


ConVal Community  
Scholarship Foundation   
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Letter to the Editor

*"If you think education is expensive, try ignorance"*

### **We must choose education**

**To the editor:**

"If you think education is expensive, try ignorance."

These are the closing words in an interview with Arne Duncan, secretary of education, in an article by Walter Isaacson in Time, April 27, 2009, on "How to Raise the Standard in America's Schools."

Isaacson's cry for higher standards is not new. Institutionalization of low expectations in our education system began more than 50 years ago. During these decades we have been reminded annually of how poorly we compare with other nations in educating our students in mathematics and reading. In Isaacson's piece, we rank 25th in math, following the Slovak Republic, Hungary, Luxembourg, Norway and Spain. Our education system is (unevenly) open to all. Anyone in it is free to excel and many do. God bless them! What is not good about our system is that our expectations are low and our perception of "adequacy" to compete globally is inadequate.

quate.

Many have criticized American businesses for outsourcing jobs. It is past time to recognize that many of those jobs are lost in our relatively high labor-cost economy because in our education system we fail to prepare our youth to compete for them.

Gene Wilhoit, executive director of the Council of Chief State School Officers is quoted in Isaacson's article as saying "I see standards as the essential foundation for all education reforms."

Arne Duncan is presented as "The Apostle of Reform." He advocates more hours, days and weeks in class, more schooling options, recognizing the distinction between certification and qualification of teachers. He sees long-term opportunity ahead with better prospects for teachers in a declining economy (meaning fewer career job opportunities elsewhere).

Essential reform in our ConVal schools is going to be even more difficult to achieve because of our votes against the school bond, budget and contract this year. We can make improvements within present constraints, but, sadly, we have chosen only temporary savings in the near term and sacrificed opportunities to do a little more to slow the con-

tinuing decline in our education system relative to those of other developed countries. Of the two alternatives posited by Arne Duncan, we must choose education.

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