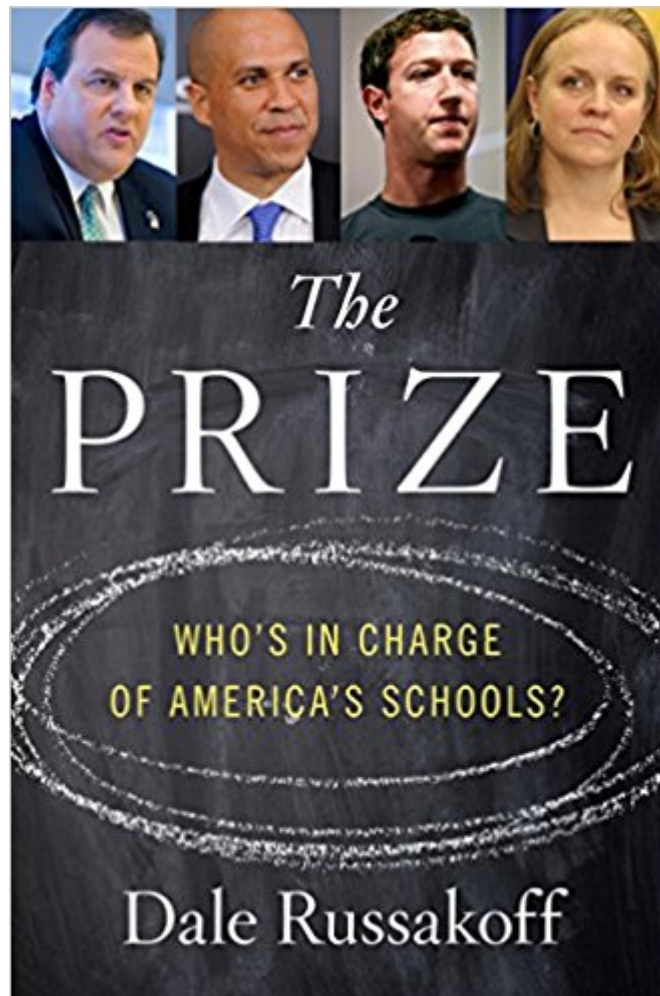




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# The Prize: Who's In Charge Of America's Schools?



## Synopsis

A New York Times Bestseller Mark Zuckerberg, Chris Christie, and Cory Booker were ready to reform our failing schools. They got an education. When Mark Zuckerberg announced to a cheering Oprah audience his \$100 million pledge to transform the downtrodden schools of Newark, New Jersey, then mayor Cory Booker and Governor Chris Christie were beside him, vowing to help make Newark a symbol of educational excellence for the whole nation. But their plans soon ran into the city's seasoned education players, fierce protectors of their billion-dollar-a-year system. It's a prize that, for generations, has enriched seemingly everyone, except Newark's children. Dale Russakoff delivers a riveting drama of our times, encompassing the rise of celebrity politics, big philanthropy, extreme economic inequality, the charter school movement, and the struggles and triumphs of schools in one of the nation's poorest cities. As Cory Booker navigates between his status as a rock star mayor on Oprah's stage and object of considerable distrust at home, the tumultuous changes planned by reformers and their highly paid consultants spark a fiery grass-roots opposition stoked by local politicians and union leaders. The growth of charters forces the hand of Newark's school superintendent Cami Anderson, who closes, consolidates, or redesigns more than a third of the city's schools—a scenario on the horizon for many urban districts across America. Russakoff provides a close-up view of twenty-six-year-old Mark Zuckerberg and his wife as they decide to give the immense sum of money to Newark and then experience an education of their own amid the fallout of the reforms. Most moving are Russakoff's portraits from inside classrooms, as homegrown teachers and principals battle heroically to reach students damaged by extreme poverty and violence. The Prize is an absorbing portrait of a titanic struggle, indispensable for anyone who cares about the future of public education and the nation's children.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

