

Eating Our Seed Corn

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My wife, Nan, a fourth grade teacher for 30 years, recently had her career concluded a year earlier than she intended. Without going into the details, there is no doubt that Nan is a master teacher and had an illustrious educational career. Her 30-year job in the same District did not end with a lively, well-attended retirement party, or a gold watch. Instead, she received a terse one-page letter which indicated that her contract would not be renewed for next year. Is that how a loyal, 30-year, highly successful employee should be treated? If you are a teacher in Arizona, the answer, unfortunately, is yes.

Nan was not the only educator the District let go. About 300 first- and second-year teachers received their discharge letter—just before AIMS testing began.

A major concern in education for the past decade or so has been the issue of retaining young teachers, as about 50 percent of them do not remain in the classroom beyond three years. Can you imagine the effect this layoff had on these 300 young professionals?

A colleague who also instructs at ASU recently informed me that undergraduate education students are currently leaving that Department in droves. A friend I see regularly at the gym just told me that his daughter's scholarship to ASU was rescinded, due to economic concerns, so she took a scholarship at a California school.

The State budget problem is being borne by the poor, children, State employees, our colleges, and, of course, local educators. Consider the following for the near-future: What will happen to all the poor families that do not have a place to live or food to eat? What will happen to all the unfortunate children who continue to be abused because the funding for CPS has been decimated? As our colleges are being severely weakened, how will we educate our youth and how will we attract new businesses to our state to improve our economy? As our school districts continue to furlough teachers, what will be the effect on our children as they are packed into classrooms of 30 or more pupils and are taught by overworked, underpaid, under-appreciated teachers. As more education students leave the field, from where will our new teachers come? Finally, what will be the impact of the "brain drain" as our best and brightest young people go out of state to become educated?

The long-term effects of the recent attempts to balance the deficit will be felt negatively by Arizonians for, at least, the next 15 years. We "are eating our seed corn" and we had better devise more suitable methods to correct the situation before it is too late.