

By Bill Husfelt

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Now that the holidays are over, it's tax time for most of us (myself included) and so it's a great time to talk about the importance of your tax dollars when it comes to funding public education.

Almost every day, I hear from taxpayers (personal visits, phone calls, emails, grocery store chats etc.) who want to know why they should pay taxes to fund our schools when they don't have children or grandchildren attending public school.

And every year, I answer those questions like this: When you're sick, hurt or having an emergency do you call 9-1-1? You probably do and you count on someone being available to come and help you. Those first responders are just one small group of the educated populace upon whom we all depend. And that's why we all pay our taxes to fund the public school system and why we are the most advanced society in the world.

Public education is something that's a critical part of America's infrastructure and taxpayers have been funding education for more than 200 years. Offering a free public education to ALL children, regardless of socio-economic background, is something that sets our country apart and it's something that we should be very proud to support.

You may wonder exactly how the funding breaks down for public schools in Florida. That information is readily available in great detail on the DOE's website (<https://www.fldoe.org>) but here's the short version: "School districts in 2019-20 received 39.15 percent of their financial support from state sources, 50.11 percent from local sources (including the Required Local Effort portion of the FEFP) and 10.73 percent from federal sources."

The FEFP referred to above stands for the Florida Education Finance Program and that's the state's method for determining how education is funded. On a national level, the school funding program incorporates a variety of funding streams. "According to Education Week, public school funding comes from a variety of sources at the local, state and federal level. Approximately 48 percent of a school's budget comes from state resources, including income taxes, sales tax, and fees. Another 44 percent is contributed locally, primarily through the property taxes of homeowners in the area. The last eight percent of the public education budget comes from federal sources, with an emphasis on grants for specific programs and services for students that need them" (<https://www.publicschoolreview.com/blog/an-overview-of-the-funding-of-public-schools>).

If you're like me, your taxes have been steadily increasing and, again, that burden may seem cumbersome to some. In reality, though, your tax dollars and those from everyone else in our area are ensuring that all of our children have equal access to a high-quality, free, public education and that's really a rather priceless gift for us to give the next generation.

I'm not exempt from paying taxes, and I don't have children in our public schools any more (all three of mine did graduate from BDS schools however) but I really feel that it's my duty to continue to pay my taxes because I know what my contribution means for countless generations

of children yet to come. Public education is the foundation of a free and open society and public education opens the door of opportunity for all students.

While I will not celebrate sending in my taxes this year, or any other, I will know that I am doing my part to ensure we have continued access to educated people who want to serve our country in the military, who want to help all of us by becoming first responders, teachers and other community heroes and those who want to lead the path to global innovation through creativity, research and invention.

I am so proud to be a product of public education, to have the opportunity to work with the finest public educators and to see generations of children benefitting from the commitment we all have to their goals, their dreams and their aspirations.

God Bless and stay safe!