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The U.S. Economy Needs Fewer Public School Jobs, Not More

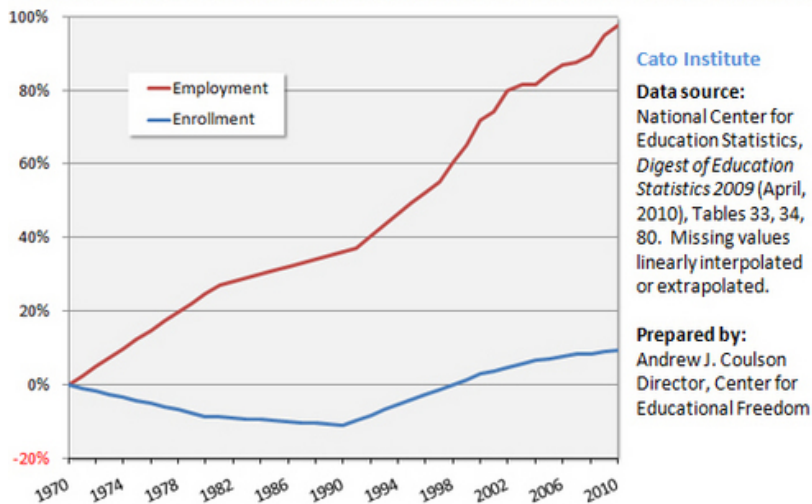
by [Andrew J. Coulson](#)

Teachers unions, the Obama administration, and most Democrats in Congress want to spend another \$23 billion that we don't have to shore up public school employment. If we don't go along, they tell us, it'll be a "catastrophe" for American education. With fewer teachers our kids will supposedly learn less, further crippling our already wounded economy.

They couldn't be more wrong.

Over the past forty years, public school employment has risen *10 times faster than enrollment* (see chart). There are only 9 percent more students today, but nearly twice as many public school employees. To prove that rolling back this relentless hiring spree by a few years would hurt student achievement, you'd have to show that all those new employees *raised* achievement in the first place. That would be hard to do... because it never happened.

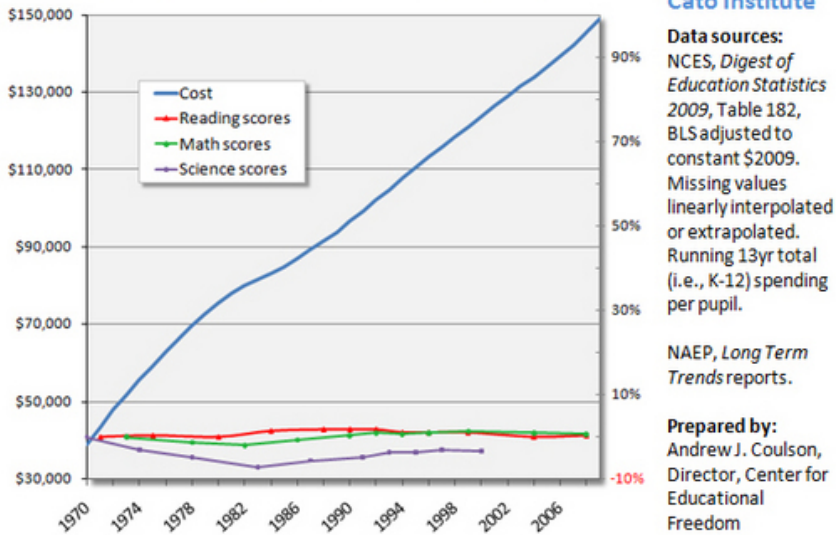
Percent Change in Public School Employment and Enrollment, Since 1970



Student achievement at the end of high school has been flat for as long as we've been keeping track—*all the way back to 1970*. But we did get something in return for all that hiring: a great, big, fat, BILL.

If you graduated from high school in 1980, your entire k-12 education cost your fellow taxpayers about \$75,000, in 2009 dollars. But the graduating class of 2009 had roughly *twice* that amount lavished on their public school careers. The extra \$75,000 we're now spending has done wonders for public school employee union membership, dues revenue, and political clout. It's done a whole lotta nothin' for student learning (see chart).

