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## The 21 Cent a Month Unfunded Mandate

October 26, 2009

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This just in from the Chuck Baker School of Management. Kids who get out of line can earn a detention on Saturday mornings. The biggest punishment is having to get up at 8am on a Saturday, although I famously led one that involved picking up trash on campus and singing Neil Diamond songs. For some mysterious reason, I have never been asked to lead detention again.

When Pinewood Derby occurs, Chuck counts on those students in detention to do chores and errands on the big day. Since there were only two students having to serve detention, Chuck had an innovative way of staffing Pinewood Derby.

He called it Detention Credits. The concept was pretty simple. Assign a kid detention for the weekend under the assumption that he or she will probably get a detention at some point, and they could bank the credit they had because they had always served it during Pinewood Derby. This was not embraced by administration, but my limited knowledge of educational reform seems to indicate that progressive ideas take time to implement.



We had multi-cultural day at RVA last week, and Nancy was one of the ones who were in charge of it. It was a wonderful day full of skits and songs, and the most emotional part of the day is when each of the 25 different countries represented on the campus this year are represented by a student holding their home flag as they walked up to the stage.

I looked at these kids, and the thing that struck me was how brave they are. They leave their parents at such young ages and live on a campus without heat or air conditioning sharing rooms with strangers on a campus so remote there are baboons and monkeys about.

It is an honor to be around them. Remind me of that the next time I want to harm one of them.



I was at one of the lunch program schools recently, and out of a thousand students, three hundred were not receiving lunch. I asked the headmaster why, and he said that he did not charge for the food, but he charged 15 shillings a month (about 21 cents) to pay for the cook, the firewood and the water it took to cook the food.



At first I was angry, but the more I thought about it, I thought: I given an unfunded mandate. I've told them they can't charge for food, but I don't provide the other stuff they need to provide the food. I pondered this a long time.

What was really great was that before I could do anything, the other headmasters met with him and explained how he could use part of his operating budget to pay for firewood and water. They explained to him the value of the program, and I suspect they let him know what a jerk he would be if he messed up and I got cranky.

But the deeper you get in, the more complex it gets. Helping without hurting while being cultural sensitive is a lot harder than it looks.

But the hardest thing of all was thinking about three hundred kids who couldn't afford 21 cents a month. I know how tough the economy is in the United States right now, but can you imagine not being able to come up with 21 cents a month?

Three hundred kids, about a third of that school, can imagine it very well.

Your pal

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P.S. RVA REALLY needs a French teacher and a Spanish teacher next year. Let us know if you are interested.

## The Peifer's Quick Links...

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### [Our Website](#)

[View Steve's CNN Hero Video on YouTube](#)

## Contact Information

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## If you would like to contribute...

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Kenya Kids Can is supported by the prayers and financial contributions of people like you, from all over the world. If you are able, please [make a donation](#) today to either the "Peifer School Lunch Program - 000339" or the "Peifer Computer Center Program - 000336." Steve and Nancy raise their own funding; to support their family directly, make your contribution to "Peifer, Stephen C and Nancy J - Support 047930001." Thanks in advance!

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