



THEMES in the NEWS

IDEA's weekly commentary on education news

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For Teachers, March is Pink Slip Month

By UCLA IDEA

The prospect of receiving a pink slip has been a painful and nasty California school-employment ritual for decades. Receiving a notice that you are not assured of a teaching assignment after June is a gut-wrenching experience that affects entire faculties. It doesn't matter if you are secure in your years of employment and you don't personally receive the pink slip; just sharing the disappointment of your valued colleagues saps energy and casts a pall over the whole teaching experience. If you are a school administrator, good luck trying to plan for next year—trying to develop that “master schedule”—trying to encourage and build the skills of promising young teachers who have been told not to count on a job next semester.

The pain and uncertainty accompanying pink slips becomes more likely today, March 1, when 5 percent across-the-board federal program cuts are triggered by sequestration. For California's federally funded education programs, sequestration could mean a loss of \$262 million, including \$91 million for Title I spending, \$72 million for special education, and \$49 million for Head Start. Many California districts faced with cuts to these programs likely will need to “protect” themselves by sending out pink slips on March 15.

Sadly, after some weeks of good news about California schools including promising economic conditions, the passage of Proposition 30, and Gov. Brown's push for a funding formula that distributes resources based on students' needs, school districts' attentions now turn to teacher layoffs, program cuts, and more crowded classrooms. “These cuts come at a time when California is just beginning a recovery from state-level cuts of over \$20 billion of education spending over the last five years,” said Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson.

Most education cuts will not be felt overnight. Rather, sequestration casts a dark shadow over the optimism and enthusiasm of the entire education enterprise. Reform? No, let's return to deciding what gets cut. According to Torlakson, “the cuts would come at a crucial time in a student's life. Many of these students many never make up the lost ground.”

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