

Public education system always neglected by leaders

The debate about the quality between public and private education remains.

In Cleveland, Ohio, this month, a school voucher program is on trial. The proponents of the system have succeeded in securing government funding for people who don't choose to send their children to public school in order to make private school available to them.

With the dismal failure that is epidemic in the public school systems around the country,

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sending their children to private school is often the only way that parents feel their children can get a good education. Unfortunately, many parents are unable to afford the admittedly high tuition charged by many private schools, and as a result have been unable to take care of this option.

When this issue came up during the last presidential campaign, it struck a chord with me because I realized that not everyone had the good fortune that I had in finding a decent public school system where at least I had the opportunity to excel, even if the overall policies of the school system were more structured toward discipline than teaching. However, this is yet another issue that liberals and conservatives have found to differ on. It seems that nobody can agree.

When leaders in positions that might allow them to influence the viability of school vouchers are questioned, they believe unrepentantly in the goodness of the public school system. When poor parents are asked about the same issue, they say

that they desperately want to have some other option, when the "improvements" to the public school system do nothing they are left with no other choice if they want their children to be well educated.

This dichotomy is particularly sharp within the black community. Leaders, both on the national and local levels, say that school vouchers are the cowards' way out because they leave the public schools in disarray, but the people whose children are in bad public schools say that they are tired of waiting on the local leadership to get their schools right, and they want an education for their children now, not when their grandchildren get to go through school.

The main difference in philosophy of then-Governor George W. Bush and Vice President Al Gore during the campaign last fall was, as most presidential things are, a matter of money.

The vice president wanted the money available in the form of a surplus to be spent on projects that would supposedly improve the lives of Americans while also keeping the money in Washington. His main reason for this, though he didn't speak it aloud, was to keep the money in Washington, where the government, the most wasteful entity in America, could spend it.

Bush planned to give that surplus back to the American people, mainly in the form of tax rebates and tax cuts, but also in the form of school vouchers. His primary reason for doing that was probably the desire to give people some choice of where their children went to school. We all remember Bill Clinton stating in his first term that he didn't see anything at all wrong with the public schools, but then sending his daughter to a private school.

Bush was being honest, in my opinion, when he stated that with the problems epidemic in some public schools in the country, parents should be given the option to send their children to another school of their choice, and the government should assist them in that.

Throwing money at the public schools rarely solves anything in part because they are government agencies and waste a lot of the money.

The solution for Gore was to throw more money into the public school system, which he believes will be more cost-efficient in the long run. With money being spent on the school system, the people who would normally have sent their children to private school under the school voucher system would have to endure a few more months or years of poor schools waiting on the dramatic improvement in public schools that will come when the money takes effect.

While that argument might sound good considering the state of funding for the public schools, it also doesn't show the problem, namely that it's never showed any effect before. Throwing money at the public schools rarely solves anything in part because they are government agencies and waste a lot of the money.

In part it's also because it's virtually impossible to match the per-student expenditures of a private school when you're stuck in a public school with 2,000 or more students. To say that a poor school district that is forced, for whatever reason, to crowd 2,000 students or more into a high school can match the spending of a private school on students' education is the height of folly. This is certainly not a problem with the students in public school, and I'm not denigrating graduates or students in the public school system.

However, I am somewhat angry at the leadership on the local and state level that hears the complaints of the people who are forced, through economic necessity, to send their children to public schools and then ignores them or promises to send the money that could allow those children to excel through the proper channels and spend it on their education through the school system.

They are ignoring the wishes of their electorate, and if enough people band together, this can be resolved through a change in leadership, since obviously the current leadership isn't interested in listening.

Some people have different complaints about the school voucher system. They say things like the school voucher system encourages the government to be involved in the private schools, and might make them think that they can make policy for the public schools since a lot of money is going to running the private schools from the federal government.

Other people feel that this encourages a breakdown in the division between church and state, because many private schools belong to some sort of religious denomination or another, and they think that the government should avoid any semblance of involvement with religion. I think these people are missing the boat because the separation of church and state, as written into the Bill of Rights, was designed to protect the church, not the state.

No individual church was supposed to receive preferential treatment from the state in order to prevent the establishment of a state religion. I believe this is the spirit of the separation of church and state, and since any religious sect can establish a private school, there's no discrimination. That's not even mentioning the crucial distinction that the people who receive the vouchers are paying the money to the school of their choice; they aren't forced to give to one organization over another.

School vouchers are a problematic issue because they obviously aren't for everybody, only for those who have no other option. However, I don't see how this is any different from welfare in education. While I'm personally against the rampant welfare abuses that take place in America today, I believe that giving people whose public school choices don't meet their needs another option is nothing but fair.

Controversy mars Olympics

The Olympics remain a positive world event despite controversy.

