcomes cannot be separated from the realities in which children live. This argument—now widely accepted—was radical at the time. It

challenged policymakers, journalists, and the public to rethink simplistic narratives about “failing schools” and to confront the structural inequities that shape educational outcomes.

In doing so, David Berliner modeled what it means to be a public intellectual: he took complex research, translated it for broad audiences, and used it to intervene in national debates.

Throughout his career, he emphasized that education is inseparable from the larger ecosystem of society. Schools reflect the conditions of the communities they serve. Poverty, housing instability, food insecurity, healthcare access, and racial inequality all shape what happens in classrooms. This systems-level perspective—now foundational in educational research—was one he championed long before it became mainstream.

Yes, he published more than 400 articles, books, and chapters. But it was his public writing, speeches, and interviews—his ability to push audiences to think systemically, dispel myths, and visualize data in new ways—that made his impact so profound.

David’s public engagement was never performative; it was principled. He believed scholars have a responsibility to help society understand the systems that shape people’s lives. He saw public education as a cornerstone of democracy and viewed public communication as essential to protecting it.

In many ways, he anticipated the role researchers now play in public discourse. Today, scholars use podcasts, newsletters, YouTube channels, and social media to reach audiences far beyond the academy. They translate research into accessible formats, challenge misinformation, and participate in public debates about policy, culture, and society.

David Berliner did all of this before such platforms existed. He showed that public intellectualism is not an optional add-on to scholarship—it is a vital part of it.

He wrote for general audiences, engaged with journalists, and participated in public debates at a time when many academics still viewed such work as outside the scope of scholarly responsibility. He demonstrated that rigorous research and public communication are not mutually exclusive—they strengthen one another.

Moreover, his insistence on connecting education to broader socioeconomic systems set a template for contemporary public intellectuals who emphasize intersectionality, structural analysis, and systems thinking. His work helped legitimize the idea that educational researchers should speak not only about schools but about the social conditions that shape them.

What ultimately makes David Berliner a defining public intellectual is not just his scholarship or his public engagement—it is his courage. He challenged powerful political narratives, confronted misinformation, and defended public education at moments when doing so was unpopular. He refused to let simplistic or ideologically driven narratives dominate public understanding of education.

David Berliner’s career offers a model for what it means to be a public intellectual in education. Through *The Manufactured Crisis* and his lifelong commitment to public engagement, he demonstrated that scholars have a responsibility to help society understand the systems that shape

educational opportunity. He insisted that education cannot be separated from the broader socioeconomic forces that influence it, and he used his voice to challenge misinformation and defend the public good.

In an era when researchers increasingly engage with the public through digital platforms, David Berliner's work reminds us that the role of the public intellectual is not new—but it is more important than ever. He set a standard for clarity, courage, and public responsibility that continues to shape the field today.

Those who didn't know him—or don't know his work—are missing out; not just about what he wrote about or thought about but HOW he thought about everything. Every paper in his office speaks to who he was and what he gave, not only to the field of education but to all of us: a reminder of the need to speak up, speak out, and change what must be changed.

David Berliner's Legacy of Ensuring the Relevance of Research

Lenay Dunn, Catherine Walcott, Glen Harvey & Nikki Filby, WestEd

WestEd joins our broader field in mourning the passing of a leading scholar and good friend, David Berliner. His impact on WestEd as an organization spanned 50 years and continues today.

David's illustrious career in academia is well known; not so well known is his early career in applied research. That career played a significant role in shaping his passion for understanding the complexity of teaching and for generating research that is relevant to policy and practice decisions. After finishing his PhD in 1968, David accepted the role of assistant professor. He left academia 2 years later for an applied research opportunity with the Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development, a federally funded lab established to support education research and development in the Western region. There, he served as Director for Research from 1970 to 1977.

