



Letters: October 18th, 2012

Say no to pre-kindergarten school referendum

From: Miriam Brougher

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“The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and being completely convinced you will get different results.” — Anonymous

On Nov. 6, we will be voting to permit a five-cent increase per \$100 assessed value on our property taxes. The money will allow 4-year-old children to attend all-day public schooling and will also pay for lunches and breakfasts for the ones whose parents cannot afford to pay. There are already churches, Northstar Montessori and private individuals who provide this type of care. Busy Bees also provides this care and will be the recipient of the tax funds, expanding their already existing program.

I recently attended a school board meeting, where several of us expressed our concerns and objections to this program and its cost. All of our objections were summarily dismissed with the phrase, “We want what is best for our children.” The program’s supporters and the school board claim it will raise the graduation rate.

Aside from the additional burden on fixed-income property owners, I wanted to research these facts: Will this program raise the graduation rate? Are graduation rates influenced by the amount of money spent per child? I Googled “US Education Spending” and read articles published by The Heritage Fund, The Cato Institute, an article in USA Today, an article from the University of Southern California, Discovery Magazine, as well as several others. There was not one article suggesting that increased spending equals increased graduation rates.

One article explained that in D.C. — where spending per student is considerably higher than in neighboring Virginia — the graduation rate is 55 percent, while in Virginia it is 71 percent. The Heritage Fund even goes so far to say that the Head Start program has no long-term effect on graduation; that most of the benefit goes to the program administrators. On the USC blog website, the graphics show how the U.S. spends \$809.6 billion on education (\$7,743 per pupil) but is not near the top in literacy, math or science. An article in Discovery magazine maintains kids are born naturally curious and inventive,

but that is mostly overridden by adults in a structured educational setting. See “The Double-edged Sword of Pedagogy.”

If asked, no one would say that we don’t want the best for our children. But I found absolutely no data to support the claim that sending 4-year-olds to all-day school will give them a better shot at graduating. There is a lot of data that shows that, despite the fact that the U.S. spends far more than any other industrialized nation on education per student, we lag far behind in results.

Shouldn’t that give everyone pause? Apparently more hours in the classroom (and on buses and in the lunchroom), which requires more money, does not translate into a better education! Why, then, are we proposing to do the very thing that has been proven not to work? Why are we ignoring facts?

My niece has been teaching for many years and is getting close to retirement. She has always maintained that, by the time children get to third grade, it is impossible to tell which child has been to preschool/kindergarten and which has not.

Maybe we should entertain a radical idea. Allow our children more free time to “play” with less structure and learning demands.

I ask that you consider these facts and vote “no” on the proposal on the ballot Nov. 6.