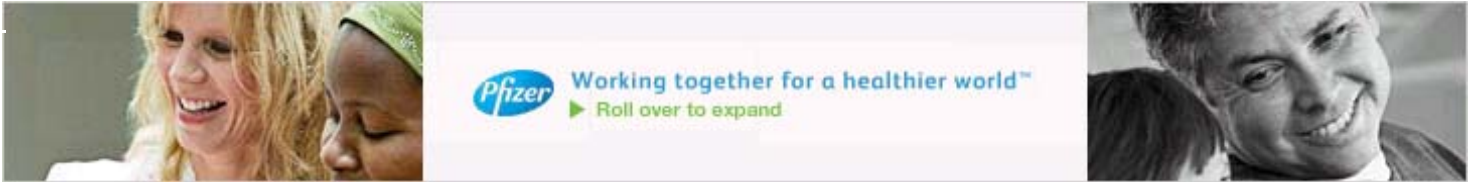


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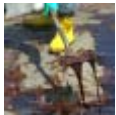
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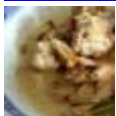


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[Derek Thompson](#) - Derek Thompson is a staff editor at Atlantic Business, where he writes about economics, business and technology. Derek has also written for *BusinessWeek* and *Slate*.

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Derek Thompson is a blogger at TheAtlantic.com and staff editor for the Business Channel, where he writes about economic policy, technology, and the media industry. His writing may include trace amounts of romantic comedy allusions. Derek graduated from the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University with a triple major in journalism, political science, and legal studies, but he doesn't plan on doing anything with that last bit. He has also written for *Slate*, *BusinessWeek* and *The Daily Beast*. He has appeared as a guest on radio and [theatlantic.com/business/.../57372/](http://theatlantic.com/business/.../57372/)

television networks, including CBS News Radio, the BBC, and CNBC. If you, too, understand the world primarily through sports metaphors, you might want to [follow him on Twitter](#).

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## In Praise of the Teacher Bailout

May 27 2010, 4:40 PM ET | [Comment](#)

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States are facing [record budget shortfalls](#), which almost always result in huge cuts to education. So the jobs bills moving through Congress propose a \$23 billion infusion to public schools to save between 100,00 and 300,000 teacher jobs. Neil McCluskey at the New York Post [shrugs](#) at the "teacher bailout," noting that 300,000 jobs lost would be "only" a 4.8 percent cut to the teacher labor force.

On the other hand, he's pretty concerned about the deficit.

So there is indeed a looming education catastrophe -- but it's not funding or job cuts. It is the bailout now moving through Congress that ignores the reality of inefficient public schooling, and adds to the already crushing burden of our federal debt.

Well, if we're playing the put-it-in-context game, \$23 billion is "only" 0.6% of the 2010 budget. An unfortunate bailout, perhaps, but hardly catastrophic, especially when you consider that 200,000 lost jobs has a tangible cost on its own: to local demand, to student achievement, and to federal coffers when more people become eligible for benefits like unemployment insurance.

McCluskey's point about soaring education costs is fair. The rise in tuition and school fees [have outpaced](#) even medical inflation in the last 30 years. Education is one of our greatest job engines, but it's also something of a black hole where money enters, disappears and [makes an ambiguous impact on student test scores](#). Smart education reform includes clear incentives for administrators to control costs and teachers to demonstrate achievement against a reasonable baseline. But we don't want schools firing teachers willy nilly in the fog of deep budget cuts that could wipe out programs based on their cost rather than their effectiveness.

At the risk of invoking a cliché, our education system is a bit like a painkiller junkie who just had his wisdom teeth pulled. In the long term, we probably want to wean the patient off drugs. In the short term, the patient happens to be in dire need of some drugs. Sec. Arne Duncan seems to acknowledge this conflict, and when the fog lifts, I hope he continues to pressure the teachers' union to loosen its grip on the bottle and allow administrators to better assess which teachers are actually teaching, and which are mostly collecting checks.

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**Chucklepants** 4 days ago

Derek: You are still not addressing the COST of teachers and other school employees. In the majority of cases, employee compensation is well over 80% of the budget. Depending on where you are, teachers enjoy very high incomes, and even higher when you figure vacation and benefits.

Why can't they work till 65 before getting a huge pension? Why can't a person making just under 100 grand be asked to pay more of their pension and health insurance costs? Why should we pay to save jobs of people who have gotten an average raise of about 8% every year and still continue to get them? Why should there be actually more teachers in school district and states where the number of school children has decreased? There are lots of other "whys".

Isn't it a bit unfair to expect private sector people, who are usually paid less and enjoy hardly any of the benefits of the public sector, to pay to "save" those rather cushy jobs? The private sector is already, in many cases, taxed to the max in local taxes to pay them now. Is it really that "unfair" to tell these people that the good times are over and they have to take a haircut, or jobs will be lost?

There's a big difference between saving necessary jobs and saving overpaid, underworked union members from taking a haircut.



**steveinch** 4 days ago

"I hope he continues to pressure the teachers' union..."

Hope is not a strategy.



**endlessike** 4 days ago

The Teacher's Union is a fundraising arm of the Democratic Party. Of course you, and the current administration/Congress would be keen on seeing it well funded.

The fact of the matter is that major reform is needed in education, and the driver of reform and change is always necessity. Cut the friggin costs, figure out a way to educate better, cheaper. It's not a hope, it's a reality. The teachers unions are the problem, funding their bloated contract is a slap in the face to every struggling parent with a kid in public schools, and every homeowner paying far too much in property taxes.



**Buckland** 4 days ago

Education costs, like medical costs, rise as a result of large government continuing cash infusions. The increases over the last decade have been huge. If now's not the time for "firing teachers willy nilly in the fog of deep budget cuts" then the budgets can never be cut.

Teacher compensation has far outpaced inflation and the private sector for way too long. Also work rules have really gotten out of hand in many districts. The time to make the decisions is when budgets are extremely tight. We all know that if the cuts are delayed until better economic times they will never happen.



**Angst** 4 days ago

So Derek,

I understand that you are weak at math.

For the sake of your argument, would you mind dividing the \$23 billion of tax payer dollars (that you seem so free to throw around) by the 200,000 teacher salaries that you want to save or create and tell us how much that is per teacher.

Here is a hint - it is a really big number.



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depend on reasoning?

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Robert P. George

Yes and no, happily. Click here to see  
what the experts say

Rebecca Newberger Goldstein

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