One of the pivotal studies at the Far West Laboratory during that time was the Beginning Teacher Evaluation Study. It was one of the first studies in which researchers systematically observed teachers and students in the classroom as part of the study activities. David approached classroom observations with curiosity and his psychologist lens, seeking to understand the dynamics he observed and the motivations behind teachers' actions. He gathered data on teaching practices and student engagement, including metrics for student time-on-task that have subsequently been used in research and professional development for decades. David also talked to teachers so he could learn about the context of their classrooms. He discovered the importance of taking into account the whole child—in and out of school—in the learning process. He became a particularly vocal champion of meeting the needs of children and families living in poverty. His study observations shaped his deep respect for teachers and his belief that all children can learn and that all should be



Clockwise from top left: John Rice, Lenay Dunn, David Berliner, and BethAnn Berliner.

provided that opportunity. These early experiences also inspired him to keep visiting classrooms throughout his career. In his own words, "The professional activity I enjoyed the most was to occasionally visit classrooms and schools, in different states and countries, and try to make sense of them," (Berliner, 2025, p. 1). The study resulted in insights about effective teaching, which impacted David's own outlook and later research for decades. It also shaped teacher preparation programs and the field of educational psychology.

The Beginning Teacher Evaluation Study, and many other research studies, set a tone at the Far West Laboratory (which later became WestEd) of prizing research that addresses important needs and challenges in the field and sharing findings in ways that can be acted upon. David always reinforced that it was critical for research to be relevant and have utility—it needed to be applied to make a positive difference for students and the adults who support them. That culture of relevance permeates WestEd—

a nonprofit and nonpartisan research, development, and service agency—today. As current or former WestEd leaders, we directly experienced David’s influence on WestEd through his probing questions about our studies and his commitment to helping us deepen our impact by sharing relevant findings that inform improvements in policy and practice.

David left the Far West Laboratory to become a university professor, but he came back to WestEd in 1999 to serve as a member of our governing board. By that time, he was solidly established in his academic career and known for his provocative voice. During his tenure on the board, which ran through 2013, he set a tone for honest, respectful debate about the needs and challenges confronting public education. He never shied away from provoking discussion about topics facing the field, including controversial topics. WestEd’s board, by design, has always included a wide range of perspectives. He actively engaged with diverse points of view and fostered a culture of discourse and debate among board members. This helped WestEd staff surface differences that stemmed from the practices of different academic disciplines (e.g., economics, psychology, sociology), ideologies, and even geographies. The opportunity to witness honest, often passionate, debate about critical education issues was invaluable to WestEd, offering a window into the realities of the diverse policy and practice contexts in which we operate. Just like David sought to understand teachers’ contexts and concerns, the culture of discourse and debate he helped foster expanded our understanding of the contexts and concerns of the communities and states we serve.

David’s commitment to a whole child perspective shaped how he approached teaching, learning, and systems improvement. At board meetings he would remind us of cross-system influences on child outcomes by saying, “You can’t clean the air on one side of a screen door.” He celebrated when we worked to integrate data across systems—from early childhood to labor markets—for a more holistic view of learning and human development. He pushed us all to question data and the design of studies to ensure that we drew conclusions supported by accurate data and high-quality research design. This discipline of looking at data, surfacing issues, and debating and then testing potential solutions was strengthened by David’s presence and has persisted and deepened in our current work. Through candid debate, WestEd staff received critical insights into ways in which they could partner with educators, state leaders, and community members to have a positive impact on students and educators.

One of the many ways our board members strengthen WestEd is by acting as ambassadors for our work and our organization. David did that with passion and flair. He was a champion who was generous in referring talent our way—including his daughter and several of his former students and colleagues, each of whom further contributed to our knowledge base about what works to strengthen education. David’s reverence for the complexity of education and the importance of generating accurate, insightful, and relevant research to inform policy and practice can be seen in our work today. David may have spent most of his career as a renowned academic, but his early career in applied research shaped his trajectory and influenced ours. He left a legacy of relevance that can be seen in WestEd’s commitment to connecting research and practice, supporting thriving learners and empowered communities, and taking nonpartisan approaches to partnership and collaboration to increase opportunities for children, youth, and adults. That legacy is powerful and lasting.