A New York Times Bestseller — A brilliantly reported behind-the-scenes account of one city's attempt to right its failing public schools. . . . Russakoff maintains a clear-eyed distance, her observations penetratingly honest and incisive to what she sees and what she hears. I suspect some may have regretted letting Russakoff in. We couldn't have asked for a better guide. . . . THE PRIZE is paradoxically a sobering yet exhilarating tale. For alongside the stories of those calling the shots, Russakoff tells the stories of those most profoundly affected by their decisions: teachers, students and their parents. . . . I repeatedly found myself writing in the margins, "Wow," either because of the heroic efforts by teachers and staffers or because of the obstacles facing their students. . . . THE PRIZE may well be one of the most important books on education to come along in years. — Alex Kotlowitz, New York Times Book Review — A stunning account of efforts by wealthy outsiders and ambitious politicians to fix Newark's failing public schools. Veteran journalist Dale Russakoff's narrative is rich with details and anecdotes that showcase the quality of her writing and bring Newark to life for people who have never lived or visited there. The story likely will unnerve educators, reformers, taxpayers, politicians, parents and students anywhere. — Chicago Tribune "if you read Russakoff's account and find your beliefs vindicated, you're not trying hard enough." — The Seventy Four — Washington Post reporter Russakoff's fascinating study of the struggle to reform the Newark school system reveals the inner workings of a wide range of systemic and grassroots problems (charter schools, testing, accountability, private donors) plaguing education reform today. | Russakoff's eagle-eyed view of the current state of the public education system in Newark and the United States is one of the finest education surveys in recent memory. — Publishers Weekly, STARRED "This is one of the most disturbing and powerful books I've read in years. The point of this story is not that the well intentioned Mark Zuckerberg and his wife gave \$100 million to help those less fortunate. The point is they gave it to the wrong people. This deeply researched story left me cheering for teachers, crying for schoolchildren, and raging at politicians. With The Prize, Dale Russakoff demonstrates why she is one of the great nonfiction voices of our time." — James McBride, author of The Color of Water and The Good Lord Bird "Dale Russakoff managed to get amazing access to the inside

story of Mark Zuckerberg's giant gift to Newark's schools. And she shows how it all fell apart, derailed and compromised by arrogant reformers, ambitious politicians, and short-sighted special interests. An essential history of the modern education-reform movement, both infuriating and inspiring." —Paul Tough, author of *How Children Succeed: Grit, Curiosity, and the Hidden Power of Character*

"Dale Russakoff, one of America's great journalists, illuminates one of the country's great problems—the failure of inner city schools—with on-the-ground reporting that extends from the governor's office and fancy philanthropies down (or up) to the small miracles performed every day by dedicated Newark classroom teachers. Defenders of charter schools and district schools will find not the usual talking points and platitudes, but hard truths contained in Russakoff's brilliant blend of skeptical and compassionate reportage." —Jonathan Alter, author of *The Center Holds: Obama and His Enemies*

"With *The Prize* Dale Russakoff has brilliantly rendered the hopes, complexities, pitfalls, and flaws of the efforts to reform American education. This is not simply the compelling story of a single conflict-ridden school system, it is a metaphor for the failing institutions that have betrayed an entire generation of American children." —Jelani Cobb, author of *To the Break of Dawn: A Freestyle on the Hip-Hop Aesthetic*

"*The Prize* is a riveting cautionary tale. Despite the best intentions of philanthropists and politicians, big money and big data will not save urban education, as long as reform efforts are undemocratic and overlook the realities of poor children's lives. With her deep ties to Newark, only Dale Russakoff could have told this poignant story. *The Prize* is essential reading for anyone who cares about how to give hope to America's most vulnerable kids." —Dana Goldstein, author of *The Teacher Wars*

"The fight for, or over, the children of Newark might have been a merely an important story about the future of public education in America, but in Russakoff's accomplished hands—and with a cast of characters including Chris Christie, Cory Booker, and Mark Zuckerberg—it has become a Shakespearean spectacle of cross-purposes: ambition, altruism, and just about any human drive that invites an equal and opposite reaction." —Diane McWhorter, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *Carry Me Home*

Mark Zuckerberg, Chris Christie, and Cory Booker were ready to reform our failing schools. They got an education. When Mark Zuckerberg announced to a cheering Oprah audience his \$100 million pledge to transform the downtrodden schools of Newark, New Jersey, then mayor Cory Booker and Governor Chris Christie were beside him, vowing to help make Newark a symbol of educational excellence for the whole nation. But their plans soon ran into the city's seasoned education players, fierce protectors of their billion-dollar-a-year system. It's a prize that, for generations, has enriched

