



Who you gonna' call? Myth-busters

By Jim Waters

It turns out the longstanding belief that women talk more than men simply isn't true.

The journal *Science* recently published results of a thorough study revealing women use 16,215 words a day, only a statistically insignificant 546 more than men.

Yet for years, the misnomer that women talk more than men was accepted as undeniable truth. Most people probably just assumed it was a scientifically supported theorem.

After all, everyone wouldn't believe such a statement if it was just a myth, would they?

My wife already knew that the "women-talking-more-than-men" hypothesis didn't hold water, her proof being monthly cell-phone bills indicating my minutes used versus hers.

Still, it falls to us to - in the current spirit of myth-mashing - to undo a couple of other long-held legends:

Myth: More money automatically results in a better education for Kentucky students.

Those who believe this remind me of folks in ancient times who adamantly insisted that the earth is flat.

But give the ancients a break. They didn't have research available to help determine the validity of their beliefs.

We, on the other hand, have the Kentucky Department of Education.

According to the KDE, per-pupil revenues received by Kentucky schools - adjusted for inflation - are 69 percent higher (258 percent pre-inflation adjustment) today than in 1990. However, the Office of Educational Accountability reports the composite score on Kentucky's ACT college-entrance test improved only 3 percent across the state's public-school districts during these same 16 years.

Got that? Sixty-nine percent more real revenue, but only a 3-percent improvement on the ACT.

I resent it when politicians try to win elections - and educrats scheme to squeeze more money from the legislature - by claiming Kentucky taxpayers are cheapskates when it comes to supporting education. We're told the state doesn't spend enough on education, yet 49 percent of our entire state budget is spent on the K-12 system.

How much is enough?

If more money automatically means a better education for students, how is it that schools spending piles of hard-earned tax dollars are turning in some of the worst academic performances, and vice versa?

Jefferson County's Portland Elementary School scored well below the state average on its overall CATS Index Score in 2004 - yet spent a whopping \$10,340 per pupil, nearly *twice* the state average of \$5,298.

On the other hand, Carlisle County Elementary - with an even greater percentage of students from low-income homes than Portland - spent \$3,080 per pupil in 2004 while producing an above-average CATS score.

Myth: Offering school-choice scholarships for Kentucky's 109,000 special-needs students won't work. Private schools are not equipped - or amenable - to dealing with these children.

Those who promote this fable are saying to parents: "You're stuck. Even if a school-choice law is passed, you won't really have alternatives."

It's promoting surrender based on myths.

Read "Enable the Disabled," a rigorous Bluegrass Institute analysis of the fiscal impact of creating such a school-choice law. It contains contact information for 408 private schools in Kentucky. On this list are Louisville's Summit Academy and Langsford Learning Center. Both have stellar reputations for providing an outstanding education and important services for learning-disabled children.

However, Royce Whitman of the anti-choice Jefferson County teachers union spouted on KET's "Kentucky Tonight" show that these schools "are not capable of taking care of these students."

But the telling point here is that Whitman and her cohort, Frances Steenbergen, generalissimo of the state teachers union, oppose even the part of the bill that would require granting parental requests for a transfer to *another public school*.

"I believe we are effectively dealing with special-needs students," Steenbergen said.

Yes, and at one time, lots of people - really smart ones - believed the earth was flat. But that didn't make it so, did it?

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