

Politics in education

Education



Politics in Education Can education exist without politics? The answer is simply put no. While many would love to see the political scene leave education, it is inherent that the two remain together. The key is how they work together in the best interest of the students. Public schools are responsible for two precious entities- children and tax dollars (Farmer, 2012). This is one of the reasons that “ today, education is perhaps the most important function of state and local governments” (Brown v. Board of education, 1954).

While we are progressively seeing federal mandates in education more now than ever, it is mainly the state and local levels where politics are inseparable (Farmer, 2012). Since education is highly imperative to the future of our country, it is and will always be subject to political scrutiny. From the beginning, a well educated American was deemed necessary to protect independence and the general welfare of the citizens (League of Women Voters, 2011). It has been stated this type of citizen will “ rule themselves through elected officials” (Brademas).

Education, especially higher education, at one point was considered a luxury; however, in today’s world a “ high-quality” education often including the collegiate level is believed to be both a “ universal right and a necessity for individual welfare” (Farmer, 2012). For this reason education will remain important topic of political debates between politicians as well as local townspeople. Politics in education goes dates as far back as the Land Ordinance of 1785 and the Northwest Ordinance of 1787.

Federal support was given at this time and later in 1841 with the Land Grant Act in the form of land designated for a system of public education to be established. During this time the federal government began to grant money.

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This money was often used to clean up from war expenses; however, some funds were used for education even though congress did not stipulate that such funds could be used for education (League of Women Voters, Oct. 2011). It is well aware this funding continues today although the state and local government share the majority of the responsibility.

In 1791, the 10th Amendment guaranteed rights to all citizens by stating “the powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people.” This amendment entrusted authority over education to the states by having state constitutions assign specific responsibility and legal authority for public education (Usdan, M. , McCloud, B. , Podmostko, M. , and Cuban, L. , 2001). Today, state and local revenue fund approximately 87% of the money for elementary and secondary education.

It is estimated that only 10% comes from federal funding (The Federal Role in Education). In 1867, the original Department of Education was established to collect data on schools and teaching in order to help create an effective school system (League of Women Voters, 2011). One major turning point for federal education was the GI bill of 1944. The government allotted for nearly eight million World War II veterans to have education assistance to attend college. Until this point, the federal government basically only did research and created policies for an effective system.

Financing of education was not highly supported through the department. Then in 1958, Congress passed the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) in response to Russia’s Sputnik. This created money available to students willing to study science, mathematics, and foreign languages (Dow, 1991).

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In 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was created which included Title 1 funding to the disadvantaged. In 1983, A Nation at Risk was released calling for a refocus on an education reform in order to compete with other countries as it appeared that America was falling behind (Farmer, 2012).

Even though the Department of Education has grown drastically, their mission still remains “ to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering education excellence and ensuring equal access” (Department of Education, 2012). Today, every educator is familiar with most of the current federal mandates including- No Child Left Behind (reauthorization of ESEA), Race to the Top, and common core standards. While most of the funding, administrating, and accountability falls on the state and local governments, these are all federal policies which are often the main topics in a political education debate.

One must ask why the federal government has most of the control over our educational system if it is primarily funded by state and local governments. Is it possible that different areas with different demographics might need a different policy than that mandate from federal level. Being successful is teaching the students in the best possible environment and demonstrating success through achievement. What works in one small town may not work in the next small or large town. Why, then, does the federal government support equality by mandating yet not funding criteria. One thing does remain true- all of these do have a common census-equality in education for each student. The debate question that rises: “ is equality for everyone possible? ” Under President George W. Bush, No Child Left Behind was designed to “

close achievement gaps, particularly for minority children” (League of Women, 2011). It was set that by year 2014, 95% of students would be meeting state standards in reading and math.

Many educators, politicians, and citizens argued that this was an unrealistic goal which would in return be punishing or threatening the low-performing schools. Under this law, parents could be given a voucher to send their child to a different higher performing school. Although every educator had to obtain “ highly qualified” status, teachers working at the schools deemed needing improvement often had negative feelings toward their job and thus the students suffered (League of Women Voters, 2011). Race to the Top was signed into law by the current President Barack Obama in 2009.

This federal mandate came with promises of funding, and as everyone knows “ money speaks volumes. ” This approach would award funds to states who would meet the necessary requirements. Two of these requirements are (1) improve evaluations of teachers thus improving effectiveness based on students achievement (2) raising the limit of charter schools (League of Women Voters, 2011). Race to the Top has several supporters because it comes with necessary funding to move our current classrooms into the 21st century; however, it also comes with unrealistic research.