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Loss of a Friend: David Charles Berliner (1938-2025)

Gene V Glass, Professor Emeritus, Arizona State University

I first met David on the street in Los Angeles in February 1969. He had only recently joined the faculty of the University of Massachusetts after finishing his degree at Stanford. I had sent him my finest graduate student to join the UMass faculty. We shook hands, he thanked me, we went on. I scarcely saw him again until he joined the Arizona State University faculty in 1987; I had joined a year earlier.

Later in life, David told me that he thought of me as the Infant Terrible, on account of my habit of criticizing everyone's research as both wrong and useless. We hardly interacted that first semester, even though Ursula's office was next to mine. After a few months, he asked Ursula, "What is he like—as bad as they all say?" Ursula let him know: "He's a paper tiger, a chickenhawk. I've dealt with his type in junior high schools for years."

David was a real tiger. His research was powerful; his positions brave. He spent the first few years at ASU pursuing his research on teaching from his perspective as an educational psychologist. The Ed Psych department had opposed his appointment initially claiming he wasn't enough of an educational psychologist. In a few years, he would publish the *Handbook of Educational Psychology*. Dean Gladys Johnson ignored their opinion as she ignored the opinions of most of the faculty that was being transformed from an inbred, unknown ed college into a contender. It have been a godsend that David did not associate closely with his colleagues in ed psych.

In January 1993, I founded the second open access online journal in education: *Education Policy Analysis Archives (EPAA)*. The first article was published on January 19. A few days later, David came over to my office. He had read Issue 1, and thought it was remarkable that these things can go around the world in an instant and reach so many people. He was thinking of writing a paper. It was way out of his field but something was eating at him. Politicians were pushing the post-1970 SAT score decline and claiming in documents like *A Nation at Risk* that our schools are failing; vouchers, private schools, and charters are the salvation. "Write it," I said. "It's not in my field." "Write it anyway." Two weeks later, February first, he came to my office with a floppy disc. The next day, "Educational Reform in an Era of Disinformation" appeared as *EPAA* Vol I, No. 2. It has been one of the most popular articles in the 32-year history of the journal—it has been downloaded nearly 50,000 times—and it changed David's life.

About a year after David published his *EPAA* piece, he and Ursula came to my office to chat. He was thinking of doing a book, a book like he had never done before. His *EPAA* article had plunged him into a whole new academic circle. Different people were writing to him; he was receiving invitations to speak. He was, he said, becoming a policy expert. And he had a proposal. Politicians did not shape up after he published "Era of Disinformation." They were still telling lies and trying to destroy our public education system. "I want to write a book. Will you join me?" "Well, I'm very busy. I think books will be obsolete in 10 years. I'd better not." Brilliant. (Bruce Biddle, wherever you are, you're welcome.)

Thus began *The Manufactured Crisis: Myths, Fraud, and the Attack on America's Public Schools*. Those of us who were close to the book and its authors may underestimate its impact. *The Manufactured Crisis* has given two generations of scholars the ammunition and moral support needed to fight back against

the conservative attack on public education. But its impact is even greater than this. When I quizzed AI on the origins of the phrase “manufactured crisis,”² I learned this:

The phrase “The Manufactured Crisis” is most closely associated with the 1995 book by educational psychologists Berliner and Biddle. They coined and capitalized the phrase as a label for what they saw as a politically motivated, evidence-distorting campaign in the 1980s–early 1990s rooted in the Reagan-era report *A Nation at Risk* that falsely portrayed U.S. public schools as failing. Since then, “manufactured crisis” has been generalized and used more broadly in political science, law, and journalism to describe situations where elites exaggerate or fabricate a policy emergency to justify preferred actions or expand power, but those later uses build on the conceptual framing popularized by Berliner and Biddle’s book.^[1]

It is difficult to imagine that David and I shared much. He was from the Bronx; I grew up in a cornfield in Nebraska. But we did share one thing. We both suffered from impostor syndrome. We both were uncomfortable with how others viewed us, namely, as old wise men. I assured him he was no impostor. He tried unsuccessfully to do likewise.

