The Save Our Schools March
July 30, 2011

The Save our Schools March brought thousands of educators, parents, and concerned citizens to Washington, DC on July 30 to stand up for quality public education for all children. Many CEASE members attended both the march and the 2-day conference leading up to it, and others who couldn't get to Washington participated in local protests held around the country. The nation's leading education leaders and thinkers spoke in Washington at the SOS march: Linda Darling-Hammond, Jonathan Kozol, Diane Ravitch, Deborah Meier, Pedro Noguera, and many others. Actor Matt Damon joined the rally and gave a heart-felt speech of his own valuing teachers and his public school education.

The SOS March coalesced individuals and groups into a new grass roots movement that is raising awareness about the harmful education reform policies embodied in No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Race to the Top (RTTT). These "corporate ed reforms" promote charter schools and the privatization of our nation's schools. They have created a punitive environment where teachers' jobs, pay and their school's survival are tied to student test scores. Standardized tests are held up as the solution to the achievement gap rather than poverty and the inequalities in our education system that are its root cause. The over-focus on tests has narrowed the curriculum in our schools and led to teacher-directed, rote learning, the erosion of play, and the loss of imagination, original thinking, and a love of learning in our children.

A group of early childhood educators, with CEASE members well in attendance, caucused in DC. Our goal was to write one sentence—one comprehensive demand—that would bring early childhood issues into focus as part of the SOS Movement. We decided to state our demand this way: *Early childhood education (birth-8) that respects young children's need to learn through active engagement and play, which tests cannot assess.*

The recently announced Race to the Top competition for early childhood aid (Early Learning Challenge grants) will be awarded to early childhood programs that come up with and use early-learning development standards and assessments. This emphasis furthers the focus on early academics and testing that already exists from RTTT and the Common Core Standards. Many states are now in the process of pushing standards and testing down to the pre-K level. This means that it's more important than ever for early childhood educators to get involved. We need to protect young children and their right to active and developmentally-based play and learning in a climate where it is rapidly disappearing.

By Nancy Carlsson-Paige

To learn about the Save Our Schools movement go to: www.SaveOurSchoolsMarch.org
To see the inspiring speeches from the SOS March in DC go to: YouTube
To read about the post campaign, go to:http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2011/07/march_leaders_craft_next_steps.html

CEASE at the SOS Marches in Washington, DC and Sacramento, CA