

Thursday, August 31, 2006

News Nuggets

body dl dt {font-weight: bold; padding-top: 10px;}

Research Shows what we have Known All Along: Public Schools are as Good as Private Schools!

In fact, many public schools are better than many private schools.

Money is not the necessary or sufficient condition that produces highly positive student outcomes. More importantly, the effort to pull students from public schools into religious schools with the use of vouchers is shown to be ill-advised, political slight-of-hand.

What makes good schools? The answer is no secret: great teachers.

Every teaching situation requires a skilled and proficient teacher. This is a stated goal of the dreaded No Child Left Behind Act. Unfortunately, NCLB goes about it in the wrong way, possibly because vouchers for religious schools is one of the hidden agendas behind the law.

But, is there any logic that places the best teachers in religious private schools where the pay is more dismal than the public school system? Answer: none whatsoever.

In fact, teaching in the wealthiest prep schools (even if the school paid above average salaries) is no picnic. In schools for extremely wealthy children, stresses are high for both students and their teachers because the parents drive the students to excel. For teachers for the very wealthy, the trade off is an exchange of meddling politicians from afar for the up close and personal meddling of parents (demanding to get their way, and used to getting it).

Enough editorializing! What did the Research Show?

The research revealed that when students were matched for various demographic characteristics, the matching groups of students achieved at approximately the same levels.

Of course the corollary question immediately jumps to our attention, i.e., what kind of science was used in the past to measure different kinds of students against each other in the first place?

Seems like this could be the same twisted logic that jumps to the conclusion that blanket test scores provide a picture of how well a teacher is doing. (Maybe even the logic of comparing students from 40 countries on achievement tests is suspect.)

Anyway, here are the links to this story: Public Schools Perform Near Private Ones in

Study <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/07/15/education/15report.html?ex=1310616000&en=abe96106c55b306f&ei=5090&partner=rssuserland&emc=rss#articleBodyLink>

Study finds worst performance in Conservative Christian

Schools <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/c/a/2006/07/15/MNGI7JVJ361.DTL>

Link to the full report <http://www.nytimes.com/packages/pdf/national/20060715report.pdf>

Of course, not everyone agrees that our teachers are competent, hardworking professionals. And, our elementary teachers seem to teach better than our middle school and high school teachers; at least when compared our students to students in foreign, industrialized countries (if you inappropriately use students' test scores to measure teachers in the way that politicians and school district administrators do).

For a particularly scathing indictment of our school system at their worst, follow this link. Link to the view that school districts need competition.

Or, check out our book review in this newsletter issue where Paul A. Zoch paints a compelling picture of the failure of American education based upon false assumptions that were promoted and indoctrinated by the Progressive Education Movement. Link to the 8-31-06 Book Review of Doomed to Fail.

Implications

If we want to measure teachers' performance, we should measure teachers' performance. As we have noted in previous newsletters, measuring students' test scores is inappropriate for judging and evaluating teachers. Link to The Flaws, Fallacies and Foolishness of Benchmark Testing article.

And, when we measure teachers performance, we need to include some scaled score for "Newbie" teachers. No scientific rationale justifies measuring the student outcomes of classes taught by a beginning teacher against the outcomes of a master teacher with three to five years of experience.

In fact, lots of support, tender-loving-care, and patience are needed to upgrade a Newbie teacher to a master teacher level. When a Newbie leaves a college school of education as a certified Newbie teachers, he or she has little more than the ability to talk the jargon of the trade in their toolkit. A college education degree is only a "ticket to play", with little of the real experience that is needed to perform the actual skills required for day-to-day output as a "all-things-to-all-students, master-of-everything-under-the-sun; when in fact, the practice, integration and habit development of most instructional skills are learned on the job.

There are ineffective teachers working on great campuses, and there are great teachers working wonders in spite of ineffective principals.

Because of biases and because of the polarizing opinions, people from every angle of this debate will probably be able to use some part of this research report to trumpet their own viewpoint (just as we are doing here).

And, there may be a level of ambivalence on all sides, such as the Classroom Toolkit policy of wishing to protect our public schools while at the same time removing them from the muck and mire of bureaucracy.

The Real Distinction

Of course, we have to draw the distinction between the competencies of teachers and between the competencies of the school districts that they teach for.

And, it may not be that government schools are monopolies that is at the core of how poorly American high school students perform (in comparison to other countries), but that our school districts (and the government that pulls their "puppet's strings") are bureaucracies.

Of course, to the knowledge workers who finds their jobs outsourced overseas, it doesn't matter what the cause behind how overseas knowledge workers became more skilled than our workers.

And it won't matter what the cause, to the cities and towns where local companies loose business because foreign companies earn contracts in global competition. When overseas workers are more skilled than our local knowledge workers, who can blame companies from wanting to work with companies with the best-trained and most productive employees.

Looming Economic Defeat of U.S. Businesses?

This looming defeat of American businesses is avoidable, if we empower our teachers and teach our students to their potential.

But, since we don't expect our politicians or our school districts to empower our teachers, Classroom Toolkit provides the tools to help teachers empower themselves.

Even though politicians and school district administrators continue to place barriers and obstacles to great teaching in front of teachers at every turn; teaching still is a great privilege (some would say that teaching rises to the level of a blessing).

Contributing to the welfare and long-term success of our students by teaching, instructing and sharing our knowledge, skills and abilities is contributing to the long-term success of our nation.

I'm sure that politicians and school district administrators want our teachers to excel, even if they don't know how to get out of the way and let our teachers teach.

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in News Nuggets at 12:51