



Class Struggle:: What's Wrong (and Right) with America's Best Public High Schools

Jay Mathews

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Bright kids with Ivy League dreams. Ambitious, energetic, active parents with lots of money. A cushy budget fed by property taxes on million-dollar homes. Creative, well-paid teachers. A recipe for a successful public school? Not always.

Washington Post education reporter Jay Matthews spent three years taking the pulse of American elite public high schools to find out what they're doing right, what they're doing wrong, and who gets left in the dust.

He emerged with a penetrating view of the competing--and often damaging--forces that nurture the Ivy League goals of the academic and economic elite while often squashing the less glamorous ambitions and potential of the rest. Matthews's investigation of American high schools taught him that our schools have often adopted some of our worst national habits.

Following the groundbreaking work of Jonathan Kozol, Matthews examines what happens when the ambitions of wealthy parents who consider their kids Ivy League-bound from birth clash with the academic needs of a more diverse population. He reveals how conflicts among students, parents, faculty, administrators, and taxpayers can prevent even the most well-funded and well-staffed public schools from fulfilling their academic promise.

In **Class Struggle**, Matthews provides an unprecedented ranking of the nation's public high schools--a ranking based on real academic opportunities, not reputation. And he shows what all schools should be doing to maximize learning for the widest possible range of students, not just those with the richest and most aggressive parents.

Matthews's book takes as its primary case study the classrooms and hallways of Mamaronek High School in Westchester County, New York, where battles rage over money, curriculum, faculty tenure, and ability grouping. We follow the progress of a diverse group of students through three years of school, and we sit in on confrontational meetings among teachers, school officials, community taxpayers, and organized, agenda-driven parents, all of whom have different ideas of what the school should be doing with all that money.

Class Struggle is a thorough, insightful portrait of an underexamined slice of American public high school life in the nineties.

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