Several argue that standardized testing is not a fair way to evaluate teacher performance. The most current federal request is the use of common vs. state standards The idea here is that not only will each child receive an equal education within their state, but they now will receive the same equal education within their country and hopefully one day within the nation. The use of common core standards allows children to master through

higher order thinking within broad life skills instead of basic memorization of state specific standards.

It opens up a new way of thinking for children and teachers. It also does create a more equal playing field as far as what children learn within their elementary and secondary education career. Most political debates in education often revolve around these federal policies, but even more often than that the main debate is: funding. Who is going to pay for education? The answer brings up the other highly political debate- us, the taxpayers. It is true that all three levels of government- federal, state, and local- contribute to education.

States typically provide a little less than half, local governments about 44%, and the federal government only funds 10% . The interesting fact is that within the federal government's 10% it includes Title 1, NCLB, RttT, Special Education, child nutrition, and Head Start (Federal Education Budget, 2012). Also, overall the U. S. Department of Education accounts for less than 3% of the total federal budget (Federal Education Budget, 2012). As a nation, we must ask ourselves is the value of education really worth only 3% of the entire federal budget? Excellence is given symbolic prominence, but not sustained financial support” (Usdan, et al, 2001). The political debate is that most politicians will not support efforts to increase funding for education because it will raise taxes- something very few citizens support. However, if the federal government gives only 10%, the state of Tennessee is left with majority of the responsibility to fund education in order for it to succeed. States rely mainly on income and sales tax to fund elementary and

secondary education. It is the legislature who determines the level and distribution of the funding.

Tennessee uses the Basic Education Program (BEP) in order to determine the cost specifications for each component in our system. In Tennessee, the share is roughly 70% which is average when compared with our country (Tennessee Basic Education Program, 2011). In some states it is as high as 86% and as low as 31%. The variation exists because some states rely heavily on local property taxes instead of state funding (Federal Education Budget, 2012). The last and probably one of the most political entities is that of the local school board. The funding for local schools is usually provided by property taxes.

Thus the wealthier areas have the ability to collect more taxes which allows for them to keep tax rates lower. Unfortunately, the poorer communities may have higher tax rates but still not reach the needed funding for the local school district. Therefore often times children with the highest needs are often sent to the schools with less resources and less qualified teachers. This is why education can never be created equal for every child. Another political argument is that in present times education leadership in America is not withheld to high enough standards.

Instead some argue that we have fifty “ education governors” (Usdan, et al, 2001) or some even go as far as to say, “ Governors and presidents are no better suited to run schools than they are to run construction sites” (Thomas, 2012). Truthfully, yes many governors could be doing a better job in education, but most are willing to fight for it. Most support the importance as honestly we must all agree that “ what, after all, could be more important

than a proper education for the state's most precious asset, its children? " (Usdan, et al, 2001). This argument holds very true at the local level.

It is correct to say that from the ladder of the president to the governor to the superintendents of education to school board chairs and members: often some of these educational leaders have little to no background or expertise in education. From the federal to the state level, most appointed leaders in education branches bring the required knowledge. However, the local school board is composed of a diverse group of members with different backgrounds and knowledge. While they all bring unique characteristics and a broad base of knowledge, it is often the case that they do not bring an educational background.

Education needs a reform in which it is driven by educators who have lived within the field. These are the people who need to be in charge of forming and implementing our country's educational policy. Educational leadership is important at all levels including the local school board. For over 200 years, politics has played a part in our educational system. From the federal government all the way down to the local politics talked about in gas stations or at a high school football game. Politics and education will always be entwined together. Both are vital for the future of our nation as our future is in our children.

As the vision for Tennessee states, " it is to prepare all Tennessee children for successful post-secondary work, education, and citizenship. " The state's master plan is to " ensure equal access to the education constitutionally guaranteed to all Tennessee children" (Master Plan). Without politics, schools will not exist. Without schools, knowledge to become a successful, active

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citizen will not exist. Thus both politics and education will always hold a vital role. Resources: Brown v. Board of Education. (1954) Civil Rights Organization. Retrieved October 2012, from <http://www.civilrights.org/education/brown/> Department of Education. (2012) Mission Statement Retrieved October 2012 from <http://www2.ed.gov/about/overview/mission/mission.html> Dow, P. B. (1991). Schoolhouse politics: Lessons from the Sputnik era. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Farmer, T. (2012, January 12). Politics of Local Education. Retrieved from the Connexions Web site: <http://cnx.org/content/m14432/1.10/> Federal Education Budget Project. (September 13, 2012). Retrieved October 2012 from <http://febproject.newamerica.net/background-analysis/school-finance> Federal Role in Education. (2012). U. S. Department of Education.

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