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Is It the Test or the Teacher?

By: Jason L. Riley – April 12, 2013

President Obama's new budget includes \$12.5 billion to "prevent additional teacher layoffs and hire teachers." But has anyone in the White House stopped to consider whether public education is already overstaffed?

"Since 1970, the public school workforce has roughly doubled—to 6.4 million from 3.3 million—and two-thirds of those new hires are teachers or teachers' aides," wrote Andrew Coulson of the Cato Institute in *The Wall Street Journal* last year. "Over the same period, enrollment rose by a tepid 8.5%. Employment has thus grown 11 times faster than enrollment."

In some states over the past decade, public education hiring has increased even while student enrollment has fallen. Of course, none of this matters to teachers unions and liberals who see public education, first and foremost, as a jobs program for adults. And those are the folks that the White House is aiming to please.

Still, hiring teachers without regard for the actual education needs of students is problematic, and not just in terms of misallocating resources. The Atlanta cheating scandal, in which dozens of educators have been indicted for allegedly falsifying standardized exams, has led to a debate over testing requirements. But the scandal could also be a byproduct of who goes into teaching.

It's long been known that our education schools tend to be populated by our lowest-achieving students. A 2011 investigation found that more than 700 teachers in Georgia failed at least one portion of the state's certification test, and nearly 60 teachers failed the test more than 10 times. Would you want your child taught by someone who failed the certification test five times, let alone 10?

Perhaps we should be debating the quality of classroom instruction instead of the merits of standardized tests. Perhaps the country has not only too many teachers but too many bad ones.