
Letter: A higher wage isn't the measure of a good teacher

January 17, 2020

Dear Editor

It seems to have become an annual event in the spring for Del Norte teachers to engage the local school district with complaints of not being respected - and for whatever reason, think that raising pay and overall compensation is the mechanism that will garner that respect.

If that is the standard being applied to the average wage and benefit package of wage earners in the county, then teachers - even those at the bottom of the compensation ranks - are indeed well respected.

Teaching compensation packages generally place them in the upper 15% of all income earners in the county, some in the upper 5%.

Quality, retention and declining numbers of teachers are not a unique problem exclusive to the Del Norte Unified School District. A dismal economic picture, low academic achievement in the county's population, homelessness, and general remoteness from population centers are also not unique in California.

While the current offer of increases from the school district may seem overly cautious, teachers and their vocal advocates may wish to consider a few things when asking for that annual raise in compensation - which, I might add is being offered, miserly though it appears to be.

Most employees in the county do not normally receive annual pay increases, or increasing compensation packages (the exception being public employees, of which the district's teachers are in that group).

As has been said ad nauseam, the cost of living in this county should afford ALL teachers a rather comfortable living, particularly in light of the fact that they all should have a college education.

The fact that teachers receive higher compensation elsewhere should not even be a factor if a teacher's focus is on providing the best possible educational experience for the students in their respective classrooms.

This annual wrangling with the school district over compensation is unseemly at best, and smacks of elitism at the worst.

My father was a lifelong public-school teacher, who began his career at \$900 per year, \$100 per month over a nine-month contract. No pay for the summer months, period. It was a pretty meager living, supplemented by coaching sports teams, in order to support a growing family of four.

This occurred in a small, rural community not unlike Crescent City, where his earnings nowhere near placed him at the top of the wage earners in the community.

I do not recall that his compensation, or lack thereof, was much of an issue. He seemed to be much more focused on how well he performed in the classroom.

My, how far we have come in those intervening years, how much the focus has changed.

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Crescent City