

Arrows from the Economic Arena

We are in such short supply of materials that you have to sign out for pens and pencils and put your number into the copy machine--items that we have previously taken for granted...It's getting to the point that if we need these kinds of supplies, we have to pay for them ourselves. (Middle School science teacher)

You can't make a referral for a kid with a suspected remediation problem and get any kind of result...Our district psychologist just finished testing children referred in October. Now it's June. If you don't catch the problems early and begin to work on them, the child has experienced a whole year of frustration and failure. But that's how it is with all the cut-backs in the district. (First grade teacher)

Attacks from the economic arena are perhaps the most damaging because they directly erode the already limited resources upon which teachers rely to do their complex and difficult work. Likewise, economic assaults are very difficult to counter because educators have little control over the purse strings. Somehow the critics of public education have managed to convince the public to withdraw resources from education at the same time that awareness of the importance of mind work in the post-industrial "information age" has been increasing. Yet organizational development scholars and the gurus of corporate consulting have been preaching the value of creative "mind work" for years (Drucker, 1989, 1993; Kanter, 1989, 1995). For instance, organizational consultant Tom Peters sums up the formula for personal and organizational success in today's complex environment with one simple and compelling statement, "Lumps are out and brains are in." In other words, human knowledge and ingenuity are much more vital than raw materials or muscles (lumps) in today's economy, hence the importance of education. Some of the most serious economic attacks on teachers and schools include inadequate school funding and teacher remuneration, insufficient tools, lack of professional development, and inclusion initiatives primarily designed to save money.

Inadequate School Funding

The United States spends much less per capita than the average industrialized nation on K-12 education, ranking 14th out of 16 industrial nations in this regard (Berliner, 1993). Hodgkinson (1995) adds that when politicians say that America throws money at education and spends more than other nations, they are including costs for higher education as well as other costs such as transportation not typically covered in those countries. For example, [Bracey](#) (1995b) notes that the United States is the only one of the 19 nations in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development in which more than 50 % of school employees are not regular classroom teachers. But most nations do not have policies requiring education of every child, including those with serious handicapping conditions (Hodgkinson, 1995).

American public schools have not been adequately supported, nor has the necessary infrastructure been developed to ensure successful education for the future. For example, from 1987 to 1992, state and local spending on K-12 education dropped by 3.9% nationwide, while student enrollment increased by 5.5% (NEA Today, 1995). Furthermore, "cuts in federal education programs are more than four times greater than the average cuts for other domestic programs" (Carter, 1995, p. 2), representing about 18 % of the national education budget. There is little hope of making up losses at state or local levels. One reason, according to Hodgkinson (1995), is that only 25% of America's households have school-age children.

This lowers the likelihood of successful school bond elections, a major source of funding for many schools. Reductions in current programs make it even more difficult to project for future needs. Lewis (1995a) reports that the U.S. Census estimates the school-age population will increase by 19% in the next decade. With so much cutting at federal, state, and local levels, schools obviously cannot prepare for this huge rise in student numbers.

Resultant problems abound. In spite of the current economic boom, many school districts have been forced to downsize due to reliance on inadequate school funding approaches (e.g.: property taxes, lottery and gambling revenues); economic recessions earlier this decade; ballot measures limiting taxes for school funding; and simplistic political approaches to the complexities of education (Pipho, 1994). Downsizing means facing increases in class size combined with elimination of support personnel (counselors, psychologists, social workers, and school nurses) at a time when problems students face are increasing. Specialist teachers, such as art, special education, music, or physical education have been furloughed by the thousands, along with cutbacks of regular classroom teachers (Elam, Rose & Gallup, 1991).

Such recisions and de-specialization would be unheard of in the legal or medical professions. One goes to the family doctor for checkups, routine coughs, colds, or stomach aches, but if brain surgery is needed, one goes to a neurosurgeon. Don't expect the lawyer who write wills or deal with divorce to take cases in international business law. But general classroom teachers are being asked to serve more students with more difficulties. They are not given the necessary training or resources to do so. Californians have suffered this situation since 1978 when Proposition 13 seriously undermined the resources of their public education system. The result has been poor teacher morale, shock, and overload in a state where local authorities cannot control their agendas as much as they previously could (Kirst, 1993).