When I became Jewish in 1993, David welcomed me to the tribe with open arms— well, with hugs, actually. He was a hugger. Every time we met, he hugged me. I never got used to it, but I would welcome one more now. He coached me on how to be Jewish. I coached him on how to write more like an English major. He called me Gene-ala, and he never looked down his nose at me.

We texted a lot in his last days. His wife was no more and his heart was broken. He wished her a swift, painless end. What irony! He had just finished what he thought might be his last book: *Public Education for Our Nation’s Democracy: Commentaries on Schooling in America*. He was concerned about his health. He was confined to a hospital bed, but his thoughts were on his book. He was looking forward to its launch and the reviews. I was editing *Education Review*, another online journal. I sent the manuscript to Leonard Waks and explained the circumstances. Len is a severe critic. He reviewed it quickly. He praised David’s insights and loving care for young people. “His empathy for children, teachers, and families shines through; his clarity about the failures of political leadership is bracing...” (Waks, 2025). I sent Len’s last draft to BethAnn and Brett in the evening of the 25th of September last year. They read it to David at his bedside. It was published hours later. They said he was pleased. David died the next day.

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In Memory of David C. Berliner

James Harvey, Former Executive Director, National Superintendents Roundtable

Those of us fortunate enough to run into David Berliner recognized him immediately as a larger-than-life figure. I first met him in 1980, when I was briefing the leadership of the National Institute of Education on the progress of the Carter administration's proposal to create a federal Department of Education, for which I served as one of the White House lobbyists. Newly arrived in Washington as some kind of intern at NIE, David took his seat with these senior administrators, and immediately made his presence known. This was no junior intern; this was a man with very strong opinions—who didn't hesitate to make sure you knew them. All these years later, I don't really recall what issue made him speak up, but you could see right away that this big man, brashly proud of his Bronx Jewish origins, matched his size with very big ideas. And, as I grew to know him as the decades passed, particularly around our association with the Horace Mann League, it became clear that the relatively young intern I met in 1980 had turned into a giant of American education.



The milestones of David's career are noteworthy. But while they do him justice, they don't fully capture the essence of the man. After earning his undergraduate degree from University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), he obtained a doctorate in educational psychology from Stanford University. In 1988, he took up residency at Arizona State University, where he remained for the rest of his career. There, he served as Dean of (then) College of Education for several years and retired as Regents Professor Emeritus.

From his perch at ASU, David launched a lifelong and spirited defense of American public schools with hundreds of books, articles, opinion pieces, and book chapters. He denounced the tired ideas embedded in the Reagan administration's *Nation at Risk* (1983) in *The Manufactured Crisis* (co-authored with Bruce Biddle, 1995). And he poured scorn on the test-obsessed "reform" movements that followed in books such as *Collateral Damage: How High-Stakes Testing Corrupts American Schools* (with Sharon L. Nichols, 2007), and *50 Myths and Lies that Threaten*

America's Public Schools (with Gene Glass, 2014). Right up to the closing chapters of his life, he poured his passion into publications such as *Public Education: Defending a Cornerstone of American Democracy* (with Carl Hermanns [2021] to mark the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Horace Mann League) and *Public Education for Our Nation's Democracy* (2025). This wise man's insights into the linear and reductionist thinking behind the "reforms" of past decades restored the courage of educators everywhere.

And the profession noticed. Awards, accolades, and encomiums at home and abroad followed throughout his career. He was a member of the National Academy of Education and the International Academy of Education and a fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences. He served as president of the American Educational Research Association and his landmark AERA presidential address laid out his foundational beliefs about American public schools. He received the Horace Mann League's "Friend of Public Education" award, along with a

citation as a “Friend of Education” from the National Education Association. He received the inaugural Lifetime Achievement Award from the Graduate School of Education at Stanford University.

