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Editor's Corner - Letter to the Editor: Image Versus Reality

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EDITOR'S CORNER

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Images Versus Reality

Dear Editor:

When reading a recent issue of the *Kappan*, I came across an article which made such significant points that I would like to call them to the attention of Iowa science teachers.

Evidence indicates many political and community leaders subscribe to images of reality that have little to do with the available evidence about the nature of public education. Some current misconceptions are:

Myth: tracking helps students;

Myth: retaining children improves achievement;

Myth: vocational education is important to long-term job prospects;

Myth: we can prescribe curricula that teachers will not change when they do not understand the goals of the prescription;

Myth: most parents have been unhappy with public education;

Myth: merit pay is important;

Myth: adding more time to the school is a cost-effective way to improve student test scores;

Myth: we have neglected the education of the gifted and talented.

With such fantasy myths, it is hard to determine reality.

When public education decisions are made on the basis of myth, it should not be surprising that we end up with policies that are regulatory and punitive — more tests and new requirements.

What strategies for improving education do hold promise?

1. Significantly increase teachers' salaries

a. Salaries should be increased 36 percent just to offset the 1970's relatively poor salary position.

b. It is doubtful the cost will be paid; shortages will be handled as before — lower teacher standards.

2. Differentiate salaries by field and training

If we do not succeed in utilizing the window of opportunity before it closes, which some feel will happen, the foundation of public education will have been weakened, perhaps beyond repair; and schools will get the blame, NOT the myth reformers, or the politicians or community leaders. It's all going to be YOUR FAULT!

—James J. Hungerford, Dept. of Science Education, Marshalltown High School, Marshalltown, IA 50158.

Reference

Hawley, Willis D. 1985. False premises, false promise: the mythical character of public discourse about education. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 67(3):183-187.