



Opinion



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# Grading the Schools Bailout: F

By: [Phil Brand](#)

Special to The Examiner

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The sky may not be falling on American public schools, but their roofs are certainly about to collapse. The situation is “an emergency,” according to Chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee, Representative George Miller (D-CA), and Chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, David Obey (D-WI). Secretary of Education Arne Duncan calls it a “catastrophe.”

What calamity has evoked such dire rhetoric? At issue are potential public school teacher layoffs. Amid shrinking state and local government coffers due to the slumping economy, school districts are cutting back. Miller and Obey [write](#) in *USA Today* that without immediate action, 300,000 school employees could lose their jobs, with the result of “overcrowded classrooms, lost school days, closed libraries and the absence of educational services.” The immediate action they support is \$23 billion in federal aid to states via a “teacher jobs fund.”

The problem is that the rhetoric is overblown.

Schools won't retreat to the dark ages without the federal shot in the arm. Start with the fact that school officials tend to [overestimate](#) potential fall layoffs, “to ensure that every employee they might have to dismiss receives the required notification.” But even with 300,000 layoffs, schools will manage, according to a recent [article](#) in the journal, *Education Next*. The authors write that even in the worst of times, schools have money to spend: “School-related revenues and employment levels have increased even when the economy (as measured by Gross Domestic Product or GDP) turned down, unlike what typically happens in sectors such as manufacturing and retail sales, where recessions trigger cutbacks in personnel and profits.” Because of this trend, Andrew Coulson of the Cato Institute [reports](#), “Over the past forty years, public school employment has risen *10 times faster than enrollment*.” 300,000 layoffs would raise the student teacher ratio to 16.6 to 1—[about](#) where it was in 1997.

We should be hashing out how much taxpayer money to spend on education, but those discussions should be had at the state and local level; as George Will recently [wrote](#), kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade education is “the quintessential state and local responsibility.” At least it used to be.

This proposed \$23 billion comes little more than a year after the federal government gave in the stimulus bill \$100 billion to states for education spending. The federal component of education spending has *doubled* since 2000, to 15 percent.

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