



End of the “Free Ride” for Public Education?

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution on September 8 published an opinion piece by Brian Crosby. In his article, Mr. Crosby proffers a solution to the problem of underperforming schools and schools suffering a lack of resources and funds. According to Mr. Crosby, the cure to the nationwide pandemic of withering budget cuts is “to start charging parents tuition for their children’s public school education.”

As Mr. Crosby reckons, there is a deep pool of untapped funds out there and the only barrier between schools and a program-saving windfall is convincing mom and dad to sacrifice one cup of coffee a day or one night out at the movies a week and give the money they save to Junior’s school.



The income from such a scheme would be astounding, Crosby declares. He estimates that there are 47 million kids enrolled in public school from kindergarten through 12th grade and if just half of the parents of those students were required to pay \$360 a year (no need to do the math, he does it for us), then \$8.5 billion dollars would be put into the anemic public school system across the country and there would be trombones, art classes, and field trips for everyone.

After laying out the wondrous effects of such a tonic, Mr. Crosby then sets out the probable causes of the disease. In his view, the blame primarily lays at the feet of parents who are spoiling their children with “ipods and cellphones” while taking for granted that they will always have the benefit of “free” education. If parents worried more about the understaffed and underfunded schools in their neighborhoods, then maybe public schools would not be in such a lamentably deplorable state that is an embarrassment to a nation as powerful as the United States.

Furthermore, Mr. Crosby believes, parents would place a greater value on the public school system if suddenly the “free ride” was over and they had to pay for their child’s education. To support this hypothesis, he presents indisputable medical proof, “Psychologically it’s interesting how people view something that is free: They tend to place less value on it than if they have to pay for it.” So, charge parents to send their kids to government-run school and suddenly the fever lifts, color comes back into the cheeks, and the schools are up and about, playing kickball on the playground again.

Unfortunately for Mr. Crosby and his magic potion, there is a very salient factor that he has left out of his formula for saving our schools. The proposal’s missing element, as every parent of a child in public or private school that is reading this article already knows, is that parents already pay for their child’s education, whether it be in the form of private school tuition or property tax that is earmarked for education. Regardless of which of the two systems a parent chooses to enroll his child in, the fees far exceed the \$360 a year that Mr. Crosby proposes to charge them so that they’ll start taking their child’s education seriously. As a matter of fact, it seems indisputable that there isn’t a mom or dad in America



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on September 9, 2009

that wouldn't rather pay the \$360 a year than the thousands they presently pay in taxes and tuition.

Moreover, the money currently paid by parents doesn't account for the other occasional charges they incur for things like school supplies, school clothes, lunches, etc. Would Mr. Crosby's plan eliminate all these charges, as well? If so, then there will be parents lined up around the block of every school in America anxious to sign up for the new plan.

The key to understanding Mr. Crosby's apparent obliviousness to the reality of public school funding as presently constituted is found at the end of his article, where his credentials are presented. Mr. Crosby proudly proclaims that he is a "National Board Certified Teacher." That means that he is a member of the teaching establishment and is more than likely simply a shill for the teachers' union that is beholden and dependent on the perpetuation of the federal Department of Education. Interestingly, although only roughly 8 percent of school funding comes from the federal government, the Department of Education is moving in the direction of dictating 100 percent of the curriculum. One wonders what the effect on the quality of public school education throughout the United States would be were the Department of Education eliminated and the tax money that supports it were returned to parents. Would those parents then be able to spend more on their children's schools without feeling like they already "gave at the office?"

Finally, there is the question of allocation. The federal and state governments (through income taxes, sales taxes, property taxes, wheel taxes, etc.) collect billions from parents whose household incomes are already stretched to the limit because of economic policies that eviscerate the middle class. The government (principally, the federal government) is going to break our legs and then wants to charge us for the crutches — all the while, consoling us by reminding us that without their care and concern, we wouldn't be able to walk! Mr. Crosby and others of his ilk should spend their time and ink investigating where all this tax money goes in the first place. Perhaps there would be more for teacher salaries and more for books, instruments, and other resources if the average school system did not have four non-teaching employees for every classroom teacher on the payroll. This sort of audit will never happen, however, so long as the federal government, the teachers' union, and bureaucrats local and national are kept flush on money taken from parents and distributed without their control.



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