

Let parents decide what is best for their children

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The Sun editorialized on March 17 that teachers “deserve” better pay. But to “deserve” something is to do something worthy of a reward.

Here in Alachua County there are many dedicated teachers and some excellent school programs, and a lot of children are being well educated. But does the system work for most of the intended beneficiaries?

The latest school rankings at SchoolDigger.com, from 2018, rated Alachua County Schools as the 31st best in Florida — well behind school systems in Gilchrist, Union, Lafayette and Columbia counties. And Alachua County Schools have been reported as having the greatest racial achievement gap of any county in Florida.

I well understand why the entrenched interests fight change and accountability. They are doing well and are comfortable — and the results of that are clear. But the time is past for the same old, same old: complain about it, pay teachers and staff more, shorten the school day, hire diversity and other consultants and staff, announce a multi-year study and expect positive change.

I trust parents. Nobody knows or cares more about their children. We should do all we can to expand school choice, be it charter schools or voucher programs — where, like for veterans, the funds follow the student.

If parents choose badly, they can later change that path. Note that the same liberals who support a women’s right to choose life or death for an unborn child would deny parents the right to choose the best educational path for their children.

To believe that public education will not change and get better is an insult to teachers. Even if it does not, it will survive due to some excellent schools and inertia — but it would at least exist in a competitive environment.

The average Alachua County teacher makes about \$42,000 a year. Teachers would “deserve” far more if their students do well. Teachers should be incentivized, with those incentives based only on the percentage improvement in uniform test results of their students. Teachers should want to teach challenging students as the percentage of potential increase would be much more.

According to disclosures required under Florida educational funding accountability law, Alachua County Schools spent about \$22,825,739 in administrative expenses in fiscal year 2013-2014. Does anybody in government have the courage to significantly cut that budget and invest the savings in property and hiring more and better teachers?

The teacher shortage, if it exists, may well be caused by a number of factors. I believe the key factors are that Florida, due to low taxes and rapid growth under Republican leadership, furnishes many career opportunities that would not otherwise be available. Thankfully, teaching is no longer the only occupation available to young women.

Is more money the answer? It always is to liberals. But Andrew Coulson, director of the Center For Educational Freedom at the CATO Institute, studied 40 years of data and concluded that there is no link between school spending and achievement — any more than there is a link between my clapping my hands and the sun coming out.

The very short school day was well designed for an agricultural economy, letting children help bring in crops. Memo to all: That is absurd. The school day should be lengthened to run from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.

A meta-data analysis review, in 1996, that integrated 39 different studies concluded that summer vacations equaled a loss of at least one month of instruction. Long vacations are great for teachers, summer camps and the wealthy, but the students suffer.

Those who can afford it the least suffer the most. Their parents cannot send them to specialized camps on code writing or learning to speak French. Working parents are forced to arrange for day care and the like, all at substantial expense and inconvenience.

Let's change the school year now, avoid long vacations and give one week off in the winter, one in the summer and be in school the rest of the year.

The time is short. Are we willing to permit another generation of students to be subjected to a system not designed with them in mind and leaving them unable to succeed in our society?

Let parents decide what is best for their children, not the educational complex. Let's have the courage to demand change now — not for us, but for our children. If not now, when?