David was a lion who roared. While the legacy of his work remains, that voice was stilled when he passed away in September. His loss diminishes us all. I have lost a great friend. Public education has lost a great leader. And America has lost a great man.

The Heart of a Scholar: David Berliner

Margarita Pivovarova, Arizona State University

When I arrived at ASU in the summer of 2013, I was an economist. While I considered my work to be situated in education, it remained far removed from the messy, vibrant realities of actual schools. I was not yet involved with education research, nor was I familiar with its seminal scholars.

And then I met David Berliner.

Everything changed. David's passion for education was contagious, and his thirst for generating evidence to defend public education was insatiable. He was unstoppable in his thinking; he possessed an energy and enthusiasm that didn't just invite you into his world—it swept you up in it.

David was an intellectual giant, but his greatest gift was making you feel like his equal, even when, objectively, I knew I was not. For David, your rank didn't matter. Whether you were a doctoral student or junior faculty, he shared himself, his wisdom, and his experience without reservation. He wanted to have a conversation; he wanted to provoke your thinking.

In those early days, fresh from my PhD and struggling with impostor syndrome, I remember being baffled when he would ask for *my* opinion on an article he had read. I didn't understand then why a man of his stature would care what I thought. Later, I realized it was because he genuinely valued people—all people—and what they brought to the profession and to life.

This respect extended far beyond the walls of the academy. He spoke with the same warmth about the people who helped care for his wife, his long-time taxi driver, or a server at a favorite restaurant as he did about his closest colleagues. He saw the humanity in everyone. This was why he loved working with students until his very last year; he viewed mentoring not as a chore, but as a shared journey. I don't think he ever fully realized what a privilege it was for the rest of us to work alongside him.

One of the last pieces we worked on together was—not surprisingly—a study on the realities of high-stakes testing: “*Same Tests, Same Results*.” Working with him and our student co-author, I saw his “realistic view” of people in action. He pushed you, but never to a breaking point; he pushed you toward the best version of yourself that he already knew existed.

I have many regrets now that he is gone. I should have asked for his advice more often. I should have collaborated with him more. I should have sent those extra texts and emails, knowing he would always respond. I simply wish for more years of having Dr. David Berliner—the scholar and the friend—with us.

I don't remember the exact moment I met him, but I feel as though I have known him forever. I know I will never be the giant David was, but I am trying. I am trying to treat people, students, and colleagues with the same love, care, and belief in their potential that he showed me. He was a man who pushed us all—not to where we could not go, but to exactly where we needed to be.

The Godfather: David Berliner

Rich Shavelson, Professor Emeritus, Stanford University

With great sadness, I told my iPAL (International Performance Assessment of Learning project) collaborators that we had lost a dearly valued colleague. David Berliner had passed away with his children, Brett and BethAnn, by his side. We all knew him as a distinguished scholar, winner of numerous awards, and most importantly of all, one of the greatest humanitarians of our time, a time when we need humanitarians. And, finally, I noted that he was a friendly but ardent critic of assessment when inappropriately used in education, be it in teaching, learning, and policy. He served as a conscience on our, iPAL's shoulders. We miss him dearly.

David was the scientific and policy voice for education, especially for diversity, equity, and inclusion. He was fearless in a hostile world in his pursuit of his values and justice, values that so many of us hold. His book, released at the time of his death, *Public Education for Our Nation's Democracy: Commentaries on School in America*, is an ardent statement on teaching, learning, and assessing with the goal of all children thriving.

His contributions to education were numerous and no doubt they will be heralded in this special issue. Now, looking back over almost 55 years on our careers and friendship, what stands out is not all the accomplishments and honors in our profession. What seems most important at this time in my life is that he was a bright, beautiful, jovial, caring, and optimistic human being with the best values on which he acted to improve the world, especially the world of education.

