



## Merely throwing money at Texas' schools won't save them

**T**he formidable former British Prime Minister, Lady Margaret Thatcher, might have been speaking about the Texas public education bureaucracy of today when she addressed her political party's convention in October of 1975: "They have the usual socialist disease; they have run out of other people's money."

For months, we have endured the loud wailing and gnashing of teeth from the public education bureaucracy and their allies in Texas politics. Their demand has a familiar ring: more money. Not just more money, but more money without accountability.

Testifying recently before the Texas Senate's Committee of the Whole, former activist-liberal-judge turned liberal-policy-activist Scott McCown (who legislated "Robin Hood" from the bench) passionately defended the thinking that has kept the school finance debate focused on spending-*envy* instead of academic results. "To have a system where some districts have laptops and others don't is simply unacceptable," he said.

Why? Not a shred of research exists to prove computers in the classroom actually improve education. If one school wastes money on pointless activities detracting from education, why must all? But in the crusade for equity, McCown and his ilk simply want to spend more money.

As one newspaper ironically pointed out, the "wealthy" Highland Park school district in the Dallas area does not have laptops for its kids, but districts receiving money under Robin Hood from Highland Park do.

Ronald Reagan, while serving as president, summed up the problem with the public education bureaucracy: "If you serve a child a rotten hamburger in America, federal, state and local agencies will investigate you, summon you, close you down, whatever. But if you provide a child with a rotten education, nothing happens, except that you're liable to be given more money to do it with."

Proof that Providence has yet to abandon Texas: The Legislature concluded the recent special session on school finance without doing anything. That was best; they were going to simply give more money to the existing system without truly distinguishing between the purveyors of good and bad education. (Be warned: Another special session could be called as soon as this summer.)

Consider this: We've tripled real per-student spending in less than 30 years, and built monuments to fiscal mismanagement with athletic and administration complexes rivaling college facilities; we have superintendents with multi-year contracts valued

in the millions of dollars. Meanwhile,

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scores on the SAT, ACT and other national indicators of academic achievement have shown no improvement. Drop-out rates, especially for minorities, are an embarrassment.

In all, Robin Hood "costs" Texans a billion dollars a year in recapture — that is, the money taken from property-"wealthy" districts and redistributed to "poor" ones. Of course, taxpayers whose cash was redistributed receive no accounting for how it is spent.

Let us set aside reason and pretend more money might actually, finally, for the first time, make a positive difference. Why not prioritize state spending? Is there nothing to cut in the state budget to provide more money for education? Nothing less important?

We have a commission to encourage government employee productivity; there are at least a dozen river authorities with billions in assets. Texas has a commission on acupuncture. Is there nothing to cut? Nothing to change? No way to save money?

In the religious pantheon of the left, government agencies and programs are wrathful gods to be fiscally appeased — never questioned — regardless of the economic effect.

Thomas Jefferson lamented that "as a government grows, liberty decreases." He wisely noted, "Government big enough to supply everything you need is big enough to take everything you have."

The Robin Hood of legend stole from tyrannical government functionaries, returning the loot to the victimized poor. In Texas, he was hired by an elected judge and legitimized by the Legislature to victimize taxpayers in the name of children, while enriching the bureaucracy.

Despite noble intentions, and precious few benefits, Robin Hood has been an unwitting tool for the advocates of increased spending without any accompanying accountability for classroom improvement. In the end, it is one more destructive attempt to soothe the ravages of the socialists' disease.

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