As a lifelong public educator, my reaction to Gibboney’s Manifesto is, quite simply, it’s about time. It is about time that we have a clear, articulate, and well-documented critique of the two-decades-plus scapegoating of the education profession, scapegoating that reached its zenith with the enactment of the most disastrous piece of federal education legislation in our nation’s history, the No Child Left Behind Act.

For proof that our politicians have failed our nation’s public schools, take a critical look at their positions on public education.

John McCain’s web site (www.johnmccain.com/Informing/Issues) calls his position on education “Excellence, Choice, and Competition in American Education.” McCain mounts no criticism of NCLB and says that schools will improve only if they are made to compete for students and if parents are offered the choice of their children’s schools. In another swipe at the nation’s schools, McCain states he will “pursue reforms that address the underlying cultural problems in our education system — a system that still seeks to avoid genuine accountability and responsibility for producing well-educated children.” In other words, McCain’s position differs little from that of the current President Bush and avoids addressing any economic causes for many students’ inability to take full advantage of the education offered to them.

Barack Obama’s proposals on education (http://barackobama.com/issues/pdf/PreK-12EducationFactSheet.pdf) do not echo McCain’s critique, but they also do not go far enough in challenging the status quo. Obama states: “The goal of the law [NCLB] was the right one, but unfilled funding promises, inadequate implementation by the Education Department and shortcomings in the design of the law have limited its effectiveness and undercut its support.” His myriad proposals for early childhood and public elementary and secondary education include plenty of good ideas. But, as Gibboney states, these ideas amount only to technical remedies that miss the main point. Such remedies will have no impact on the quality of public education until the insidious effects of poverty and social class in our nation are resolved.

Educators Must Rally for Reform

Politicians don’t have the answers that schools need, Mr. Kastle writes. It’s time for educators to stop indulging in self-blame and to lead in education reform.

By Kenneth D. Kastle

The candidates should have better ideas for realizing the intellectual and democratic ideals for public education.
Gibboney says about educators, Obama is still “treat-
ing NCLB as a technical and political problem rather
than as a grave threat to democracy.”

Nowhere in his issues briefs does Obama connect
social class and poverty in our country with children’s
ability to achieve at the desired levels in our public
schools. In fact, his issues briefs treat the two issues
separately.

Where is the “Change We Can Believe In”? Where
are the proposals for bold actions that would match
the soaring rhetoric of “let us reach for what we
know is possible. A nation healed. A world re-
paired. An America that believes again”?

These candidates — with their own intelli-
gence and experiences, the collective intelli-
gences and experiences of their staffs and advis-ors, and the millions of dollars at their disposal
— should have better ideas for realizing the
intellectual and democratic ideals for public educa-
tion.

**FIGHT INFERIORITY COMPLEX**

For more than 20 years, public educators have de-
veloped a professional inferiority complex and a
strong sense of hopelessness. After all, the dominant
message over those years, including from some withi-
in the profession, has been that educators have caused
the declining quality in public schools. Educators
have failed and continue to fail our nation and its chil-
dren. They caused the decline in our nation’s eco-
nomic competitiveness. Educators have placed our
nation at risk. Sadly, this critique of the education
profession has been trumpeted for so long and by so
many that it is accepted uncritically as fact. Saddest
of all is that, when educators are told often and by
many that there are low expectations for them, they
begin to believe it and act like it.

Regardless of which candidate is elected president,
we are likely to hear the messages that educators can-
not be trusted to decide the why, what, and how of
learning for children — their own profession. The ed-
ucation profession still will not have a seat at the table
where the national conversation about the purposes
of public schooling are held and decisions are made.
In fact, the profession has not even been allowed in
the room where these decisions are made.

Individual classroom teachers don’t need Gib-
boney’s Manifesto to tell them that they have been
stripped of their professional identity and respect.
They know on a daily basis that they are forced to do
things in their classrooms that violate everything they
believe is right for the education of the young. They
are now required to function as automatons as they
present scripted lessons, follow pacing schedules, nar-
row the curriculum to those few areas tested on the
state assessments, and, in general, limit their profes-
sional lives to activities that could be performed by
teaching machines or computer programs.

Gibboney’s Manifesto should be a rallying cry for
the profession. He has articulated the reasons why
public education failed to achieve John Dewey’s in-

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