The Winter Olympic Games in Salt Lake City were not lacking for any athletic achievement worthy of the history books. By the end of competition, the threats of the Russians and the South Koreans to leave the Games or boycott

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certainly been the most vocal with accusations of a North American bias; even the highest-ranking government officials became involved. Russian President Vladimir Putin said North American athletes had a "clear" advantage in Salt Lake City.

The Russian figure skating delegation filed a complaint with the International Skating Union requesting that a gold medal also be given to figure skater Irina Slutskaya, who finished second in the ladies' competition after American Sarah Hughes shot from fourth to first place with a flawless free skate. "We think the judging was biased," Viktor Mamatov, the head of the Russian delegation, said.

"Canadian skaters were awarded their gold medals. Now that subjective judging harmed us, we want the same for Slutskaya." There did indeed appear to be a split along old Cold War lines: the judges from Russian, Slovakia and Bulgaria favored Slutskaya, while the Canadian and U.S. judges favored Hughes. To my untrained eye, it seems clear that Hughes deserved the gold medal, but the "alpha scandal" of these games opened up the door for any and all accusations of impropriety in the judges' booth.

It is surprising to those of us who – obviously naively – used to equate an event as prestigious as the Olympics with fairness and impartiality to learn that vote trading, national coalitions and shady arithmetic are nothing new to figure skating.

The ISU's decision to award a second set of gold medals set a dangerous new precedent – it is doubtful that the Russians would have asked for Slutskaya to be awarded a gold medal if Jamie Sale and David Pelletier, from the alpha scandal, had not received theirs. There must be aggressive reform of figure skating laws and judging regulations to finally resolve this problem rather than face the decision of tinkering with the medal distribution after the fact.

This must come regardless of a nation's reaction to an athlete's disqualification. The United States, for example, did nothing

when speed skater Apolo Anton Ohno was disqualified in the 500-meter semifinals for pushing Satoru Terao of Japan, while South Korea threatened to boycott the Closing Ceremonies when speed skater Kim Dong-sung was disqualified in the 1,500-meter finals for illegally blocking Ohno. It is up to the athletes themselves to maintain their dignity and good sportsmanship. Ohno kept up his good spirits, but Dong-sung threw the South Korean flag on the ice in disgust. Sale and Pelletier should also be commended for maintaining that their dissatisfaction was with "the system," not with Berezhnaya and Sikharulidze.

I am hopeful that the new IOC president, Jacques Rogge of Belgium, will be instrumental in bringing about change. The former president, Juan Antonio Samaranch of Spain, reportedly wink-winked at many allegations of judging discretions, and did absolutely nothing to ensure a level playing field for the athletes.

The down-to-earth Rogge, a breath of fresh air for many after Samaranch, who was not shy about asking to be referred to as "your highness," is making a name for himself as a reformer; hopefully sweeping reforms will be made before the next Summer Games in Athens, Greece, and the next Winter Games in Turin, Italy.

I do, however, believe NBC commentator Bob Costas said it best when he said, "As flawed as the Olympics are – and we do know the long list of imperfections in the Olympics – at their best, they do represent a peaceful international gathering, and they do represent people striving for excellence." If these Games can be remembered as the impetus for uncompromising change to ensure that just as athletes are not permitted to make political statements during the Parade of Nations or on the medal podium, judges and referees will not be able to make political statements on their scorecards or in their officiating.

We will be able to look back on Salt Lake City and remember the winners like bobsledder Vonetta Flowers, the first African-American woman to win gold at the Winter Games, and Jim Shea, the famed third-generation Olympian who took home the gold in the men's skeleton while carrying a photo of his recently deceased grandfather in his helmet, more than the spoilers.

Faculty salaries still at an unacceptable level

The university's long-held promises to raise faculty salaries have yet to be fulfilled.

In 1995, Wake Forest's administration stated its goal (and promise) "to raise faculty salaries to a level above the average of joint admission institutions in all ranks in 2-5 years" and "to the top third of the joint admission institutions within a decade."

This goal and promise was used by the administration to gain the college faculty's

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acceptance of what at that time was a controversial plan, which included a rapid and unprecedented increase in tuition.

The story has often been told and chronicled by the American Association of University Professors and others at WFU since:

1) The goal has not been met, indeed the gap between the salaries of WFU and the comparison institutions actually widened at an alarming rate.

2) In early 1999, the AAUP presented information that compellingly demonstrated that the foregoing promise was not being kept. This finding was endorsed and accepted by the College Faculty in February. It was also accepted by the administration.

3) In May 1999, the administration accordingly announced the creation of a "Salary Opportunity Fund" designed to meet the minimal promise of 1995 (to reach the mean) within two years, that is, by 2002.

