



New Jersey Gasoline, C-Store, Automotive Association (NJGCA)

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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EDUCATION REFORM AND THE SMALL BUSINESS COMMUNITY

Sal: “Get in the car now!”

Mike: “Why? Where are we going?”

Sal: “We are going to your high school; I want to speak to your math teacher now! I want to find out why as a junior in high school that you can’t do 5th grade math! My tax dollars paid for your education and I want a refund!”

That exchange took place between me and a young gas pumper one afternoon in 1995. I was teaching an employee how to open my Texaco gas station in preparation for his upcoming summer vacation. This had become an annual ritual so that an ambitious teenager could take advantage of his time off from school and earn extra money.

I was troubled by the lack of skills that high school and college part timers possessed in order to be competent employees. Handing customers the correct change, balancing shift paperwork, or recording inventory are simple tasks requiring fundamental education, yet few high schoolers have these skills. I opened my Exxon station in 1978 and learned that my employees were incapable of performing the most menial of tasks. For years I thought, “if someone is not capable of pumping gas-then what are they capable of?”

Think about it. If a person doesn’t have the skills to pump gas, then what can they be employed as? What contribution to society can they make? Ultimately society pays for the uneducated and the unskilled through higher taxes and costs associated with crime

and poverty. Poorly educated children cause an economic ripple effect that employers pay for in many ways beyond high taxes.

How does an auto technician properly measure the thickness of brake rotors if he can't read and calculate a micrometer? How can a technician do a proper wheel alignment if he can't add or subtract caster tolerances? Today we refer to auto mechanics as technicians because repairing a car requires highly skilled personnel.

Why do we employ workers that are so poorly educated? Why do we have employees pumping gas that can't make proper change? Why do grocery store clerks look puzzled if you hand them coins in order to receive back cash?

About 75% of our property taxes pay for local schools. Why do we pay so much and get so little in return?

Small business owners know how competition affects business performance and profitability. Some customers drive right past a gas station to save a penny, while others will pay more for better service or a preferred brand. Even loyal customers will look elsewhere to have their car repaired if they don't receive quality service and competitive prices. Starbucks charges \$4 for a cup of coffee, yet a gasoline/C-store only charges \$2. Why? COMPETITION!

Competition doesn't exist in our education system, creating a malaise of mediocrity and lack of accountability that permeates our classrooms. When I grew up teachers were poorly paid in comparison to other professionals with similar levels of education. When I grew up teachers chose to be teachers because their passion and career were rolled up in to a paycheck. Rightfully so, teachers began to demand more, resulting in an out of control teachers union, extremely well compensated teachers with extraordinary benefits, out of control property taxes, and kids graduating that can't add and subtract.

Who guarantees your job if you don't perform? Teachers have a guarantee! It's called tenure. Once a teacher is employed for 3 years, it is impossible to fire them. Poor performance doesn't matter and poorly educated kids are a result. Although this didn't happen overnight, our kids can't read and write, or add and subtract. This means they can't even be employed as competent gas pumpers.

The incident that angered me and demand my young employee Mike get in my car to visit his teacher was prompted because Mike was unable to calculate that 24 quarters equaled \$6. I wanted him to learn how to make a proper cash bank when opening my gas station every morning. I am certain that I had learned that level of math in the 4th grade. Mike was a junior in high school without the ability to multiply and divide. Who was responsible?

I figured approximately 15 teachers and school administrators failed to properly educate Mike. They failed Mike, they failed me, and they failed the taxpayers where Mike was supposed to be educated. If my math is correct--yes I did learn how to add and subtract-- about \$1 million dollars in a 10 year period was paid to teachers that failed to perform. Considering the property taxes I had paid; how much of that belonged to me? I am only addressing Mike's inability to add and subtract. Trust me, Mike wasn't all that proficient

in reading and writing either. I don't think he had any clue who George Washington or Abraham Lincoln were either. So how many dollars were actually wasted educating Mike and his classmates?

I have challenged several principals over the years by telling them "you know the teachers on your staff who perform with excellence, and you know the teachers on your staff that can't tie their own shoes." Unfortunately, a bad teacher may be paid more than an excellent teacher. This is wrong!

It is easy to place the blame on teachers, but an honest assessment will show that we also need better parents, and better students.

The NJ legislature has an opportunity to pass legislation that will reform the teacher tenure issue, and also pass the Opportunity Scholarship Act, which will create an opportunity for those that want to be better parents and better students. Both should be passed.

The small business community will welcome high school and college students that can read and write and add and subtract. Pumping gas will be a breeze.

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