

Opinion:

## **Dropout stats not only phony ones** **Ignore the propaganda: Per-student state education funding at all-time high**

By ALAN BONSTEEL, Orange County Register, May 27, 2005

In April, the Harvard Integration Project blasted the California Department of Education's falsification of our high school graduation rates, a report that was on the front pages of almost all of our largest daily newspapers.

This information, however, was not news. Our group, California Parents for Educational Choice, pointed out these falsehoods in 1999. In 2002, the Manhattan Institute picked up the drumbeat. And in 2004, Education Trust West slammed the phony dropout rates.

In 1998, when we did the original research, we worked from printouts from mainframe computers. Now anyone can pull the ninth-grade enrollment and 12th-grade graduation numbers off the Internet and see that the CDE is lying. What got all the publicity was not any original research but rather the Harvard name.

Earlier this month, the Schwarzenegger administration released its proposed budget for the next fiscal year. The California Department of Education quickly put its spin on the proposal, which was dutifully reported in many of the state's newspapers. CDE claimed the proposed budget would give each California K-12 student only \$7,402 per year.

Just as any 8-year-old who can log onto the Internet can work out correct graduation rates, so can even elementary school kids figure out that these per-student spending numbers are phony. The state's K-12 public schools receive \$61.5 billion from all sources each year to educate 6.32 million students. That right there works out to nearly \$10,000 per student.

Back out from those numbers the part-time adult education students, who are of course funded at far lower rates than full-time students, and we get the correct current figure of \$10,201 per student - half again what our charter schools get, and nearly twice the per-student funding of private schools.

The lies don't end there. The California Teachers Association is spending millions of dollars on television ads to claim that Gov. Schwarzenegger is cutting back on public school spending, when in fact his proposed budget increases public school spending by \$2.5 billion.

Further, the CTA continues to claim that 1978's Proposition 13 resulted in "cutbacks" in K-12 educational spending. In fact, if Schwarzenegger's budget is passed, it will mean a total increase in per-student K-12 spending in California of nearly 50 percent in constant,

inflation-adjusted dollars since the passage of Prop. 13. Those same Internet- savvy 8-year-olds can verify this on the Web sites of the state Legislative Analyst's Office or the federal National Center for Educational Statistics. And we don't need the Internet to know that during the last 20 years, the quality of California's public schools has plummeted despite the vast increases in spending.

With the lies that blatant, why aren't they being reported in any newspapers?

The public school monopoly is one of the most pervasive and powerful monopolies of our time, much more so than "The Octopus" of the railroad monopolies of the late 19th century that once dominated our government. Our government-run K-12 schools supply one job in 30 in the United States, and one family in four has a close relative or family friend employed by public schools.

Equally importantly, education writers of daily newspapers are often former public school teachers, and they stubbornly cling to the myth that public school funding has dropped and is now low, when in fact it has steadily increased throughout the nation and is now at record or near-record levels in all 50 states.

The reality is there for anyone who can log on to the Internet. Will we start seeing it soon in the newspapers - or will it take the Harvard name to drive home the truth to the California public?