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## A Question Of Dollars And Sense

by John Greet | Our Liberty | 07.27.09 |

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As [reported here](#) and elsewhere, LBUSD has voted 4-0 (Ellis, once again, conspicuously absent) to ask the voters to approve a five-year parcel tax in November to further fund public education.

Let's leave, for the moment, the continuing saga of persistent absentee LBUSD Board Member and constituent-insulter Michael Shane Ellis. That topic will require yet another column of its own.

Instead, for now, let's discuss the wisdom, or lack thereof, of continuing to pour ever-increasing millions of our tax dollars into consistently underperforming public school systems.

Let me say right up front that I have a *profound* respect and admiration for all competent teachers. I believe they are, to a person, grossly over-worked and despicably underpaid considering the critical importance of their mission. They are constantly asked to teach ever greater numbers of students with fewer and fewer resources and to do so according to standards that are, in some cases, impractical and lamentably arbitrary. But I believe these adverse conditions to be caused primarily by our current approach to certain public policies generally and to public education specifically, rather than, as many believe, by any lack of commitment to the broader ideal of properly educating our population.

Let me also say that, as Public School Districts go, LBUSD seems to be more fiscally responsible than most but, in truth, that really isn't saying very much. From what I can see, LBUSD allocates its funds only slightly less foolishly than other Public School Districts. But budgetary foolishness has, indeed, been occurring. From out-of-town Training and Team building junkets to blatant misallocation of Title 1 subsidy to being far too top heavy administratively, like it or don't, LBUSD has been making its share of what I consider to be laughable budgetary gaffs.

I believe the actual number of truly competent public school teachers to be diminishing steadily. In government-run institutions, like Public Education, that incentivize seniority (tenure) over results (quantifiable academic achievement), the measure of success necessarily becomes longevity, rather than excellence. Combine this truth with the fact there are few, if any, real consequences assessed to a public school teacher that consistently produces un- or under- educated students and we are left with a public educational system that once was a model among other industrialized nations but that is now consistently below average in comparison.

In January 2006, ABC News Correspondent John Stossel hosted an excellent TV news special on this challenge entitled "[Stupid in America - How Lack of Choice Cheats Our Kids Out of a Good Education](#)." As you can imagine, Mr. Stossel's report critical of the sorry state of Public Education in America was not well-received among various Teacher's Unions who quickly organized protests against both he and ABC in New York City, Chicago, Atlanta, Detroit, and elsewhere. But all these Unions could do was protest the manner in which ABC chose to deliver Stossel's message; they could not (and never did) refute his findings. But he had [some responses](#) for them anyway.

If the true mission of a teacher is to teach...to educate...then why are some too busy quoting contract language to demonstrate a willingness to work with parents to improve their child's education? Why, as my lovely wife and I have personally experienced, would a public school decline to require a teacher to make a simple and occasional phone call as a means of communicating more effectively with the parents of a student experiencing challenges in the classroom? For when we once asked that a public school teacher place a simple and periodic phone call for that purpose, we were, in fact, told by School Administrators that the teacher's contract "didn't require it" and, so, no phone calls would be forthcoming and, indeed, none were received.

Is such a response and approach institutional at LBUSD? Perhaps not.

But, in my view, such a response should not even be an option. Not in a taxpayer-funded public school system responsible for educating our kids and which publicly proclaims the importance of parental involvement in a child's education.

But I believe the aforementioned anecdote to be symptomatic of a much greater challenge: that of an approach to educating our children that has generally become as antiquated as it is bloated, inefficient and ineffective. The proofs of this, at least for me, are in the test scores and academic expectations that (with a few notable exceptions) continue to plummet even while the dropout rates and per pupil costs continue to soar.

In 2008, the Cato Institute's Andrew J. Coulson conducted a comprehensive comparison of the per-pupil costs between public and private schools in Washington, D.C. His study, entitled: "[The Real Cost of Public Schools](#)" was originally published in the Washington Post and then expanded upon on the Cato Institute's website. Coulson concluded that D.C. taxpayers funded the average K-12 public school pupil to the tune of \$24,606 per year as compared to \$11,627 for the average K-12 private school student.

### Our Liberty

• John invites you to join him in discussing and debating national, state and local public policy issues that impact Long Beach. John strongly believes that it is our liberties, our freedoms and our responsibilities as free people in a Constitutional Republic that frame the debate on all public policy deliberations and that open, honest and respectful dialog is the key to better understanding these sometimes complex but always entertaining issues.



*John B. Greet is a native resident and employee of the City of Long Beach. His views and opinions are his own and in no way reflect the official positions or policies of the City of Long Beach or any of its Departments, nor are they intended to. John is married with 4 children and 2 pets; is a military veteran; a community volunteer; and an avid reader, researcher and freshwater fisherman.*

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