

Money matters in schools

By Sharon Hartin Iorio

Money does matter when it comes to providing educational opportunities for our nation's children.

But not according to syndicated columnist Cal Thomas. Though Thomas deserves respect for his long career as a political commentator, he was certainly misleading and way off base in claiming the lack of



relationship between educational spending and better schools ("More money won't buy better schools," June 24 Opinion).

It's just plain common sense that simply throwing money at any problem will not lead to its resolution. But money does matter when it comes to public education.

Sufficient public school financing is the fundamental source of educational opportunity in our state and nation. Educational funding is always important. But in a down economy, funding becomes even more important.

Now is not the time to imply, as Thomas did, that school funding is not crucial for school success. Thomas' very narrow argument rests on research excerpted from a 2009 book by Eric A. Hanushek and Alfred

A. Lindseth that compares increased court-mandated school funding with increased scores on tests. The authors do make a valid point that test scores did not automatically rise when funding increased, and this merits further discussion.

Yet the results of the research should not be offered as simplistic proof that public funding is not tied to overall student achievement.

There are two things to consider here. First, it's not the purpose of the exams to prove that the funding has been adequate. The purpose is to mark student's overall levels of achievement. Rigorous evaluation of students is important, but test scores alone are hardly an adequate standard by which to measure funding effectiveness.

Second, it's not the money per se. It's how it's spent that counts. When funds are directed to locally focused, effective programs and adequate facilities, students learn.

Improving student achievement is complex. It can't be measured by one indicator, and it can't be accomplished without long-term, sufficient funding.

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