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Money Is Not What Schools Need

By [John Stossel](#)

U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan recently claimed: "Districts around the country have literally been cutting for five, six, seven years in a row. And, many of them, you know, are through, you know, fat, through flesh and into bone"

Really? They cut spending five to seven consecutive years?

Give me a break!

Andrew Coulson, director of the Cato Institute's Center for Educational Freedom, writes that out of 14,000 school districts in the United States, just seven have cut their budgets seven years in a row. How about five years in a row? Just 87. That's a fraction of 1 percent in each case.

Duncan may be pandering to his constituency, or he may actually be fooled by how school districts (and other government agencies) talk about budget cuts. When normal people hear about a budget cut, we assume the amount of money to be spent is less than the previous year's allocation. But that's not what bureaucrats mean.

"They are *not* comparing current year spending to the previous year's spending," Coulson writes. "What they're doing is comparing the approved current year budget to the budget that they initially *dreamed* about having."

So if a district got more money than last year but less than it asked for, the administrators consider it a cut. "Back in the real world, a K-12 public education costs four times as much as it did in 1970, adjusting for inflation: \$150,000 versus the \$38,000 it cost four decades ago (in constant 2009 dollars)," Coulson says.

Taxpayers need to understand this sort thing just to protect themselves from greedy government officials and teachers unions.

It was on the basis of this fear and ignorance that President Obama got Congress to pass a "stimulus" bill this summer that included \$10 billion for school districts. The money is needed desperately to save teachers from layoffs, the bill's advocates said. We must do it for the children!

When you look at the facts, the scam is clear.

"Over the past 40 years," Coulson writes, "public school employment has risen *10 times faster than enrollment*. There are 9 percent more students today, but nearly twice as many public school employees."

But isn't it just common sense that schools would be better if they had more money? As a wise man said, it's not what we don't know that gets us into trouble; it's what we know that isn't so.

Consider the American Indian Public Charter School in Oakland, Calif. It was once a failing school, but now it's one of the best in California. Ben Chavis turned it around without any additional money. His book, "Crazy Like a Fox," tells how.

Chavis' experience exposes the school establishment's lies for what they are. Nearly all of Chavis' students are considered economically disadvantaged (98 percent qualify for free lunches), yet they have the fourth-highest test scores of any school in the state.

"In Oakland this year, on the AP (advanced placement) exam, we had 100 percent of all the blacks and Mexicans in the city of Oakland who passed AP calculus," Chavis said. "There are four high schools, and we're the only ones who had anyone pass AP calc."

Yet Chavis accomplishes this without the "certified" teachers so revered by the educational establishment. His classes are as big as, and sometimes bigger than, public school classes, but only a quarter of his teachers are certified by the state.

Money, he insists, is not the answer. "My buildings are shacks compared to their schools, but my schools are clean, and we'll kick all their asses."

He scoffs at the establishment's solutions to the education problem, such as teacher evaluations.

"I don't do no teacher evaluations. All I do is go into a class, and if the kids ain't working, your ass is fired. (Most principals) sit for hours and say, 'Is he meeting this goal, is he meeting' -- I just go to class, and if the kids are not working ..."

It's time we threw out the "experts" and exposed the schools to real competition by people with common sense.

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