I could tell many stories of my 50+ years with David (and some I cannot tell!). But as I roll the video in my mind over all these years, I keep coming back to the same one which I dub ***The Godfather***. In our family, David was known as the Godfather. Here is how this came about.

I met David at Stanford in 1970. He had returned to the Bay Area having served as an assistant professor under Dwight Allen at the University of Massachusetts. His new position was Associate Laboratory Director for Research at the Far West Laboratory. We met one day when he arrived from Berkeley at Stanford (where he received his PhD and I just completed the PhD). He, my wife Patti and I immediately became fast friends.

David, upon taking up his position at the FWL almost instantly became famous, leading the Lab's Beginning Teacher Evaluation Study and pioneering research on *time on task* and its implications for practice. Among other famous scholars consulting on the study was the statistician, David Wiley. David was brilliant. His work on structural equation models with latent variables way back then became the basis for Karl Joreskog's leadership in the field. As it turns out, Wiley's brilliance was right ... about half to two-thirds of the time. So, Berliner hired me for two reasons: (1) ostensibly to advise him of which of Wiley's brilliant ideas held water and which might well be ignored, but really (2) to get some consulting money to Patti and me so we could start a family.

I don't know how well I did with Wiley, but Patti and I did our part. We immediately went to work and held up our end of the bargain. We started our family and welcomed Karin into our family in 1971!



David was at our home almost as soon as Patti and Karin came back from Stanford hospital. Then, almost immediately, David declared Karin to be a bright, energetic kid ... and she has repeatedly proved him right.

We asked David to be Karin's godfather; he accepted on the spot. And ever since then he has been known to family and friends as The Godfather. Having made it possible for us to begin our family, he looked after us the remainder of his life. To fulfill his part of the bargain, for example, he became an instant on-line minister enabling him to officiate at Karin's wedding.

David Berliner: Always and Forever

The Godfather

March 15, 1938 – September 26, 2025

Treasuring David, the (Serious) Goofball

Kevin Welner, National Education Policy Center

When our policy center prepared its David Berliner tribute newsletter, we placed at the top this 2024 photo of him delighting in a real NYC bagel (National Education Policy Center, 2025). The joy is genuine, and what also comes through is the joy David found in joy itself. David taught me and others so much. But, sitting here months after his passing, the lesson that sticks with me most is that we can—and should—make our serious academic arguments while not taking ourselves too seriously.

If we can encourage our audience to laugh as well, so much the better.



David was an extraordinarily accomplished and well-respected scholar. He cared deeply about students, their teachers, and their schools. His brilliant mind was, for 60-plus years, focused on helping us all understand how children learn, how teachers teach, and how poverty, racism and other injustices place appalling obstacles in the way of that teaching and learning. He powerfully explained the importance of opportunities to learn inside and outside of schools—how today’s learning opportunities lead to tomorrow’s life opportunities.

He was also a “goofball,” in the words of his daughter, BethAnn. She’s the one who shared the bagel-rejoicing photo, and she assured me that David would indeed want to be remembered for his joy and humor. BethAnn, who is also an education writer and researcher, reached out to me after David’s passing, and we shared memories in a heartening email exchange.

Thinking about David’s embrace of humor, my mind immediately went to David’s role as “Master of Ceremonies” for the Bunkum Award videos that the policy center produced in [2013](#) and [2014](#). David jumped at the chance to ham it up for the camera, donning a tuxedo and lampooning the worst think tank reports that we reviewed over the past year. He loved nothing more than making serious points with jest and wit.