Inflation-Adjusted Cost of a K-12 Public Education and Percent Change in Achievement of 17-Year-Olds, since 1970



But, some readers may ask: were all those new employees teachers? About two thirds of public school employment growth has been teachers (41 percent) or teachers' aides (23 percent). The remaining third was comprised almost entirely of support staff in schools and district offices.

So, yes, a bit of public schooling's employment bloat can be put down to a swelling bureaucracy. But given that adding a couple of million new instructional jobs did nothing to improve achievement at the end of high school, there's no reason to expect that shedding a few hundred thousand of them would hurt it.

Ed. sec. Arne Duncan and friends are thus mistaken if they really expect a negative academic or economic impact from reversing some of our costly and ineffectual public school employment growth. In fact, they actually have it backwards.

In the private sector, jobs are created and retained only if they are believed to add value to the enterprise—if their salary and benefit costs are outweighed by the revenue they generate. By contrast, we know that the millions of new government school positions added over the past four decades have not added measurably to student knowledge or skills at the end of high school. So instead of boosting the U.S. economy, these jobs have actually been a drain on it. Returning to the staff-to-student ratio we had in 1980 would save taxpayers about \$142 billion every year.

Losing a job is a terrible experience, but the school hiring binge of the past four decades has been entirely disconnected from enrollment levels and unaccompanied by educational improvement. Foolish public officials and self-serving, empire building teachers' unions have created millions of unproductive jobs that were never justified in the first place and that have been a terrible drain on the U.S. economy. With the nation \$13 trillion in debt and many state governments looking at red ink for years to come, we just can't afford to perpetuate their mistake any longer.

Throwing billions more at the system would only worsen the problem and delay the solution, which is to help ease the transition of these workers from their current unproductive employment back into the productive sector of the economy.



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[Missy8s](#) 123p · 1 day ago

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6/7/2010

» The U.S. Economy Needs Fewer Pub...

Kick the union thugs out of the "public schools" and off of the "public dole" stop paying idiots and political shells to indoctrinate your children and ruin their chances for a successful life free of government intrusion.

It is time to put a PERMANENT END to the Indoctrination Warehouse Complex in America and rescue the kids from the progressive plantation of institutional slavery to government!!!

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[phthaloblu](#) 77p · 1 day ago

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In our city, there are 17 administrative employees for each student. They've been throwing billions of dollars at the public schools and they aren't getting any better.

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[mugiwara](#) 80p · 1 day ago

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I love how NJ Governor Chris Christie called the Teachers' Union's bluff:

Teachers' Union: "You can't cut education!!! Think of the children you Nazi!!!!!"

Christie: "Ok, all funding for the kiddies stays as long as the Teachers' Union agrees to forgo their raise this year"

Teachers' Union: "Chris Christie is Satan!!! Pray for his death!!!!!"

Wish I could vote for a gov like that here in NY this year, but I don't think Lazio has what it takes, but hey, if he starts talking like Christie, Lazio's got himself a vote.

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[Shrink the State](#) 68p · 1 day ago

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NEA and SEIU -- the two largest public unions -- are plundering America.

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[aharris](#) 102p · 1 day ago

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Clearly, student/teacher ratios are not as important to education as they Unions would like us to believe. Maybe someone should suggest that they actually try, you know, teaching rather than social engineering?

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[Lolo2](#) 75p · 1 day ago

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Everyone should study Daniels up close in Indiana, and see what he has done. I certainly think Christie has!

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[Looking4Sanity](#) 121p · 1 day ago

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"Throwing billions more at the system would only worsen the problem and delay the solution, which is to help ease the transition of these workers from their current unproductive employment back into the productive sector of the economy."

If the axiom, "Those who can't do; teach." is to be believed, I fail to see how they would ever be productively reabsorbed into the private sector. It is much more likely that they would simply gravitate to another union environment where they would continue to be a drain on society in a different field of endeavor. Until we get control over the union problem, I'm afraid this situation is not going to be satisfactorily resolved.

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 [joejobinks123](#) 66p · 1 day ago +7


We spend more and more in Education and it gets worse and worse...Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results....The teachers unions suck hind teat....America are you tired of the left yet?

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 [rckmom](#) 106p · 1 day ago +9

The teachers stopped caring about education a long time ago...when they realized that they can keep their jobs no matter what!

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 [Reason For Life](#) 74p · 1 day ago +9

The best way to fix this problem is to provide parents with the money for educating their children and letting them choose which school they want. Inferior schools go bankrupt and superior schools will grow.

