



More Money for Education?

Hell no. It's time to stop pouring money into a bottomless pit.

By: LARRY SAND

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Not a week goes by without a gloom and doom story on the National Education Association website exhorting us to “invest” more in education lest the children of America be shortchanged. For the educrats and unionistas who are still trying to sell this claptrap, their periodic slap in the face comes courtesy of Andrew Coulson, director of Cato Institute’s Center for Educational Freedom. As you can see from his chart linked here, from 1970-2010 our education spending has tripled (adjusting to constant 2012 dollars.)

What kind of return have we gotten for our investment?

Nada. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading and math scores for 17 year olds have been flat for the forty year period. And in science, the scores have gone down.

At the Heritage Foundation, Coulson’s counterpart Lindsey Burke reports,

Students headed back to school this fall will have **historically high levels of dollars spent on them in the public school system.** (Bold added.) Nationally, average per-pupil spending exceeds \$11,400 this year....

To put this into perspective, just 10 years ago we spent \$9,482 per pupil (in constant dollars). Thirty years ago we paid \$5,718 and 50 years ago just \$2,808 per student! The reasons for the current spending orgy are several – an increase in the number of useless educrats, the rise of teachers unions, a public that has been way too trusting of those in power, etc.

Internationally, of the world's 28 major industrial powers, we are second in spending, slightly behind Switzerland. Yet when it comes to achievement, our performance is middling at best. Education Next recently reported,

A new study of international and U.S. state trends in student achievement growth shows that the United States is squarely in the middle of a group of 49 nations in 4th and 8th grade test score gains in math, reading, and science over the period 1995-2009.

Students in three countries – Latvia, Chile, and Brazil – are improving at a rate of 4 percent of a standard deviation annually, roughly two years' worth of learning or nearly three times that of the United States. Students in another eight countries – Portugal, Hong Kong, Germany, Poland, Liechtenstein, Slovenia, Colombia, and Lithuania – are making gains at twice the rate of U.S. students.

The very obvious conclusion to be drawn is that the time has come to stop blindly pouring money down the public education hole. One way to improve our sorry state of affairs is to have schools compete with each other by giving parents a full range of school choice options. Education would improve and at the same time cost less. Heartland Institute education research fellow Joy Pullman makes the case for choice very clearly in *The Best, Most Recent Voucher Research*:

Research has consistently demonstrated vouchers and school choice increase high school graduation rates, college attendance rates, achievement test scores, parental satisfaction, school safety and discipline, tolerance of other cultures, racial integration, and civic engagement. Every voucher program also has saved vast amounts of taxpayer dollars. School vouchers first came into existence 22 years ago, and private schools have not been overrun with government regulations or fraud. Where fraud has occurred, it has been isolated and comparable to fraud perpetrated within government schools.

School choice offers families equal access to high-quality schools that meet their widely diverse needs and desires. Instead of unjustly condemning millions of children to failing and dangerous schools because their parents cannot afford private tuition, vouchers give all families the same opportunity to meet each child's unique education needs. Vouchers also end the injustice of forcing parents to pay both in taxes and in tuition for school choice.

Greg Forster of the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice collected the results of all available empirical studies using the best available scientific methods to measure how school vouchers affect academic outcomes for participants, and all available studies on how vouchers affect outcomes in public schools. Contrary to the widespread claim that vouchers do not benefit participants and hurt public schools, the empirical evidence consistently shows vouchers improve outcomes for participants and public schools.

And ideally, choice should be available from the very beginning of a child's education. In the August 28th issue of *U.S. News & World Report*, Harrigan and Davies claim that "Public High Schools Are Not Doing Their Jobs." It's a good piece, but the authors start their expose about nine grades too late.

High schools can't do their jobs if they are enrolling students who are barely literate. However, the authors do reach an important conclusion,

The way to stop the trend is to allow parents to hold our public schools accountable. They can do this the same way that they hold their cellular providers or grocery stores or car dealerships accountable. If public schools can't educate their children, parents should be free to take their children—and their tax dollars—to schools that can.

Our children and our economy are in desperate need of school choice. As such, we all need to become more knowledgeable consumers and then ratchet up our political will to make choice a reality. So when the bureaucrats, the teachers unions and their bought-and-paid-for legislators start to whine about how we need to pour more money into education, just say, "No" to them. And at the same time, support candidates for office who represent you, your children, your pocketbook and a better future for America.