

Increasing the Per-Child Tax Credit: There's a Better Way to Help Families

Would you accept \$500 a year to keep your child in a crowded, overburdened school?

The U.S. House of Representatives recently passed President Bush's plan to double the per-child tax credit from \$500 to \$1,000 over the next few years. The plan, while providing a short-term benefit, fails to address the real concerns of American families—in particular, schools that are bursting at the seams with students.

National school enrollment has ballooned to 49 million, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, and is projected to continue growing rapidly, packing even more kids into already overcrowded classrooms. Schools around the country are being forced to bring in portable buildings and to stagger class schedules to ease the burden on cafeterias, libraries, hallways, and playgrounds. Teachers report that they don't have enough time to assist individual students who need extra help, and too many students are getting lost in the crowd.

Instead of being used to improve the quality of education for current students, our limited tax dollars are diverted to build new schools to accommodate growth (federal officials say school districts will be forced to build 2,400 new schools by 2003).

It's time that our political leaders acknowledged what parents already know: Our schools, like our highways, our parks, and our energy supply, are suffering from a population crisis. Upping the tax incentives for having children doesn't solve the problem; tackling population growth and helping struggling schools does.