Another problem is the vast differences between amounts spent on education in different regions, wherein districts in affluent suburbs may spend as much as \$20,000 per student, while poor districts may allocate only about \$3,000 per child (Moyers, 1996). These discrepancies, Hodgkinson (1995) says, particularly hurt the already severely disadvantaged children in the bottom third of the socioeconomic strata. Terman and Behrman (1997) found that "student outcomes are more profoundly affected by the concentration of poverty in the school than by the student's own family income" (p. 10). [Kozol](#) (1991) calls the differences between economic support provided for wealthier districts and those with poor populations "savage inequalities." He states that current funding methods are a major reason for these [inequalities](#). Hayden (1996) notes that poor communities are penalized, particularly when schools are funded through property taxes, although the proportion of tax dollars that go to education are higher. The low income schools, typical of urban and isolated rural areas, are old, crowded, crumbling, and leaking, with poor learning environments and minimal technological access.

The lack of funds for repair of the aging schools across the nation has left schools in a serious state of disrepair (Bracey, 1994; Moyers, 1996). Lewis (1995b) declares that the cost of putting off repairs means that every dollar not spent now on school roofing in New York City will eventually cost \$620. Citing reports released by the General Accounting Office (GAO), she claims that it would cost \$112 billion to repair, renovate, and modernize the nation's schools so that they are in good overall condition and comply with safety mandates. Moyers (1996) notes the largest proportion of crumbling schools occurs in central cities with very high rates of poverty, where teachers and children must function in school buildings that are unsafe according to building codes applied assiduously to homes and businesses. The consequences of inadequate funding hurt everyone: teachers, school students, and citizens alike. But such price tags appear too great to the decision makers in state legislatures who create the bottom line for schools and who prefer to use the funds to build prisons.

Yet, Hodgkinson (1995) claims that education is the best weapon against crime and poverty. He states that 80% of America's 1.1 million prisoners are high school dropouts and that, with one exception, states with the lowest dropout rates also have the lowest per capita prison populations. Hodgkinson laments that investment in prisons, being built at an ever increasing rate, has far less pay-off than investment in education. But Americans appear willing to build jails to get tough on crime, and to spend an average of \$60,000 annually per prisoner, rather than invest in schools and children at the annual average cost of about \$6,000 per child (Moyers, 1996).

It is a myth that money is unrelated to the outcomes of schooling, according to Berliner (1993). States that spend the most on schools produce citizens whose incomes are significantly higher. Teacher salaries, class size, and length of the school year are significant predictors of a student's future earnings. Explaining these findings, Berliner suggests that higher salaries attract and keep brighter, better teachers. He notes that research indicates that once class size exceeds 18 in grades K-7, each additional student makes for a significant drop in district achievement. He cites one study in Texas that reported a huge drop of 35 percentage points on standardized tests of achievement when class size increased from 18 to 25. [Project STAR](#) of Tennessee (Achilles, Finn, & Bain, 1998) found that reducing class size to 13 to 17 pupils at the primary level was particularly beneficial for nonwhite and impoverished students in increasing gains in achievement and reducing retention and remediation problems later. Moreover, Bracey (1995b) points out that if tutoring rather than usual classroom instruction is employed, achievement soared by two standard deviations. Bracey (1995c) cites a number of research studies that indicate much improved academic performance among students who enjoy low pupil-teacher ratios in comparison with their peers in larger classes. Yet how many districts have the luxury of keeping class sizes to below eighteen students or are able to provide extensive tutoring?

