

Sees sad ironies in critics' attacks on Winsted schools

Editor of The Register Citizen:

I am struck by the sad and stunning ironies which emerged during the recent public discussions of the education budget in Winsted.

Last year's school budget resulted in no tax rate increase and in fact was a minus number in the total increase generated by the additional spending for town government. Important teaching and teacher aide positions were cut; after school, cultural, field experience and athletic program accounts were reduced or eliminated.

Selectman John Gauger isn't worried that the numbers in our classrooms will expand beyond planned capacity because he remembers being in classes of 45 children. If true, that crowded classroom may explain his inability to comprehend the changes in society in the 30 years since he was in first grade.

To fully appreciate the second compelling irony, please consider the Board of Education. Many who sit on the board campaigned with the intention of curtailing spending. They have conducted on-site studies of the various cost centers. They are taxpayers who live in the community, have chosen to raise families here, who care about education and economics. Yet the attorney for the Nader Trust questioned their honesty. While I too find the board's budget format unwieldy, their motivation is unquestionably to provide honest, detailed information. It is, after all, a \$10 million plus budget.

Perhaps I can clarify one point concerning the number of staff who actually deal with children, of the total 183 employees:

Eight administrative (five are principals or assistants who work with children and teachers daily), 97 certified full- and part-time teachers, four school psychologists (two are part-time), one social worker, two speech pathologists, two counselors, two nurses, one librarian, 26 paraprofessionals (aides in library, special education classrooms, assist handicapped of which five are part-time), 11 clerical, two part-time, nine custodians, one part-time.

These numbers demonstrate that 140 of the total employed deal directly with students, with 19 support staff (custodial and clerical) and three administrators with no classroom responsibility.

I found further irony in Miss Nader's admonishing Wayne Ellsworth for a lack of community spirit. Surely community spirit includes mutual trust, recognition of another's expertise, and the potential for disagreement over process or substance in a manner devoid of the arrogance which breeds antagonism. Where was the community spirit when Mr. Miller labeled an entire teaching staff "greedy"? Where was the commitment to the good of the whole when he mustered a cadre of older, better off, part-time residents to compromise the educational opportunity of Winsted's least well-off and needy citizens?

Mr. Miller is still angry that some teachers make as much or more than he does. He might consider the fact that many engineers, lawyers, restaurant owners and plumbers do too. If Miss Lavoie cannot understand why we cannot educate our students for the same amount per capita as the Japanese, perhaps she could read a bit about the differences in our two societies, starting with the portrait of a Japanese school boy in today's Christian Science Monitor. And didn't she wonder, as I did, why 11 other industrialized nations invest significantly more than we do in education?

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