

A Little Death Penalty Math, Part 2.

By Greg Westfall

How much education could one death penalty case buy?

By the most recent numbers I have seen, it costs a county \$500,000 to try the average death penalty case and, all things considered, approximately \$2 to \$3 million from investigation to execution.¹

Even before our Governor and Legislature fleeced the school system this last session, Texas was already behind in how much we spent per pupil per year. In the 2009-10 school year, Texas spent \$9,227 per student, which was \$1,359 below the national average.² God only knows what it is now, but let's just go with the \$9,227 figure.

So let's see, instead of trying to kill one, single person, a county could immediately pay for 54 children to go to school for a year. At the \$3,000,000 dollar level, those same 54 children could go all the way through primary school.

What if we hired teachers instead?

Well, according to the Texas Education Agency, a public school teacher with 10 years of experience should cost approximately \$37,000 per year³ and according to the figures recently released by the Texas Association of School Boards (TASB) and Texas Association of School Administrators (TASA), the average annual public school teacher salary is around \$48,000.⁴

Thus, for the same initial outlay of half a million bucks, we could pay at least 10 public school teachers for a year. For three million dollars, we could keep them all around for six years. Maybe even give 'em a little raise.

When you throw in for good measure the fact that as of 2009, close to 60 percent of police chiefs polled agreed that the death penalty is not even an effective deterrent to crime,⁵ it makes you kind of wonder why we still have it, doesn't it?

¹ "Life or Death," Cleburne Times-Review, January 9, 2012, found at <http://www.cleburnetimesreview.com/local/x2145129487/Life-or-death>.

² "Texas slips in per-pupil education spending among states," Dallas Morning News, Jan. 28, 2011, found at <http://www.dallasnews.com/news/state/headlines/20110128-texas-slips-in-per-pupil-education-spending-among-states.ece>.

³ <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=2147501688>.

⁴ "Survey shows average teacher salary at \$48K per year," Your Humble News, January 29, 2012, found at http://www.yourhoustonnews.com/humble/news/survey-shows-average-teacher-salary-at-k-per-year/article_62fd9bf9-719a-54ee-97bb-18345b1a5f5c.html.

⁵ Smart on Crime: Reconsidering the Death Penalty in a Time of Economic Crisis, Death Penalty Information Center, Oct. 2009, found at <http://deathpenaltyinfo.org/documents/CostsRptFinal.pdf>.