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While Carroll County continues to seek exemption from state mandated full-day kindergarten; a plan is in the works to assess children on an individual basis to judge the need for it. School board critics of the Thornton requirement argue that full-day kindergarten is not necessary for the all children and will become yet another un-funded state mandate, which our county can ill-afford. Indeed, moving to full-day kindergarten will be very expensive and will drain critical resources away from many other funding priorities like new school construction, modernization and staffing intent on reducing class size and increasing scholastic performance.

The school board has briefed the State Superintendent of Education, Nancy Grasmick on the plan and expects to have the full support of our County legislative delegation in Annapolis this fall to again press for an exemption. The county is currently offering full-day kindergarten in three schools: Taneytown, Robert Moton, and William Winchester where approximately 50 children participate in full-day kindergarten programs. Assessment tests are already in place to determine the need for full-day kindergarten. It is estimated that as many as 50% of children may still demonstrate a need for full-day programs, yet parents of children who score above the selected threshold will still be able to send their children to full-day programs under the plan.

Considering other construction funding priorities, like the oft-postponed renovation of Freedom Elementary or the enrollment over-capacity of area high schools and the dearth of accelerated learning/advanced placement courses, our school board is wise to seek exemption from this state mandate. The county clearly needs to squeeze every available penny and do its level best to eliminate any unnecessary expenditures, if it is to even expect to hold its standing as one of the top 5 or 6 performing counties scholastically.

Perhaps the most expensive example of waste is the Prevailing Wage Statute, which requires the county to bid all major construction jobs at union wages in order to qualify for state funding. It is the county's experience that construction contracts bid with prevailing wages are in the neighborhood of 15% more expensive than non-prevailing wage contracts. Moreover, when asked, the same contractors generally provide two different bids for the same project. Given the choice between building a \$30 million school with 50% funded by the state (\$15 million) or the same school for \$25.5 million with no state participation, the choice for the county is pretty easy. To add insult to injury, the state requirement is that contracts not even be bid without prevailing wages, so price differentials cannot be readily identified.

Rest assured that this union "grave train" will be under fire from our school board and state delegation during the next General Assembly in Annapolis. With two new schools planned for S. Carroll over the next 4 years, it is critical that our county is exempted from this colossal waste of taxpayer money.

Discussing these and other important issues facing our public schools, FACC is pleased to welcome Sue Holt, Carroll County School Board President to tonight's meeting at 7:30 at the Freedom Christian Church in the Carrolltowne Center. FACC meetings are open to the public and are held the 2nd Thursday of every month. For more information please visit us at www.freedomareacitizens.org.