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WESTWORD

WEB EXCLUSIVES

Lack of federal funding proves detrimental

by Suhail Ansari
World Editor

As this article is being published, the United States Senate is debating whether or not to cut education funds from President Barack Obama's stimulus package. Why is such debate even necessary?

In a democratic system, a standardized, quality education is a necessity for future voters so that they may cast their ballots for the most qualified candidates to public office. Therefore, more knowledgeable and qualified persons shape public policy which will benefit the majority of the people. With such an ambitious goal put forth, it is the responsibility of both state and federal governments, to make sure each individual is adequately prepared to cast his/her ballot.

School funding has been a fickle issue over the years, as local municipalities have struggled to maintain enough funding to make sure each of their districts may operate efficiently. Several local schools have struggled in the past few years to make sure enough money has been allocated to preserve the quality curriculum offered, namely Skokie and Morton Grove School District 69 (District 69) and Niles Township High School District 219 (District 219).

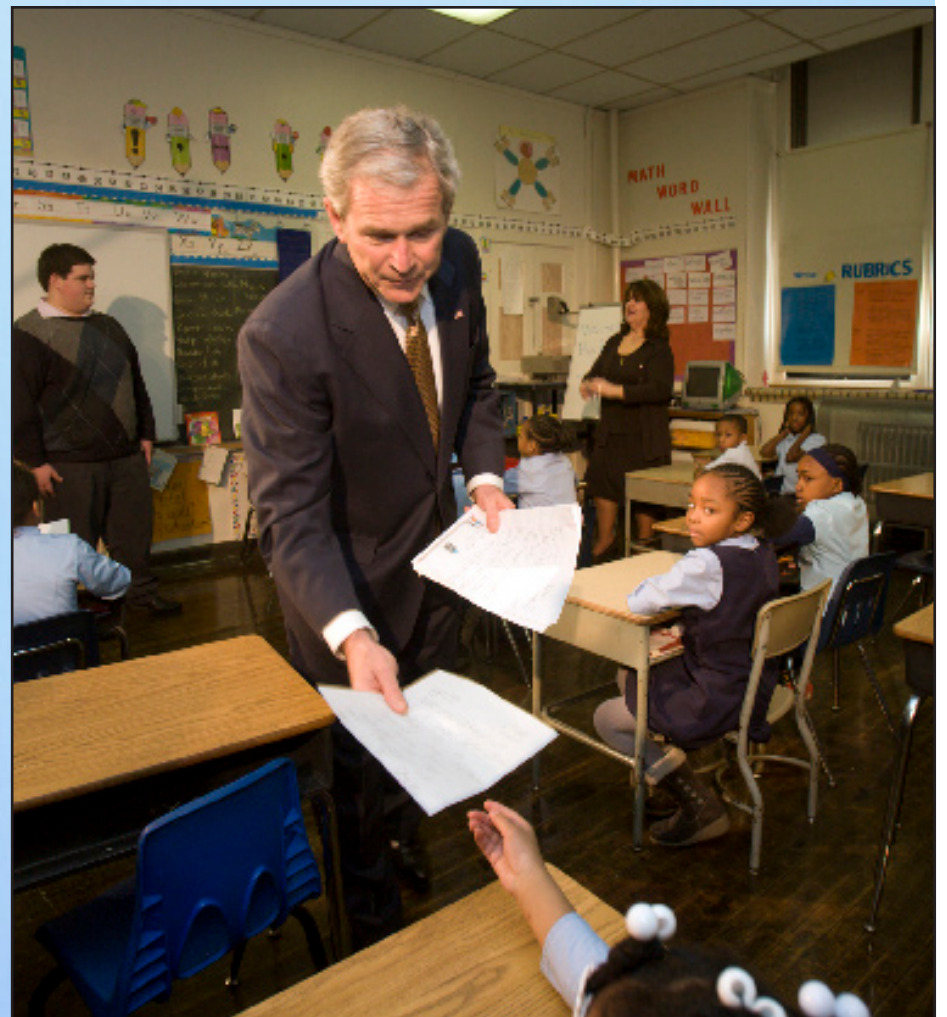
Both of those districts' administrators foresaw large deficits in their future funds, and therefore opted for referenda, which increase local property taxes for school revenue. District 219 saw the passage of its referendum to insure the precious funding that benefits the students and therefore the community. District 69 was not so lucky, and the result was the cutting of important after school activities and teachers that had previously enriched the students and the community.

My eighth grade at District 69 was not very pleasant, as all after school activities were canceled, and class sizes surged. The lack of money was especially hard on those who counted on the school to provide a safe place for their children after school was dismissed. As local junior high schools competed in interscholastic sports conferences, students at Lincoln Junior High were sent home at the ring of the last bell. The clubs that once provided a sense of community were gone, along with the enrichment they provided.

It was not the fault of the community that a well-rounded education was not provided, but the fault of those who rejected the idea of increased federal school funding, some of the same legislators who, right now, are seeking to remove funding from the stimulus package. Without increased funding, money for schools will continue to come primarily from local property taxes, so it is the wealthy that get the best schools and the less fortunate who suffer inadequate education.

While hundreds of billions of dollars may be easily allocated to wage immoral wars in foreign countries, money cannot be found when it comes to educating students adequately. Roadblocks such as the No Child Left Behind Act are thrown in the face of school administrators, legislation that threatens lack of funding if results are not produced without resources, the ultimate Catch-22. It is not District 219 that is suffering the most, but many of our neighboring schools. The Chicago Public School Districts struggle to lower their double-digit dropout rates while local areas with more affluent residents see their schools prosper.

Larger amounts of federal funding could alleviate some of the rifts that exist in our society, but changing the status quo would not be easy. Critics argue that the federal deficit, which is measured in trillions of dollars, would first need to be reduced; however, the lack of school funding proves to be a more drastic situation. The lack of well-educated future leaders will surely become more of a problem as our country contends with an increasingly more educated global community.



Former President George W. Bush visits an elementary school to campaign for a renewal of the No Child Left Behind Act, which partly provided more federal funding. Photo courtesy ASNEKRT Campus