

## The Great Education Rip-Off

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By Alan Caruba

It has taken a severe recession, combined with rising costs for gas and the weekly grocery list, for Americans to begin to seriously question where their tax dollars are going and why. As individuals, as families, and communities, we can no longer be indifferent or profligate.

The events in Wisconsin where the teacher's union led to protests against collective bargaining has made many Americans begin to question all those TV ads about what a great job teachers are doing and the reassuring message that it's all about the kids. No, it's all about salaries, health benefits, and pensions that far exceed those in the private sector.

A recent Policy Analysis (No. 662) published by the Cato Institute on March 10th and written by Adam Schaeffer is titled "They Spend WHAT? The Real Cost of Public Schools."

The analysis is based on a review of district budgets and state records for the nation's five largest metro areas and the District of Columbia. "It reveals that, on average, per-pupil spending in these areas is 44% higher than officially reported." In other words, taxpayers simply had no idea how big a part of their local and state budget the educational system actually represented. That is deceit on a massive scale.

“Real spending per pupil ranged from a low of nearly \$12,000 in the Phoenix area schools to a high of nearly \$27,000 in the New York metro area. The gap between real and reported per-pupil spending ranges from a low of 23% in the Chicago area to a high of 90% in the Los Angeles metro region. (Emphasis added)

The educational system has been so thorough degraded with political correctness and idiotic “No Child Left Behind” national testing standards that it is little wonder many school systems have massive, unforgivable dropout rates. Black students are routinely put on a fast track to juvenile detention while others are passed through the system to avoid closer scrutiny from the state and federal Department of Education.

And Mr. and Mrs. America are picking up the tab. “Citizens drastically underestimate current per-student spending and are misled by official figures,” says Schaeffer. “Taxpayers cannot make informed decisions about public school funding unless they know how much districts currently spend.”

This is no small concern because state and local officials came up more than \$158 billion short of projected tax revenue when they planned their 2010 budgets in the previous year.

In response, more than 30 states raised taxes and 43 reduced services. It just got worse, “as the economy deteriorated and tax revenue plummeted more quickly than expected, 39 states discovered additional budget shortfalls of nearly \$34 billion.”

Schaeffer noted that “K-12 schooling is the biggest item on state and local budgets. How big? Based on 2005-2006 totals from the national Center for Education Statistics updated to 2009 dollars, state and local governments are spending well over \$500 billion on public K-12 education.”

Both the Bush and Obama administrations are responsible for “a startling increase in the federal involvement in and funding of K-12 education, but state and local governments still provide the majority of funds.” That’s YOU.

As shocking as the expenditure of all this money for schools generating students who do not compete academically with those in dozens of other nations is the fact that the statistics being published about the cost of this money pit is always three to four years out of date!

If you were to try to find out what the actual amounts involved were, you could look for timely information on total spending at individual school district budgets and even a skilled analyst like Schaeffer says “The budgets are complex and often confusing.”

“If a district is spending \$30,000 per child, surely that is enough to ensure a high-quality education. If the school buildings are nonetheless in disrepair and the kids can’t read, then there is good reason to suspect that a massive share of that money is being wasted.”

Call it the Great Education Rip-Off.

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