I also thought of David’s gracious agreement to write the foreword for *Potential Grizzlies: Making the Nonsense Bearable* (Welner, 2020), a book of short satirical pieces about education policy. He wrote:

[M]any disagreements about research, the nature of “facts,” and the analyses of policy must be met with seriousness. But some such disagreements are better met with a response that is humorous—playful, ironic, sarcastic. . . . Silliness, absurdity, and their cousin, ridicule, are proper responses to inadequate research in support of a political ideology, or of just hare-brained ideas! . . . To be playful in a world of seriousness is to give most of us a well needed break, a smile, and even a hearty laugh. (Berliner, 2020, p. ix–x.)

Academia is rife with insecurity and with that lurking imposter syndrome—the apprehensive feeling that we’re fraudulently pretending to know more than we really do. David, as someone who knew and understood substantially more than us mere mortals, taught me to laugh off such doubts and take risks. In fact, I think he saw a genuine value in puncturing some of the pomposity of academia.

Back when David was writing that Foreword, he ended an email with the following counsel:

But here is advice from a hard worker and quite productive and successful academic—make sure you vacation and play more!!!! You want to have good memories—and Ursula and I did really well accumulating those—but I now wish we did even more along the way. We never took that walking tour of Sicily we had intended, nor that river trip across the northwest to the pacific ...

“Ursula” is David’s widow, Ursula Cassanova, professor emérita at Arizona State University and author of *¡Si Se Puede! Learning from a High School That Beats the Odds* (Teachers College Press, 2010). David and Ursula were frequent co-authors until Ursula was slowed by Alzheimer's, and David’s role evolved into loving caretaker. He shared poignant memories of Ursula in his final book, *Public Education for Our Nation’s Democracy* (Teachers College Press, 2025).

The publication date of this collection of essays is September 26, 2025—the same date that David passed away. Months earlier, as David felt his body weakening, he reached out to me and Dr. Faith Boninger, the policy center’s Publications Manager, and asked us to help call attention to these very personal essays. David wanted to issue a final clarion call, grabbing us by the shoulders, shaking us lovingly but firmly, and pleading with us to value our public schools and venerate our teachers.

David asked me and eight other members of his fan club—Howard Gardner, Jonathan Kozol, Gloria Ladson-Billings, Sonia Nieto, P. David Pearson, Diane Ravitch, Joel Westheimer, and Yong Zhao—to read the book in advance and send blurbs to his publisher. When I was reading the essays, I sent David a note: “I heard your voice coming through on every page.”



I also hear his love coming through—for Ursula but also for teachers. I attribute that in part to David’s deep knowledge of how children learn. He was trained as an educational psychologist and for years he was best known for his textbook, *Educational Psychology*, co-authored with N. L. Gage and first published in 1975. That textbook was revised and published through six editions, until 1998. By that time, his 1995 book, *The Manufactured Crisis*, co-authored with Bruce Biddle, had achieved phenomenal reach. The book’s title itself became shorthand for its theme: that many of the critiques and criticisms we hear of public schools are not based on evidence but are instead strategically put forward by enemies of public schooling as a way to undermine support for public schools.

David was outraged by the attacks on public schools and on teachers—attacks that he explained were often weak and deceptive. While he had zero patience for the attacks’ dishonesty and harm, his response never came across as Angry David; in fact, I don’t think I ever witnessed Angry David. Instead, we heard from Outraged David and Dismayed David—from an expert voice that was sincerely offended by wrongdoing. One comment BethAnn included in her emails to me was, “living life by a moral compass was incredibly important to him.”

David insisted that we cannot sit back, that we must do our part, stay engaged and reach as many people with the truth as possible. That’s exhausting and often thankless work, but David modeled it so well. In doing so, he subjected himself to plenty of public attacks, some of which were overtly anti-Semitic. He never let it slow him down.

After David’s passing, we repeatedly saw people describing him as a “*mensch*.” The essence of this Yiddishism is simply that a *mensch* is a genuinely good person, and David was indeed that. He truly adored people and, as a result, he wasn’t just approachable; he was embraceable. He was a generous soul who was extremely down-to-earth and yet had an otherworldly presence. And, of course, he helped us to laugh.

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