**Saving education**

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Remember when federal, state and local governments actually seemed poised to do something about the great teacher exodus plaguing our schools?

With an influx of money earmarked to help schools recover from the pandemic, many expected pay raises and bonuses to keep experienced teachers in the classroom.

Ha! That didn’t happen! Not in most places. In fact, the very idea seems ludicrous now – and this was being discussed like it was a foregone conclusion just a few months ago at the beginning of the summer.

So what happened? We found a cheaper way. Just cut requirements to become a teacher. Get more college students to enter the field even if they’re bound to run away screaming after a few years in. It doesn’t matter – as long as we can keep them coming. The young and dumb. Or the old and out of options.

Entice retired teachers to come back and sub. Remove hurdles for anyone from a non-teaching field to step in and become a teacher – even military veterans because there’s so much overlap between battlefield experience and second grade reading.

And in the meantime, more and more classroom teachers with decades of experience under their belts are throwing up their hands and leaving. Stop and think for a moment. This is fundamentally absurd. If you have a hole in your pocket and you keep losing your keys, wallet and other vital things from out of your pants, the first thing you do is sew up the hole! You don’t keep putting more things in your pocket!

But that’s only true if you’re actually interested in solving the problem. Maybe you prefer the status quo. Maybe you even like it or see it as an opportunity to change your wardrobe entirely. It’s a simple matter of cost.

The educators who have been in the classroom the longest are also the highest paid. So if we just let them go, we can save some money for other things.

Of course the problem of getting excellent teachers in the classroom is only compounded by such thinking. You don’t get more seasoned teachers by letting them leave and putting increasing pressure on those who stay.

And make no mistake – experienced teachers are incredibly valuable. That’s not to say new teachers don’t have their own positive aspects, but the profession’s expert practitioners are its heart and soul.

Think about it.

Like any other profession, the longer you practice it, the better you usually get. For example, no one going under heart surgery would willingly choose a surgeon who had never operated before over a seasoned veteran who has done this successfully multiple times.

But we don’t value the work teachers do nearly as much as we do surgeons. Or lawyers. Or almost anything else that requires a comparable level of education. That’s really the core issue.

We don’t care about quality teaching. In fact, in many cases we actively don’t want it to occur.

Republicans are literally running a political platform on weakening teachers, schools and education because they need the poorly educated to make up their voting base.

When Trump was President, he actually praised the badly educated because they supported him more than any other demographic.

And even those who aren’t actively against education are more concerned with privatizing the public system for profit. They like it when public education fails because it gives them an excuse to push for more charter schools, more school vouchers, more cyber schools – anything where they can siphon away tax dollars earmarked for education into their own private pocketbooks (and no holes in there even to pay their own taxes)!

So the teacher exodus isn’t being fixed on purpose.

It is a political and economic plot against increasing the average intelligence and knowledge of voters, stealing government funding for personal gain and refusing to increase the quality of a government sponsored service.

In the meantime, more teachers are leaving every day.

A February 2022 report from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics said the numbers of public school teachers had gone from approximately 10.6 million in January 2020 to 10 million – a net loss of around 600,000 teachers.

In August, the national Education Association (NEA) sounded the alarm that an additional 300,000 educators had left since the report was issued. And it’s only getting worse. An NEA union poll found that 55% of educators were considering leaving education earlier than they had originally planned.

In my own district, there are several teachers who have taken leaves of absence or are sick and had to be temporarily replaced with long term subs. We’re located in western Pennsylvania south of Pittsburgh, just across the river from a plethora of colleges and universities with teacher prep programs. Yet it was pretty difficult to find anyone to fill these positions or serve as day-to-day subs.

There is so much we could be doing to encourage seasoned teachers to stay in the classroom beyond increased pay.

You could cut all unnecessary tasks like formal lesson plans, stop holding staff meetings unless an urgent need presents itself, refrain from new and unproven initiatives, and/or cut duties where possible to increase teacher planning time.

And that’s before we even get to the lack of respect, gas lighting, scapegoating, and micromanaging teachers go through on a daily basis.

What we have here is a crisis that cuts to the very heart of America’s identity as a nation.

What do we want to be? A capitalist experiment in school privatization whose only regulation is the free hand of the market? Or a nation supported by a secure system of education that took us to the moon and made us the greatest global superpower the world has ever known?

What do we want to be? A nation of dullards who can be easily manipulated by any passing ideologue? Or a country of critical thinkers who can accept new evidence and make rational decisions based on facts? There is a cost to becoming a great nation and not just emblazoning the idea on a hat.

Excerpted: ‘Teacher Exodus Proves We Are Willfully Destroying US Public Education’.

Courtesy: Commondreams.org