

Basic lessons of cash grab

By Michael Graham | Tuesday, June 8, 2010 | <http://www.bostonherald.com> | Op-Ed

And you thought liberal public schools didn't believe in making kids work hard. Why they're ready to bring back indentured servitude!

That's what a mom named Laura Wellington just found out. Her daughter came home from school with instructions to "accomplish chores around the house with the goal of being paid by me for those chores the sum of \$20," Wellington wrote on her blog. "She would then have to hand the full \$20 over to the school to make up for the shortfall in their overall budget."

Her daughter's participation, according to the information the school sent home, was mandatory. So you're supposed to shake mom down for \$20 and give it all to the teachers - no questions asked?

You'll be stunned to learn this happened at a school in New Jersey.

And isn't it interesting that this school was sending its little Johnnies and Julies home to collect, not for a field trip or class pizza day, but for the actual operating budget of the school. As in teacher salaries and benefits. This puts even more pressure on the kids. After all, now it's nice Mrs. Johnson's paycheck at stake.

This trend in public school fundraising is on the rise. According to The Boston Globe-Democrat, private donations to Massachusetts public schools have jumped from \$10 million to \$27 million in the past decade.

Right now, Arlington is trying to squeeze moms and dads out of an extra \$1 million for teacher salaries through its "Bridge The Gap" initiative. Arlington taxpayers, it seems, just aren't paying enough. So parents and citizens are being hectorated and harassed by education do-gooders to pay more.

Always more.

Now, truth be told, there is a "gap" in Arlington. It's the gap between the private sector workers - who've seen unemployment spike and wages fall - vs. the members of the Arlington teachers union.

Since 2005, Arlington's spending on public schools has jumped 30 percent, from \$34 million to \$44 million a year. At the same time, average teacher salaries have soared from \$48,000 in 2005 to more than \$59,000 today.

For normal people with real jobs, a 30 percent revenue jump and \$11,000 salary increases would be a little slice of heaven. But the edu-crats of Arlington and their allies have declared this a crisis.

It could be worse. The **New York Times** [NYT] reports that parents in the Cupertino, Calif., school system were hit up for contributions of \$375 directly (cash or credit card) to avoid any cuts. Not every parent could do it, of course. As Momma Wellington pointed out, "Quite possibly what my daughter's school should focus on is teaching kids to "stop spending when they outspend their individual budgets during fiscally challenging moments throughout their lives."

Did she say "stop spending"? Sorry lady, but these are public schools. That's never gonna happen.

There are some delightful exceptions. The Quincy schools, for example, recently voted to defer a year's raise to help the taxpayers out. That's both fiscally sound and politically smart, putting the teachers and parents in the same economic boat.

Unfortunately most teachers unions are happy to throw the taxpayers overboard at the first opportunity. Stuffing the kids' backpacks with high-pressure fundraising appeals so Mrs. Johnson can have her 4 percent pay hike just makes the gap even bigger.

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