

LaCrosse Tribune

Jim Grenisen: Education improves when parents have more choices

[By Jim Grenisen | La Crosse](#) lacrossetribune.com | Posted: Sunday, July 31, 2011 12:45

For more than 40 years, educators have been keeping track of the cost of the K-12 public school system. Along with tracking student progress in various subjects, math, reading and science have drawn the most attention.

During those years, the cost of sending a child to public schools has tripled, but the increase in funds has not improved the quality of education. In fact, test results have shown a decline in science.

Employment in public schools has grown 10 times faster than enrollment during the past four decades, yet students are not learning more in spite of spiraling costs and increase in staff.

Some blame must fall on the public school employee unions — the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers.

During the past four decades, these unions have formed an alliance with the Democrat Party and have achieved a monopoly status in education. This enables these unions to secure higher salaries and benefits, reduced workload staff and a lower student-teacher ratio.

According to a report last year by the Cato Institute, the real mechanism by which unions have driven up their membership and compensation has been by lobbying in state and federal legislatures and packing school boards with their supporters.

At the federal level, public school employee unions have contributed \$56 million the past 20 years. It's the state level where their lobbying efforts are focused, as there is no competition, and taxpayers have no control over wages, benefits and staffing levels.

The answer is to give parents and taxpayers real choice by giving public schools competition.

Education tax credits or school vouchers, as proposed by the late economist Milton Friedman, hold the most promise for taxpayers and parents.

Gov. Scott Walker is supports choice in education. Public schools spend roughly 50 percent more than the private schools and they recorded poorer results. A voucher for 50 percent of the per-pupil cost of public schools would enable parents to have a choice.

President Barack Obama, along with congressional Democrats, killed a small school choice program in Washington, D.C. It was reinstated in April by Republicans.

The more troubling aspect is the millions of dollars teachers unions are pouring into Democratic political campaigns. There is a fine line between campaign contributions and a bribe.

A bribe is paying for something that should not be sold, such as a vote. In a 1976 decision, the Supreme Court opined, “to the extent large contributions are given to secure a political quid pro quo from current and potential office holders, the integrity of our system of representative democracy is undermined.” The Latin quid pro quo means something for something.

With millions of dollars flowing from the unions to candidates of one party, just who is looking after interests of the the taxpayers and the public?

The La Crosse County Chapter of Citizens for Responsible Government, supports freedom of choice in education. CRG is nonpartisan, but it appears the state is best served in this school-choice issue by having the current governor and legislature in office.

Jim Grenisen is vice president of the Citizens for Responsible Government in La Crosse County.