

## Saving students, one tax-withdrawn dollar at a time

Written by David Lollar

Friday, 02 October 2009 05:22 - Last Updated Wednesday, 07 October 2009 15:45

---

Money. It's about money. Why do we always tell students that they'll make more money if they are more educated? Because we care that they have more money in their pockets? No. It's because we want them to be able to pay more taxes, to help make our economy strong. Now you know.

I teach CAHSEE English, classes designed for Junior and Seniors who have not yet passed the High School Exit Exam. This particular two day long/four hours per day examination allows the students the chance to demonstrate that they are prepared to leave high school with the requisite knowledge and skills for beginning their journey in either the business world or the ivy-walled halls of higher education. And yet, they take this test (the first time anyway) their Sophomore year of high school. So, guess what? I have discovered a secret. Sophomores aren't ready to leave high school yet. And teenagers don't like tests. Teenagers don't like fear. And Teenagers are smarter, more capable of future success, than we'll ever be able to assess on the CAHSEE.

If students learn critical thinking and independent learning skills, they can do just about anything, academically. This of course assumes they are reading and speaking and writing English at their grade level. So what if that isn't true? CAHSEE doesn't care. So what if they've been designated Special Education students with learning disabilities? CAHSEE doesn't care. Or, at least it didn't until this Fall, when, due primarily to budget cuts alone, those students were exempted from the exam to save us money. OK, so what if students were designated with an EL classification that shows they are not fluent in English? CAHSEE doesn't care. Well, somewhere in the fine print lives a clause stating that if a student is listed at a certain low-level EL status, they can defer taking the exam for 24 months. But knowing that requires access to the CAHSEE Handbook, a contract lawyer to translate the fine print, a school system set up to take advantage of it, and a student who doesn't mind waiting an extra two years to have a chance to take a test to determine if they get a diploma or not. In the 8 years I've been doing this, at three different schools in Kern County, I have never, not once, known of any student ever, or any teacher for that matter, to have either known of this deferment or taken advantage of it. Let me put it this way: CAHSEE. Doesn't. Care.

## Saving students, one tax-withdrawn dollar at a time

Written by David Lollar

Friday, 02 October 2009 05:22 - Last Updated Wednesday, 07 October 2009 15:45

---

Hence, anxiety and stress and emotions of all sorts run very high in these children, and the last thing they can seem to focus on is “how to analyze the metaphor in a metaphysical poem by John Donne.”

So let me tell you the big secret, how these students can pass this exam, so they can move on to either higher tax paying jobs or higher education. Because they're ready to. Please don't think the CAHSEE really tells us anything useful or is a good assessment of student preparedness. It does not, it is not, and for now trust me on this one, knowing I'll explain why in another article at a future date.

OK, here are the two magic words: AFFECTIVE FILTER. Yup, that's it. What is the Affective Filter? You can Google it for details, but in short, it's the filter in our brains through which information flows. When we are stress free, we can receive more stuff more easily and recall more stuff more easily. In other words, high anxiety equals low test scores, and low anxiety equals high test scores. Now you know.

Yes, it's true, that a student needs to be knowledgeable and skilled enough to comprehend and answer the questions correctly, but even when they already have that ability, as most do, the psychological warfare they endure sometimes prevents them from scoring well on the CAHSEE. So, what do I do? Do I teach English stuff to them? Not really. I mean, sure, what they need to know or recall from years of English since the 6<sup>th</sup> grade perhaps, and of course writing skill improvement so they do well on the essay portion of the exam. But my primary objective? Lower their affective filter. Let them know they are valued; they matter; they are not defined by any past or current negativity in their lives. This is done through lots of writing and

## **Saving students, one tax-withdrawn dollar at a time**

Written by David Lollar

Friday, 02 October 2009 05:22 - Last Updated Wednesday, 07 October 2009 15:45

---

thinking and class discussion. But the important thing is, you too can help. Parents, love your children and tell them you're proud of them. Friends, encourage each other to be excellent. Teachers, speak to your students as if they are the sacred, mature, intelligent beings we want them to be. And to all readers in general, pray that these students discover their value and grow into good, tax-paying citizens. And that's how you save a city, one child at a time. And that's why it's all about money. But for me, as long as the kid is saved too, that's OK with me. Now you know.

\*\*\*

*David Lollar, MFA, teaches English at East Bakersfield High School*