

NORTH CAROLINA ASSOCIATION FOR MIDDLE LEVEL EDUCATION
JOURNAL

James Davis, Ph.D., Editor
Coastal Carolina University

Fall 2017, Volume 30, Number 1

Editorials About Public School Funding Miss the Point

By

Sam Basden

Director of School Performance, Union County Public Schools

Jonathan Bowers

Director, Accountability and Student Services, Union County Public Schools

Brad Breedlove

Director of School Performance, Union County Public Schools

In a recent article posted by the John Locke Foundation, Dr. Terry Stoops states that public school funding is a topic that is generally supported by both sides of the legislative aisles. With this as a foundation, the author then proposes the idea that “Educational Productivity” should be the point of funding conversations focused on public school education. “Educational Productivity” is defined as “the relationship between educational inputs (money) and outputs (performance metrics). This “return on investment” serves as the author’s baseline for decisions about educational funding. According to Stoops, any other elements “miss the point.”

Unfortunately, Dr. Stoops has missed “the point” with his “Educational Productivity” model for public school funding. While this argument is “bootless” (a term used and defined in the article as “ineffectual or useless”) on many levels, this response will only focus on the myth of educational productivity and funding.

By definition, productivity is a measure of inputs v. outputs. In most commercial arenas, productivity is a manageable measure based on a relatively standard set of inputs. A manufacturing plant buys a set of standard, high-quality raw materials and produces a high-quality measurable output based on their handling of the raw material. Sub-standard raw materials are rejected or returned to the source. The same model applies to banking, construction, and the restaurant industry.

Ironically, this model also holds true in public education. When a school is presented with a set of homogeneous, healthy, grade-ready students – the school is generally able to produce very positive outcomes. A review of the recent NC School Report Card will clearly demonstrate that schools in single-race, high-income areas are among the highest in educational productivity. Conversely, those schools in areas of poverty and diversity struggle to meet the arbitrary productivity goals set by the legislature and NCDPI. Unlike other industries, these schools do not have the option to reject their raw materials (students) or return them to their source (send them home). Dr. Stoops’ idea of “Educational Productivity” only transfers to the already accommodated elite.

The “point” in public school funding is not “Educational Productivity.” The point that the current legislature is conveniently overlooking is per pupil expenditure. Per pupil expenditure equalizes for growth and provides the consumer (us) with a manageable number for comparison. During an election year, prepare to hear big, universal dollar values in the millions that are heralded as huge increases in funding. In most cases, these truly are actual increases in funding, but these increases are not keeping pace with the increases in enrollment. Simply put, a 4% increase in funding in a year when the enrollment increases by 6% is actually a decrease in per-pupil expenditures. According to the NCDPI web page, per-pupil expenditure is actually down from \$8,541 in 2010 to \$8,296 at the end of 2015. These figures become even more perplexing when inflation is factored into the equation. According to the website usinflationcalculator.com, an item that cost \$20.00 in 2010 now costs the consumer \$22.07. So, even with flat per-pupil expenditures, the funding is reduced – and the current funding is below flat.

Consider the term “pupil”. In addition to referring to “students”, it can also refer to the “eye”. Eyes come in all shapes and sizes. Eyes come in a variety of colors. Some eyes are perfect with 20/20 vision while others need corrective lenses to be useful. Some eyes do not work at all and are supplemented by other enhanced senses. Finally, many believe that the eye is the mirror of the soul. Like the pupil of the human eye, the pupils of North Carolina’s public schools come in all shapes, sizes, and colors. Some are ready to succeed upon arrival, while others need adaptive correction or support. And, if we are to be truthful, these pupils define our soul as a state. When funding for public education is based on the individual pupils and not some soulless manufacturing productivity model, North Carolina will start getting the point.

Reference

Stoops, Dr. Terry. "Debates About Funding Miss The Point." *John Locke Foundation*, John Locke Foundation, 29 July 2016, www.johnlocke.org/update/debates-about-funding-miss-the-point/.

Sam Basden joined Central Services of Union County Public Schools after serving 7 years as the Principal at Porter Ridge HS. Mr. Basden is currently serving as the Director of School Performance after spending three years in Auxiliary Services in two other roles. Prior to moving to Central Services, Mr. Basden served as the principal at Porter Ridge HS.

Brad Breedlove became the Director of School Performance, after serving as the Director of Secondary Education for two years. From 2012-2015, Mr. Breedlove was the principal of Monroe High School and from 2007-2012 he served as principal of Weddington High School. At both schools he experienced great success with student achievement as measured by test scores and a high graduation rate, as well as athletics, visual and performing arts, and philanthropic endeavors. Mr. Breedlove attributes the success to great teamwork by the students, parents, faculty, and administration.