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# **An Interview with Neal McCluskey: Where is that 10 Billion Going and to Whom and What ?**

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**8.10.10 - Michael F. Shaughnessy - Even absolutely worst-case scenarios show only a very small fraction of public school employees facing layoffs, and when you compare staffing and academic achievement trends it is clear that we have far too many public school employees, not too few**

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**1) Neal, apparently we have had another bailout- 10 Billion for teachers. I guess our Senators and Congressmen believe that keeping teachers in**

**the classroom will help them in November- your thoughts?**

As of the moment I'm answering this question there is no official \$10 billion bailout. One seems very likely, though, as Speaker Pelosi has House members scurrying back from campaigning to vote for it.

Unfortunately, while I can't see into legislators' hearts, it is very difficult to conclude that the major motivation for this is anything other than to get teachers energized to campaign for Democrats in the midterm elections. Educationally, there's just no justification for it: Even absolutely worst-case scenarios show only a very small fraction of public school employees facing layoffs, and when you compare staffing and academic achievement trends it is clear that we have far too many public school employees, not too few. Since 1970 staff-per-student –

- including teachers – has gone up about tenfold, while achievement has been almost completely flat.

**2) Neal, I have to discuss with you the observation that test scores have stagnated. Is it that test scores have stagnated, or is it that there are more and more children who are bilingual in the schools, more and more children with disabilities and handicaps in the schools, or simply greater heterogeneity in the classrooms?**

It is true that there have been demographic changes that would likely decrease test scores, but there have also been trends that would increase them. On net, as [Jay Greene and Greg Forster have itemized](#), it appears the changes should have increased test scores.

**3) Is there any evidence that this money will go directly to teachers salaries, or perhaps to computers or perhaps to administrators salaries?**

According to the legislation, the money should only be used for retaining or hiring public-school employees, which would include both teachers and administrators. The money is not supposed to go to anything else.

**4) How is it that public school employment has increased faster than enrollment? Is there any logical rational, reasonable explanation for this?**

An educational argument – that smaller class-sizes produce better results – has certainly spurred a lot of hiring, and it has significant intuitive appeal. It has also, though, been well debunked, especially when large-scale reduction has been implemented, such as in California. The other explanation is that in our government-monopoly education system public-school employee unions have a huge amount of political power, and they constantly fight for new programs, smaller class sizes, and more and more employees to staff all things new and old.

**5) In many instances, some of our illustrious colleagues, who shall not be mentioned by name tend to "blame special education". Is there any break down in the data as to how much money goes to special education? Or perhaps to administrators?**

While there have been big employment increases across the public-schooling board, the largest explosion over the last several decades has been in teacher aides. They've gone from roughly 1.7 percent of total public-school employees in 1969-70 to 11.6 percent in 2007. As for special education, it has accounted for increasingly large percentages of education spending, but the change since the 1970s doesn't at all explain why overall spending and staffing have increased so markedly.

**6) I see our good friend Andrew Coulson has prepared the statistics and [data and graphs that you have provided](#). What other data is available and relevant that should be examined?**

I think those charts tell the story pretty succinctly, but you could also look at graduation rates, international comparisons, or other outcomes measures to see that we have gotten essentially zero return on all the money we've been spending on public schools.

**7) What do you suspect will be the long term payoff in terms of special interest votes? Will this help the**

**Democrats in November? Or do you think voters will go to the polls and as Ray Stevens sings "Throw the Bums Out"?**

I'd say never underestimate the power of teacher unions to affect elections. After all, the NEA and AFT combined have about 4.7 million members. That said, I sense that Americans have about had it with out-of-control spending, especially when it is so transparently aimed at buying votes. As a result, I'll be optimistic and say this will backfire on the Dems.

**8) You have written a cogent book about Federal involvement in the Schools. Can you tell us about the book and how this concept is creeping into our classrooms and schools?**

The book is [Feds in the Classroom: How Big Government Corrupts, Cripples, and Compromises American Education](#), and this bailout is case-in-point for the fundamental reason everyone should want government out of education. In the end, government schooling works for the people employed by it – not the parents and children it's supposed to serve – because the employees are the most motivated and easily organized to affect education politics. Unfortunately, the one thing I wasn't able to answer in the book is how many more billions of taxpayer dollars we have to see thrown at education special interests for purely political reasons before we demand an end to socialized education. Maybe \$10 billion will finally put us over the edge.