



Great Public Schools for Every Student

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Laid-off California educators lobby members of Congress for jobs bill

NEA members nationwide seek urgent funding to prevent up to 300,000 U.S. educator layoffs

WASHINGTON—As Congress continues to grapple with the emergency supplemental funding bill, laid-off California educators are joining teachers from several states yesterday and today to lobby their members of Congress in hopes of passing the emergency education jobs legislation. Without this infusion of money to state education budgets, an estimated 100,000 to 300,000 educators across the nation will lose their jobs.

“The nation’s economic crisis has pushed public education to a tipping point, but there is still a chance to stave off more damage,” said NEA President Dennis Van Roekel, “Congress can choose to put students first by supporting emergency education job funding that will keep teachers and other essential personnel and programs in our schools. All students deserve the highest quality education, and their education shouldn’t be diminished because we lack the political will to act. Every parent, community member and elected official needs to understand the real consequences to this funding crisis.”

“In California, public schools have been cut by \$17 billion the last two years and thousands of educators like the fine classroom teachers who are in Washington, D.C. now talking to their representatives will lose their jobs in our state alone,” said David A. Sanchez, president of the 325,000-member California Teachers Association. “Congress must act now to help stop the damage being done to public schools and students in California and across the nation.”

California teachers are lobbying in Washington, D.C. Wednesday and Thursday to implore their congressional representatives for federal funding to save educators’ jobs. They are:

CENTRAL VALLEY

John Seybold, Madera:

His Madera Unified School District lost 160 teachers over the past two years, and teachers this year took six furlough days (a 4% pay cut) to save jobs and avoid even bigger increases in class size. This year, 60 educators were pink-slipped, and some rehired, said Seybold, vice president of the Madera Unified Teachers Association. So many counselors were let go that the ratio is now 500 students to 1 counselor, affecting how much help they can give students in choosing colleges and applying for scholarships. High school class sizes of 38 are common, and 28 in lower grades.

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Brianna Clegg, Stockton:

She had an exciting day recently. She was one of just three teachers receiving an award from the San Joaquin County Office of Education as a “Teacher of Excellence” in English instruction and she was walking on air. “So I went home with my award in hand, opened my mailbox, and there was my pink slip,” Clegg recalls, her voice choking up.

Teaching fourth grade in Stockton isn’t just a job to Clegg. “That first day of school is pivotal. You look kids in the eye, shake hands, say hello—it has a huge impact. This is a very transient district. These kids have a lot of instability in their lives—parents, money, moving—so the biggest thing for them is a teacher who makes that relationship with them.”

Brad Barnes, Bakersfield:

He is speaking on behalf of the 120 Bakersfield City Elementary School District educators who got pick slips. This large Kern County district will have one librarian for 28,000 students.

Many teachers will be rehired because of a successful retirement incentive. But that will still leave classes much bigger (because the positions are lost). In some cases, class size is pushing into the 40-student range even before the latest round of cuts.

“One fourth grade class had 44 kids this year,” said Barnes, president of the Bakersfield Elementary Teachers Association. “They couldn’t fit that many desks into the classroom, so they had one group of students sitting along the wall.”

ORANGE COUNTY

Clarissa Barragan, Santa Ana:

She was raised and still lives in Santa Ana, went to school there, became the first member of her family to finish college, went to work as a teacher in Santa Ana Unified, and is active in her community. Barragan serves as a role model for many Latino students starting out in life with stories just like hers.

She was pink-slipped three times in her first three years of teaching. The third time, she wasn’t hired back. That was a year ago. Since then, she’s been subbing in K-12 classrooms, still trying to get a permanent job teaching in her community.

“Subbing is tough!” she says. “Every day it’s different students, different subjects. One day I’m singing with kindergarten children and playing with them on the floor, another day I’m teaching algebra.”

Her message to Congress: “Get that jobs bill passed. Help teachers like myself continue to help our students become good citizens in our community. That’s why I teach.”

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Peter Boyd, Santa Ana:

This is the second year of heavy staff cuts in Santa Ana Unified, says Boyd, who is second vice president of the Santa Ana Teachers Association. Getting Congress to pass the teacher jobs bill is critical for his district, he said. “It looks like, without the jobs bill, 90 or 95 people will have lost their jobs and not get hired back in those two years. It greatly affects the stability of the schools. People are shuffled around. This is a dense, urban community where schools are the heart of the community. From 7 in the morning till 6 at night, schools are a safe place where kids can go.”

LOS ANGELES COUNTY

Tahnya Nodar, El Segundo:

She is vice president of the El Segundo Teachers Association and a second-grade teacher. She said a third of the teachers in her own school near the Los Angeles International Airport lost their jobs.

Teachers accepted five furlough days next year to help save jobs and programs—they saved the middle school art program and prevented worse increases in class size.

Christopher Rieder, Los Angeles:

He came to teach music in Los Angeles from Beverly Hills two years ago because of the model elementary program LA was nurturing. He now travels to three schools teaching visual arts, music, dance, and theater. “Kids respond to it,” he says. “In these under-served areas, a lot of the day is test prep, so this is push-back against that. The kids can be creative, express themselves, solve problems in a different way. I have kids as young as second grade who can sight-sing music. It’s a testament to how plastic kids’ brains are. They’re engaged.”

But it looks like he’s only going to be an L.A. elementary school music teacher for a few more days, because Rieder is being laid off: there’s no money to pay him.

School budgets across the country have been cut to the bone, forcing massive layoffs of teachers and education support professionals. Some districts are moving to four-day school weeks, cutting critical services and programs for kids, or even closing schools. These California layoffs and cuts are coming at the same time that schools are facing rising demands for better academic outcomes.

“We are closing in quickly on the end of the fiscal year, and it’s incomprehensible that our children are being forced to bear the brunt of the nation’s economic woes,” said NEA President Van Roekel. “Enough is enough. The time to speak up for education and kids is now.”

Follow the Speak Up for Education & Kids campaign on Facebook at www.facebook.com/speakupforkids.
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The National Education Association is the nation’s largest professional employee organization representing 3.2 million elementary and secondary teachers, higher education faculty, education support professionals, school administrators, retired educators and students preparing to become teachers.