4) Although the gap has been reduced by the utilization of the Salary Opportunity Fund it is a near certainty now that less than 40 percent of the gap will be addressed within the two years (16 percent of the gap was closed in the first year of the Fund). That is, the Salary Opportunity Fund has not/will not reach its goal.

Unfortunately, the promises made in 1995 and unfulfilled seven years later did not address the issue of fringe benefits at all. The value of Wake Forest's fringe benefits (2000-2001) ranks dead last among the nine institutions with which WFU is compared, and the situation continues to deteriorate with respect to our comparable institutions. Nor did the promises address the mounting evidence that Wake Forest staff members fare even more poorly than faculty when comparisons are drawn between Wake Forest and comparable institutions.

The foregoing paragraphs should come as no surprise to those that have kept up with this issue over the course of the past several years. However, recently the local chapter of the AAUP has discovered information, which is likely to be quite surprising, at least it was surprising to the officers of the AAUP.

Specifically, Wake Forest salary and benefits approximated the mean of the comparison institutions in 1982-83, the last year of the Ralph Scales administration at WFU! That is, the Promise of the Plan of the Class of 2000 had been met by WFU in 1982! As Yogi Berra would say: "d'jà vu all over again."

The goal has not been met, indeed the gap between the salaries of WFU and the comparison institutions actually widened at an alarming rate.

The inescapable conclusion is that the difficulties faced by WFU faculty with respect to salaries and fringe benefits is the consequence of the policies adopted by the current administration; they were of their own making. The current administration has not been playing "catch up" owing to unfortunate personnel policies of the previous administration (as has often been intimated to the faculty), but rather the current administration is responsible for allowing Wake Forest faculty salaries and benefits to fall relative to our comparable institutions.

The evidence for the latter assertion is compelling and irrefutable as demonstrated by the following table, which presents the differences in mean salaries and fringe benefits for full-time WFU faculty in 1983 and 2001 as compared to the relevant means of the nine comparable institutions.

The numbers represent thousands of dollars. The comparison of WFU figures (the differences) are with the mean salary or mean value of fringe benefits of the nine comparison institutions (Davidson, Duke, Emory, Richmond, UNC-CH, Vanderbilt, Virginia, Washington and Lee, and William and Mary) expressed in dollars. "Pluses" refer to relevant data (WFU's performance) above the respective mean; "minuses" to relevant data below the respective mean.

| | 1983 | |
|-----------|--------|---------|
| Rank | Salary | Fringes |
| Full | -2,000 | -500 |
| Associate | +700 | 0 |
| Assistant | -100 | -100 |
| | 2001 | |
| Rank | Salary | Fringes |
| Full | -3,900 | -3,700 |
| Associate | +2,200 | -2,400 |
| Assistant | -3,900 | -5,700 |

The findings are stunning. In 1983 it would have cost Wake Forest University \$144,100 to meet the analogous salary goals of the Plan of the Class of 2000; in 2001 \$1,103,464. With respect to total compensation (to reach mean of comparison institutions – salary plus fringe benefits) in 1983 it would have cost \$199,700; in 2001 \$2,407,400.

The AAUP contends, therefore, that the problems related to the unfortunate salary and benefits situation of WFU faculty, are the creation of the current administration's policies and priorities. Ostensibly, therefore, since their policies created the problem, in all fairness, it is their problem to remedy.

The administration's recently announced prospective 1.5 percent to 2.0 percent salary increase, coupled with no plans to significantly increase the value of fringe benefits to faculty will almost certainly make the situation far worse next year than it is today. That is, the current administration's policy is to allow the situation to further deteriorate.

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the Closing Ceremonies, as well as multiple accusations of improper judging, threatened to overshadow the accomplishments of the athletes. Athletes like Garrett Hines and Randy Jones, whose victory in the four-man bobsled made them the first African-American men to medal in the Winter Games, or Croatian alpine skier Janica Kostelic, who recovered from three knee surgeries within the past year to win four medals, including three golds.

Perhaps the first indicator that these Games were not exactly going to be a textbook example of diplomacy was the chilly reception President George W. Bush and First Lady Laura Bush gave to athletes from nations such as Iran during the Parade of Nations. As leaders of the host nation, the Bushes should have shown all athletes, regardless of their home countries, equal amounts of warmth and graciousness, not punish an athlete for something he or she has absolutely no control over – the actions of his or her country's government.

Even before the Opening Ceremonies, however, there was tension – this time over the United States' request to carry an American flag recovered from Ground Zero during the Opening Ceremonies. The International Olympic Committee was justly concerned about the appearance of jingoism, but in the end, I believe a fair solution was reached. It was appropriate for the flag to be displayed separate from the Parade of Nations during the Olympics, an international event, because the Sept. 11 tragedies themselves were international in scope.

Citizens of many nations were killed; it was appropriate to pay homage to these victims on the world's stage.

The Russian delegation has