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BEAN COUNTERS GONE WILD

Ah, bean counters. Where would we be without people to show us numbers and figures and show us that if $1+2=3$ then $2+3=4$, right?

A few weeks ago, I was treated on these pages to an enlightened letter from a reader who claimed to be involved with some kind of fiscal watchdog group. The letter, in true bean counter fashion, spouted numbers about average teacher's pay in Ohio, and then proceeded to point out how much teachers at Sycamore School District are making, and that it is more than the average, etc.

What this journeyman bean counter did not mention, of course, is what we are getting for that money. Oh, no. That is squishy and hard to measure! No doubt, but here I must make issue with my bean counter friends that watch our spending so carefully. It CAN be measured. It is measured in the "excellent" rating the school district has. It can be measured in the real estate values for the school district. It can be measured in the number of children that go on to graduate from universities and become productive members of society. And, to some degree it can be measured in the smile of parents, students and staff at Sycamore Community Schools when they talk proudly of their district.

Yes, we do pay our teachers higher than average salaries. That is because we want to attract better than average teachers who produce better than average - indeed excellent - results. There is no shame in admitting that. What IS shameful are taxpayers who want to pay average or less than average wages to teachers, skimp on school running expenses then decry the poor results as incompetence. Shame on you.

No-one is saying that we should not be fiscally responsible and spend our tax dollars wisely. But in order to analyze this you need to look at the results first, then look back and see where we could spend differently or more efficiently.

Let me put it to you another way. Recently an Indian motor vehicle manufacturer announced it will sell a new model vehicle for \$2,300. This is a triumph for the guy counting the cost and for the consumer who wants to buy that vehicle. Sure it is cheap, it is thrifty, but it is very basic transportation. So now bean counters rejoice! You can now say that we pay far too much for a car in America because there is a new car available for \$2,300. In your mind, all vehicles should be measured against this benchmark. Never mind that we, as consumers, want a vehicle with air conditioning and an engine that will go from 0 to 60 in a time we can measure with a watch, not a calendar. What you are suggesting is that we should now go into a Cadillac dealership and try to negotiate a vehicle purchase, by explaining that we are being overcharged for cars, because you can get a new car for \$2,300. Therefore anything over this price is outrageous.

The argument is too ridiculous to contemplate, but it is precisely what our bean counting friends would have us argue.

Sure, you can hire plenty of teachers for less than what we pay. Many school districts do that. Not many of those have schools we would like to send our children to, but in the world of absolutes, that is irrelevant.