

## I AM GETTING SICK AND TIRED OF THIS ARGUMENT

For those of us who have toiled in the fields of education for most of our lives, I am sick and tired of the “Education is doing poorly in our country.” It is especially true when speaking to the elderly, retired and comfortable folk who have not been inside a school building since 1954.

Since my wife and I live in an “Adult Community,” we hear this all of the time. “They should go back and teach reading, writing and arithmetic, like they used to. “Do you know they don’t even teach cursive writing, spelling and mathematics?”

O.K. I pretty much had enough of this. When I hear government officials, local, state or federal, it becomes even more intolerable. It has become a favored political diatribe to say, “Education is terrible.” Not even sure what that means. The comparisons are then made to Iceland, Shanghai, Japan, Bali, Myanmar, and all sorts of countries who could either fit into one of our states and whose education is incredibly narrow.

The story of education is usually attached to funding and how much money we spend on education. Why aren’t students doing well? However, they are doing well. If we did, as other countries do, and only tested our middle class children, we would always be the number 1 in the world. Our public education system does not turn any child away. For instance, right at this very moment, 2 local elementary schools had 15 students in each school appear with no comprehension of English. Public schools are mandated to help these children, and we do.

Besides all of the basic courses that are taught, there are massive expenses for special education that did not exist in 1954 or any other time. The PARC consent decree, which mandated special education, came about in 1972. It is now up to 20% of a school district’s expenditures.

Charter Schools are an increasing cost. As the number of charter schools grows, almost every dollar they get comes from local school districts, making it another burden on local budgets. In many states, the cost of charter school students is greater than students in the local school district. Although public charter schools must take all comers, they really do cherry pick their students. One charter school, of which I am acquainted, has parents fill out a 15 page application and only holds meetings with parents during the school day, when parents are working.

The jokes about public schools abound. They are crass and unknowing. Almost all Nobel Prize winners come from public schools. You are probably thinking that means nothing because the winners are old. Many are, but they were certainly young enough to go to public schools as baby boomers and the children of baby boomers. Take a look at how many of the Nobel Prize winners come from the United States. We are still on the top by far.

High stakes testing has helped schools reach a new low in wasting time. The tests tell us nothing about what is happening in schools. Do any colleges or universities use these tests for admission? Do employers use the tests to hire? What exactly are these tests used for? Do they tell us anything about how children are progressing through the grades? Do they tell us where the children were, when they entered school? Do we note their progress? Welcome to the world of the test makers, who make a ton from these worthless things?

As a former lobbyist for rural schools, I once asked a state senator why they don't use other variables to grade school districts. His answer was clear, "It is much easier to use these tests."

Having traveled many miles across a number of states, visiting rural schools, I can safely say, "Those districts, save a few, are doing so much

with so little.” The ingenuity and the effort are so apparent in these places. The children seem to be working hard, the teachers, even harder.

The local communities in these places are proud of their schools. That even appears in the yearly survey of the Kappan. I say this to all of my co-aged friends. “Come and go with us to the local rural schools and see what is happening.” For those that come with us, the final discussion is “How can I volunteer?”

Bless those folks who are taking care of our children in our schools.