

From [\*Education Follies: four decades of tilting at windmills for no apparent reason\*](#)  
by Jeff Lee Byrem, (c) 2016



## *The Myth of Educational Funding and More*

Here is an eye-popping statement from the 2014 Cato Institute publication, [\*State Education Trends: Academic Performance and Spending over the Past 40 Years...\*](#)<sup>1</sup>

*“The performance of 17-year-olds has been essentially stagnant across all subjects despite a near tripling of the inflation adjusted cost of putting a child through the K–12 system.”*

(Note: If you're curious about the relationship between funding and student achievement in your state, the above report provides charts for each state.)

In the midst of conservatives calling for the evisceration of the welfare state because they are citizens who, apparently, “claim they love America, but clearly can’t stand

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<sup>1</sup> < <http://object.cato.org/sites/cato.org/files/pubs/pdf/pa746.pdf> >

Americans<sup>2</sup>,” and in the midst of progressives who believe, apparently, that throwing money at an educational system, which is failing to serve the children who need it most, will magically resolve the problem, the Cato report raises this simple question in my mind...

*What the hell is going on?*

Here are three starting points for pursuing answers and for prompting discussions at the highest levels of government and at kitchen tables, Little League games, random meetings at supermarkets, after church or synagogue chats...you get my drift...

First: The knowing-doing gap among educators at both the leadership and classroom levels is dysfunctionally large. There is a body of research that verifies **too many educators—both leaders and teachers—are unlikely to implement the professional practices they know will increase student achievement.** (Refer to a brief summary from the Washington State ASCD: [\*What is the Knowing-Doing Gap?\*](#)<sup>3</sup>)

Second: A high proportion of educators (and parents) I have encountered over the past four-plus decades (my nonscientific sample of one) is seriously **deprived of an understanding of what intrinsically motivates human beings to learn.** In fact, by the time students reach the fifth grade, educators and parents have “atta-boyed,” gold-starred, stickered, dollar-billed, and otherwise rewarded the intrinsic motivation to learn right out of our children (see [\*What Happens to Four-Year-Olds\*](#)).

Third: There are decades of research that verify **a direct relationship exists between student learning and teacher expectations.** Despite this research-based reality, my nonscientific sample of one has provided me with example after example of teachers who, often with pity tinging their voices, have pleaded with me to lower

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<sup>2</sup> Click this [link](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0112346/quotes) for origin of quote: <<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0112346/quotes>>

<sup>3</sup> <[http://wsascd.org/downloads/February\\_2011\\_-\\_Critical\\_Question\\_Series.pdf](http://wsascd.org/downloads/February_2011_-_Critical_Question_Series.pdf)>

my expectations because “those kids” cannot learn due to the baggage they bring with them to school.

The solution is conceptually *NOT* at a rocket-science level of complexity.

Education is at a Nike moment. *JUST DO IT!*

- Eliminate the knowing-doing gap—do what we know works instructionally, especially with disadvantaged children
- Apply the three C’s to jumpstart intrinsic motivation; see [\*The Three C’s \(Children Are Not Pigeons!\)\*](#) for an overview
- Attack low teacher expectations

There are two scary and politically dicey challenges to overcome...

*Nowhere does data support the notion that paying educators more has ever had a proportional, positive impact upon student achievement.*

Look into where the huge increase in funding has gone over the past forty years, and you will discover the greatest portion has gone toward increasing the number of educators and their compensation. As long as the rules of the game are not changed—if teachers are given free rein to teach how they wish to teach—student achievement, especially that of disadvantaged children, will not change no matter how much money is directed toward educator compensation.

There are examples where student achievement has shown significant gains in relatively short periods of time.

One set of examples is associated with the Renaissance School Initiative in the School District of Philadelphia. The initiative involves offering ineffective public schools to

charter school organizations with the goal of bringing about substantive change. One such organization, Mastery Charter Schools, has taken on several failed Philly schools. When charter organizations take over a school through the Renaissance School Initiative, they must accept the same students from the same neighborhood in the same building. What is different? The management of the school and the adults in classrooms.

One Mastery Charter example is Simon Gratz High School. The year before Mastery took over Gratz, the school was designated one of the fifteen most dangerous high schools in America. I was told that when a Mastery team visited the school the spring prior to the Mastery takeover, the team encountered students urinating in the halls and smoking dope in the stairwells. Few Gratz students were meeting or exceeding cut points on the required state exams.

But in the third year of Mastery operation, the school climate I observed was very close to what any parent would want it to be, AND according to a report in the Philadelphia Inquirer, Gratz was in the top ten (not top ten percent, the top ten) of the several hundred schools in the Delaware Valley in terms of the improvement in the school's raw School Performance Profile scores (a rating system devised by the Pennsylvania DOE that incorporates performance on the state tests).

What were the apparent variables responsible for the improvement at Gratz? Educator compensation was not one; rather, the two apparent variables were different management and a different faculty.

I cannot address the matter of whether or not Mastery staff members understand the particulars of motivation research, but I can attest (via my nonscientific sample of one) that in the Mastery Charters with which I am familiar, all faculty are expected to and do apply research-based strategies, AND I observed continual examples of

teachers who believed their kids could learn (the same students previously failed by previous SDP faculties).

A second scary, dicey, political challenge is what to do about standardized testing.

*Such tests should never have been used, nor should they continue to be used, to evaluate student and school performance because standardized tests are intended to rank and sort, not evaluate student and school performance in a standards-based environment.*

As long as standardized test results are the focus of policy makers, those tests will be the focus of instruction, i.e. the focus of instruction will be on a very shallow level of skills and knowledge ([Standardized Tests: Opt Out or Not?](#)). Further, the use of standardized test results to bully teachers will NOT change teacher practice (but it might chase effective teachers into other professions!).

How then can educational funds be directed—and by extension, how should *any* major initiative be structured—in order to eliminate the knowing-doing gap, change educators' understanding of motivation, and ensure that teacher expectations are what they need to be?

One: Politicians and policy-level educators must provide the professional development necessary to create a cadre of school managers that have a strong and clear understanding of: (1) motivation theory, (2) the relationship between teacher expectations and student achievement, and (3) effective practice, including standards-based assessment and grading practices.

Two: Teachers must be provided with intensive training in: (1) motivation theory, (2) the impact of teacher expectations, and (3) effective instructional and assessment

practices; also, it is essential that teachers be provided with ongoing support to insure fidelity of implementation of effective practice in every classroom.

Three: School Managers must be held accountable for the implementation of effective practice in every classroom to include a mandate to observe and verify fidelity of implementation on a FREQUENT basis.

Four: School managers must have a mandate and the skills needed to develop and implement meaningful, compassionate improvement plans for non-compliant teachers; teachers who cannot or will not comply with expectations should be directed to another profession.

The above four strategies did not originate with me. I am simply repeating what is known—it is up to politicians and policy makers to do what needs to be done.

Whether teacher unions, or the politicians who want their support, like it or not, it is not poor neighborhoods, not large class size, not a lack of parental involvement, nor insufficient teacher compensation that are insurmountable obstacles our children—especially disadvantaged children—cannot overcome to learn at the level at which they should be learning.

The current obstacle that needs to be—and can be—overcome is the synergy of politicians', policy-makers', and educators' failure to ensure that what is known to work is implemented with fidelity. Until that obstacle is overcome, increasing educator compensation, massive redistricting, improving infrastructure et al will not result in an increase in measured student achievement. Politicians, policy-makers, and we educators need to wake up and accept the reality that right now...

*“We have met the enemy, and he is us.”<sup>4</sup>*

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<sup>4</sup> Pogo (Walt Kelly)