

September 17, 2010

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**LETTER**

**Ridiculing 'Edu-Babble' Ignores Study's Content**

To the Editor:

In an August, 2010, **blog posting** for *Education Week's* Web edition (*Rick Hess Straight Up*, [edweek.org](#)), Rick Hess claims that our June 17, 2010, piece in *Teachers College Record* "make[s] an impressive contribution to the ranks of incomprehensible edu-babble." It's hard to disagree with Mr. Hess' complaint. Research is often written in specialized languages that can be difficult for outsiders to understand.

The main point of our article was to show how the needs of students with differences are not met by policies such as those embodied in the Race to the Top initiative. Mr. Hess' choice to focus on our writing style over the content of our arguments, however, means that students with differences are once again being ignored.

Our original commentary introduced the idea of "[dis]ableing" to help us look at how we define "ability," because it determines who is and is not succeeding. In short, we argued that to judge all students based on a single definition of ability is wrong. In effect, that's what Race to the Top does.

In our article we made three key points:

- By judging states, schools, teachers, and students solely on the basis of test scores and how well they abide by the rules of the Race to the Top program, this policy turns schools into survival-of-the-fittest factories.
- "Ability" in Race to the Top is defined in vague and idealistic terms, where any discussion of difference is noticeably absent and made to seem deviant.
- Race to the Top policy is informed not by principles of equity and democracy, but instead by how to best serve corporate interests.

We appreciate Mr. Hess's attention, but request that he remain true to his "Straight Up" label—true, honest, and serious. And we hope that he will stop exhibiting the frat-boy humor when considering topics with serious negative consequences for American children and youths.

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