Low Pay

Most of the increases in educational costs over the last 20 years have been for health care, transportation, and special education, not regular instruction or teacher salaries (Berliner, 1993). Teachers in the United States still earn about 30% less than other workers with the same education level and amount of experience (Darling-Hammond, 1993). Likewise, they do not compare well against salaries for teachers in many other developed countries (Bracey, 1994). In fact, of the 13 comparable occupations with which they were contrasted, American teachers were last in average earnings (National Center for Education Statistics, 1996). Most teachers are willing to work for lower salaries than other professionals because they are not in it for the money. They are committed to helping children. But there is a limit to their altruism. As Baines (1997) noted,

"Most teachers still earn between \$10 and \$15 for each hour that they work, receive 20 to 25 minutes for lunch, and must carefully schedule bathroom breaks and phone calls to coincide with the five minutes between classes. In contrast, over the past two months, I have paid a plumber \$50 an hour, an auto mechanic \$35 an hour, and an electrician \$45 an hour. The plumber, auto mechanic, and electrician all had the luxury of having a real lunch hour and did not have to supervise hundreds of noisy adolescents in a school cafeteria while they ate. America has always gotten better teachers than it deserves, but there is no guarantee that the trend will continue." (Baines, 1997, p. 498).

Lack of Tools

The typical classroom has at best a couple of aging computers and no telephone. To call a parent about a student problem often means standing in line to use one of two or three phone

lines during a brief recess period, too often in the hearing of others. What other professional has no tools (Glickman, 1991)? "Even supermarket checkers have more high-tech support than today's teachers" (Bell, 1993, p. 596).

Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Regular Classrooms

A recent trend in education is the inclusion of disabled children in regular classrooms, often full inclusion. While many such children should be included at least part time in the mainstream, decisions about placements must be made on the basis of benefit--to both the child and the entire class. When these decisions are based on economic considerations rather than child benefit, the system fails. Most states and school systems, however, are adopting full inclusion to save money (Shanker, 1995). All too often, professionals skilled in working with the particular disability are being cut back or eliminated, so neither the child with the disability nor the rest of the class thrive. Most classroom teachers are inadequately trained to work with these children (For elaboration on this issue, see recent articles in the September 1994, March 1995, and December 1995 issues of Phi Delta Kappan; and December 1994, January 1995, and February 1996 Educational Leadership.) Placing children with severe problems, particularly emotional or behavioral disturbances, in regular classrooms without sufficient support or teacher training is destructive to teachers and children alike (Kauffman, Lloyd, Baker, & Reidel, 1995). Federal laws that prohibit suspension of disabled students have exacerbated the problem, especially when such students are seriously disruptive or even dangerous. Considerable litigation has arisen and some teachers have abandoned the profession because of the stress (Schnaiberg, 1996).

Lack of Professional Development

When state or university budgets are curtailed, teacher training programs at research universities often are among the first adversely affected, nationally and internationally. For example, witness the effects of the 1990 Ballot Measure 5 in Oregon, in which teacher training, research, and graduate programs in curriculum and instruction were virtually eliminated at the three major state universities and teacher education was relegated to the three small state colleges. The long-term implications of such political and economic decisions have not yet been fully considered, but assuredly these closures do not bode well for teachers or students in the state. When these cuts were first made, there was not one place in Oregon to pursue doctoral course work or research in curriculum and instruction. Unfortunately, similar cuts have been made elsewhere in the nation.

Even when quality university programs do exist, rapid escalations in tuition costs have made professional development opportunities at universities less affordable. Although considerable movement towards professionalizing teaching has occurred in the last decade or so, through post-baccalaureate programs in education and through efforts to create standards for the profession, the reality, at least in some places, has been to de-professionalize teaching by returning to the old "normal school" approaches. Even worse, some states, particularly those in which there are severe teacher shortages, now certify career changers as teachers through alternative routes that offer little or no professional preparation (Wise, 1994). And all too often, new teachers are put into classrooms with little or no support, forcing them to "sink or swim" (Halford, 1998).

Professional development is also needed for in-service teachers to keep up with the extremely rapid pace of school reform and recent research on teaching and learning; yet no national strategy for staff development or leverage to improve teacher preparation exists. Learning has never been better. The shifts to a constructivist paradigm, research on the learning process, brain theory, the new technologies, and the incredible expansion of knowledge have led to

tremendous opportunities for learning. This is one of the reasons that teaching is suffering. Teachers simply do not have the time to keep up with all the new strategies and approaches to learning, nor do they have the experiences, training, or comfort levels to try to utilize some of these approaches. Thus, the teaching profession is being killed paradoxically while learning is thriving. There is a time warp between what many students have access to through the world wide web on their home computers and the traditional textbook of the classroom. The common one-shot, "what to do Monday" types of staff development are not sufficient. What is needed is long-term professional development that involves reflection on practice and coaching with like-minded colleagues (Kirst, 1993). Such long-term training costs money. It also takes time, a luxury rarely available to hard-pressed teachers in districts with severely limited resources.