If this is done along with the conversion of all publics schools to charter schools the cost of education will plummet and the quality of teaching will improve.

It is too bad that Coulson did not do productivity comparisons of teachers (something like "students educated per dollar") with other professions. I would bet that teaching is the only profession whose productivity has declined over the years. Engineers produce more designs per dollar, auto workers produce more cars per dollar Heck, even hamburger flippers flip more hamburgers per dollar. Only teaching can show such a hideous decline in productivity.

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 [petee363](#) 74p · 1 day ago +5

there was a old teamster joke, but i suppose i can insert teachers.
how many teachers does it take to change a light bulb?
seven, you got a problem with that. the problem is we need vouchers, so parents can take control of their child education, we don't need more teachers.

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 [rowanes](#) 61p · 1 day ago +9

When I started school way back in the stone age (1967) we had a class of 30, in my small town, at the end of the year all 30 could read and do basic math. To contrast; when my nephew started school in '97 there was a class of 16, at the end of the school year only half could read at second grade level, and they were just learning subtraction.

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 [Majic12](#) 68p · 1 day ago +7

First, Eliminate two thirds of school administrations. Then eliminate or drastically reduce the union stranglehold. Teach just the basics and do away with courses that divide us as Americans. We are Americans FIRST and our culture SECOND. I as a young man never was taught such devisive BS. My friends and I never even thought of our cultural differences. Not until the 70's and the birth of the RACE PIMPS did I even think about race. Now, all schools care about is seperating and classifying students, giving ribbons and diplomas to failing students for fear of damaging or hurting thier feelings and collecting that 35.00 a day per student for attendance. Teachers get a TON of time off and I'm tired of listening about how hard they work. I'm sure there are good teachers out there. If we can just free them of the La Cosa Nostra(Unions) and let the good teachers shine then we will see progress. Not until then.

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 [Syntax game II](#) -57p · 1 day ago -41

Ya know, you all could keep your kids out of "big government" public schools and state universities and keep them home and perhaps home school them. That way they'll never pose a threat or get in the way of intelligent people. Imagine how effective a tea-tard is when they believe in evolution and Jesus riding dinosaurs while collecting their state checks they whine about people getting. Most of them are mental welfare recipients anyways and can't spell most of their protest signs they make so...eradicate yourselves through your own stupidity and allegiance to the elites and save all us smart folk a lot of headaches having to listen to you welfare hypocrites whining about YOUR entitlement programs and your continuous complaining about "big government" programs and spending that politicians YOU elect are responsible for.

Your children are making life difficult for our intelligent children. You kids will probably end up protesting on taxpayer funded public land complaining about entitlement programs they're using and whining about on tax-payer funded public

land. Keep your kids out of our kids way and we won't end up like stimulus funded Texas.

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[CHICAGO RALPH](#) 89p · 1 day ago

+14

Day Cares centers,...

Head Start centers,.....

Counseling centers,.....

Afro studies this,....Latino studies that centers,.....

educating millions of illegals,.....

more days off and holidays than 100 Greek government workers,.....

Looking at those graphs,.....I think we have done a commendable job holding the line,.....

on the cost of education,.....

maybe next semester we can even allocate some funding for,.....

R,...R... and,.... R.

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[i.hart](#) 78p · 1 day ago

+9

The chart stacking up cost and student performance is shocking, even if you start from the assumption that more money doesn't equal better education. But then, the NEA and their enablers won't let a lack of money get in the way of increased spending, so why should facts have any impact?

All the more reason to root for Governor Christie in his fight with the unions in New Jersey!

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[MacDaddyWatch](#) 77p · 1 day ago

+9

THE SOLUTION:

VOUCHERS + TAX CREDITS = COMPETITION. Only good things will follow.

All unions fear competition. From autos, to steel, to furniture, to truck drivers, to farm workers, to tires, to government, to textiles, to education. They all fear competition because unions are not designed to compete, they are designed to plunder at the expense of the final consumer and industry that employs them. Just look at what has happened to EVERY American industry with entrenched unions.

U.A.W. = U Ain't Workin'

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[macnvettes](#) 95p · 1 day ago

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The big problem is that school systems are bureaucracies, the jobs being created are not teaching jobs, but administrative positions.

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