

# The Detroit News

## Better pay equals better education

By: Dale Hansen - February 9, 2013

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When it comes to education there is one thing that most Democrats and Republicans can agree on – improving outcomes. Unfortunately everything after that is up for debate.

The Cato Institute offers a good example of the standard Republican argument, which basically boils down to “We spend more money now than ever yet we get mediocre results.” While this statement is true, it is a massive oversimplification of the situation, resulting in massively oversimplified and errant solutions.

For example the Cato Institute points out that per pupil spending has risen by 133% since 1970 and lays the blame for this increase at the feet of teachers unions. The reality, however, is much more complicated. In Michigan the average teacher’s pay has decreased by 7.7% since 1999 while per pupil spending has increased by nearly 20%. Second, the number of educators in unions has dropped from 84% in 1989 to 38% in 2010. This data does not support the Cato Institute’s assertion.

Additionally the Cato Institute also completely ignores the fact that in 1975 Congress passed the “Education for All Handicapped Children Act” which resulted in twice as many special education students for public education. At a cost two to three times that of students without disabilities, the needs of special education figures prominently in the new education spending since 1970.

The Cato Institute also fails to mention that nearly twice as many Americans live in poverty now than in 1970. As Education Secretary Arnie Duncan stated, “Educators across the country understand that low-income students need extra support and resources to succeed.”

So while the data points to education costs’ rising, it doesn’t show that teachers are the cause or that higher paid teachers lead to worse outcomes. In fact quite the opposite is true. The data shows that states that spend more money on education tend to have better outcomes. More importantly the data in Michigan shows that the top performing schools spend a much greater percentage of their per pupil funding on teachers than the lowest performing schools. So rather than attacking teachers and their salary as the problem, the data suggests that we need to look at teachers and competitive pay as the solution.

If education spending is out of control then we should look at where the money goes and what can be changed. But those changes should be predicated on improving educational outcomes. Arbitrarily cutting teachers’ salaries and benefits even when the data suggests that doing so will result in worse educational outcomes is not a solution – it’s a witch hunt. Our children deserve better.