Countering the Assaults from the Economic Arena

Clearly, rallying community support (as described in the last section) is critical in securing funding for schools and teachers' salaries. The willingness to increase funding for schools depends on the community perceiving schools and children as financial priorities. Clear goals for funding, demanding educational equity, collective bargaining, linkages to business, and helping the public recognize the value of education are other strategies for countering the economic assaults.

Set Clear Goals for Educational Funding

The public does not want to see their money thrown at education. They are far more willing to pay costs for specific items that they see will benefit the children and their community. For example, requests for funds to repair the gym, classroom computers, an art or music teacher, or a new ceiling for the lunch room are more likely to gain community support than ambiguous and general requests for money. Teachers and administrators can also investigate outside resources for enhancing instructional programs. Small grants from service clubs, foundations, and local businesses can be used to provide many of the materials teachers need to do their jobs and help to support special activities and scholarships.

Take a Stand on Equitable School Funding

When high poverty schools receive the same level of funding as wealthier schools and provide proven programs and practices, the profound gaps between middle class and disadvantaged children are eradicated (Slavin, 1997-1998). Most challenging are schools with high concentrations of poor children, where 40% or more qualify for free or reduced priced lunch. Such schools need a formula for funding that gives extra weight to each child in these circumstances to equalize outcomes (Terman & Behrman, 1997). Rather than cutting funding for the wealthier districts back to that provided poor districts, Terman and Behrman suggest that the goal should be to bring the lowest-funded schools up to the funding level where there is a 70% student success rate in similar populations. Educators need to take a stand to ensure that gaps between the rich and poor do not perpetuate inequalities. Speaking with local citizens, having a letter writing campaign to legislators, and using collective bargaining are some starting points for seeking fair and stable school funding.

Use Collective Bargaining

With increased demands on teachers, collective bargaining for appropriate and equitable resources becomes critical. In addition to the traditional issues of adequate salary, funding must be negotiated for professional development, particularly in working with children with special needs, using new technologies, and learning about new classroom management

strategies. Professional development priorities should be based on local needs and decision making, and should provide time for reflective and collaborative work. Another concern for collective bargaining is the issue of inclusion. At the very least, resources for classroom support and alternative placement options must be negotiated as part of teachers' contracts. Finally, adequate tools, such as telephones and computers should be non-negotiables for all teachers. Now that a teacher shortage is looming, there may be a greater willingness to meet these demands when districts are desperate to encourage new teachers to enter the profession.

Connect Businesses to Schools

According to Parkay and Hardcastle Stanford (1998) corporate contributions to education, have more than tripled over the past decade to about \$2 billion annually. For example, at the Whiteaker School in Eugene, OR, the lowest socioeconomic level school in the state, each classroom was adopted by a business with considerable benefits to the children.

Portray Education as the Key to Solving Persistent Societal Problems

Education is the key to success in the post-industrial world. From strictly an economic viewpoint it is foolhardy today for an individual, an organization, or a nation to withdraw investment from mind development. From a sociopolitical vantage point there are even more compelling reasons for investing in education, such as the development of creative and critical thinking in preparation for dealing with highly complex social problems. Educators must make the public aware that the undermining of public education represents a serious external and internal threat to our long-term viability as a prosperous and civilized people. Teachers can capitalize on an emerging private-sector mind set: that mind potential is the new capital of the post-industrial era. Educators who use this terminology to advertise their work can encourage those inclined to undermine public education to view it in a new positive light. Americans do invest in education when they perceive external threats. For instance, the nation invested heavily in science and math education when it became apparent that the Soviet Union was moving ahead in the space race in the late 1950's (Tannenbaum, 1993). Speaking out at citizens' meetings, writing letters to the editor, meeting with state or federal legislators, and addressing business groups are all vehicles.