seemingly everyone, except Newark's children. Dale Russakoff delivers a riveting drama of our times, encompassing the rise of celebrity politics, big philanthropy, extreme economic inequality, the charter school movement, and the struggles and triumphs of schools in one of the nation's poorest cities. As Cory Booker navigates between his status as rock star mayor on Oprah's stage and object of considerable distrust at home, the tumultuous changes planned by reformers and their highly paid consultants spark a fiery grassroots opposition stoked by local politicians and union leaders. The growth of charters forces the hand of Newark's school superintendent Cami Anderson, who closes, consolidates, or redesigns more than a third of the city's schools a scenario on the horizon for many urban districts across America. Russakoff provides a close-up view of twenty-six-year-old Zuckerberg and his wife as they decide to give the immense sum of money to Newark and then experience an education of their own amid the fallout of the reforms. Most moving are Russakoff's portraits from inside classrooms, as homegrown teachers and principals battle heroically to reach students damaged by extreme poverty and violence. The Prize is an absorbing portrait of a titanic struggle, indispensable for anyone who cares about the future of public education and the nation's children. "

If fixing urban education were easy there would be no problems in inner city schools. Unfortunately throwing money at the problem and instituting top-down change does not work. This long term study of Newark Public Schools over the last five or so years is an eye opening read. Required reading to fully understand what inner city poverty schools are up against and trying to change.

Brilliantly researched and insightful reportage on how foundations are being held responsible for fixing education rather than the government. Russakoff's knowledge of effective instruction is a bit superficial: she sees teachers who love their students as enough, which unfortunately is not true. It was fascinating to consider that Cami Anderson's vision of effective instruction might likewise be narrow, not about loving kids, but about certain rigid protocols. The frustrating part is that I do believe Anderson and Zuckerberg wanted to do well. I believe that there are lots of folks out there who want to help children but do bad things in the name of helping children. Because there is no government oversight or clear expectations, public education is the Wild West with the casualties being young low SES children. It is a disheartening time. Time to vote and support the candidates with the least ties to lobbyists and the most intellectual integrity.

Extraordinary book managing historical argument to show how stupid is American educational

corporate and neoliberal reform. Zuckerberg made his debut as philanthropist in Newark, only to experiment his great deception and to discover that education is not just a funding problem. Two bad influences were there: first, that of funding people who always know better what is good for other people (money is not just power, is also knowledge and even wisdom!); second, technocrats who write education policy out of their heads and ideology, maintaining people as experiment objects. It is not so that population knows better, but it is less probable that technocrats know better. Russakoff makes a clever historical reconstruction of facts and events, as basis for her argumentation against educational reforms managed from above and outside. It's the art of worsening what was already bad. Reform without chance.

This book gives an inside look at the education reform movement yet from an outside perspective. It gives the reader the jargon vocabulary of the education reform movement heard all over the United States. The author adopts the premise that Chris Christie, Corey Booker, and Mark Zuckerberg all are well intentioned men but their good will goes wrong. The author gives a reality check for the wealthy wading into communities with no background knowledge of the community. It also is a reality check for politicians utilizing education as a platform for their political ambitions without an understanding of the community they utilize for their platform. The teacher's union, local and national, and how the union approaches their work with the wealthy/political educational reformers with Newark as the stage is presented by the author. The unfortunate reality is the children of Newark were not being served during educational reform movement or in the aftermath of the educational reform movement. We as readers should consider the concept of "where are they now?". With the background the book presents the reader can determine what other reformers are doing now and what does that mean for education in the future. The reader can decide if the premise of the author of reformers as well intentioned men is correct or should the public further investigate motives and success of the educational reform movement in Newark and across the nation and the resulting deeper political, economic, and sociological results. Marylloyd Claytor RCG Research Consulting Group

Excellent and so needed deep understanding of the conflict between political aspirations and how painfully inadequate ambition is when the future for children is at stake. Thanks for the remarks about Dr Robert Curvin, a public servant who has always asked nothing for himself. Just so with Dale R. This is an important book.

This book exposes the many reasons urban public students and teachers struggle and what is needed to help them succeed. The author takes the reader to a public school and a charter school who have teachers who are excellent. The charter school has resources for social services while the public school lacks them. The reader follows a student in the public school. This student has high hopes and struggles because of lack of reading skills. This comparison gives a clear picture of the struggles of the public school teacher. The author gives a detailed account of the money raised by the private sector to reform the schools and the related dismal failure of this top down effort. She also explores the reasons why the efforts failed

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