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Invest in improving students' behavior

I want to correct an impression USA TODAY may have given readers. The story, "Study: Pupils pay academic price for unruly classrooms," was all too true, but it missed a major point. Students aren't the only ones who pay. We all do (Education, USATODAY.com, May 11).

The loss of productivity in the classroom, the lack of civility in the classroom and beyond, and the degradation of teacher morale affect all of us, directly and indirectly.

It costs us taxpayers an enormous amount to have 30%-40% of a teaching day wasted. It costs taxpayers through absenteeism and truancy. It costs taxpayers more money to build more schools and hire more teachers because it's becoming harder and harder to manage even 20-30 students who can't pay attention or behave appropriately in the classroom, much less find someone willing to take the abuse. It costs our community because we turn out many students who can't perform to a basic level of proficiency. It costs our society because of disruptive, rude and disrespectful individuals. It cost lives in 1999 at Colorado's Columbine High School.

The article points out that schools have less time to teach social skills. But that is a myopic viewpoint, because if social skills were taught in the schools, the schools would regain an amazing amount of time and energy; there would not be all of the discipline problems detailed in the recent report by Public Agenda.

How do I know this? Because schools that have adopted our PoliteChild program have seen cultural changes through the entire school as a result. Imagine what you could do with a productivity and time-on-task increase of 30%-40%. And what does it cost? Roughly what it costs now to educate a student in a public school for two days.

Given the alternatives, the evidence of which we see every day, schools can't afford not to teach these skills.

Don't we want them to turn out not only good students, but also good citizens and good people?

Corinne A. Gregory, Founder and president, The PoliteChild



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