



09-07-2011

'Teachers, educators, parents, and even children know better'



DPB contributing writer John deVille is a 16-year history and philosophy teacher at Franklin High School in Macon County. John is a proud NCAE member and a former Teacher of the Year from his school district. Email John at jdeville@gmail.com.

When I read the paper this morning I was saddened and then angry as I remembered the promises made in the heat of the 2010 campaign by candidates running for the General Assembly. They promised to be “job creators.”

Later we were told by these same men and women that killing the one cent sales tax would spur investment and the creation of private sector jobs. We were assured that their cuts made to public education would hold teachers, their classrooms, and our children harmless.

My newspaper tells another story:

“The state's unemployment rose above 10 percent in July -- its highest level in nearly a year. The uptick in unemployed workers was led by the loss of 11,800 local government jobs. A majority of those lost jobs involved teachers and other educational workers, according to data released this morning by the state Employment Security Commission. Another 300 State government workers lost their jobs. Statewide unemployment rate rose from 9.9 percent in June to 10.1 percent in July. The unemployment rate hasn't been this high since last August.”

So even though the private sector created 6,900 jobs during this same period, we are left with a net loss of 4,900 jobs across our state. So much for job creation, so much for protecting the classroom. Senator Jim Davis (my local senator) supported a budget that hemorrhaged jobs in public education, hurt children in my community, and divested in our state's economic future.

Contrary to the statements presented by Senator Davis and his colleagues, the state budget for 2011-12 **did not** fully fund classroom teachers and teacher assistants. To prevent having to select which cuts to be made in a school system, the General Assembly instead required each system to return to the state a significant percentage of their allocated operational resources (\$428,000,000), better known as discretionary funds. The thinking here is transparent – if monies are cut to the locals but the locals wield the sword to balance their curtailed budgets, somehow the General Assembly can hope to maintain its innocence in the matter. Teachers, parents, and even children know better.

By this process, they actually placed the responsibility for making specific cuts on the shoulders of superintendents and local school boards. Since over 80% of education dollars are in people, this meant having to cut teachers, assistant principals, and support staffs or not replacing them as vacancies occur.

Macon County Schools was required to return \$1.25 million on top of \$905,000 last year and \$600,000 the year before. These were the very funds that assisted in paying for teachers, state/federal mandated programs, supplies, equipment and student transportation. Prior to these cuts, Macon County had already lost 22 classroom positions over the past three years in anticipation of the severe budget cuts which did indeed ensue.

Jackson County returned \$1.2 million; and, this summer, as teacher vacancies occurred, a number of those positions were not replaced, thus causing class sizes to be increased and two of its pre-school programs were shut down. Clay County has had to return \$400,000; and, because of required reversions to the state over the past three years, they have had to cut twenty-five positions.

In each of the above counties, if it had not been for the federal (Obama) stimulus package and the wise judgment of our county commissioners and school boards to place funds into reserve, this school year's challenges would be even more dramatic. Next school year, however, those reserves will have been depleted and even more drastic cuts will have to be made, causing a dilution in our children's education and impacting their future.

The broken promises and assurances made by Senator Davis, the local Tea Party faithful, and the Art Pope-controlled General Assembly have done real damage to educators thrown out of work as well as to the potential for educational success of our children.

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Brian Lewis, Government Relations Manager • brian.lewis@ncae.org
North Carolina Association of Educators
700 South Salisbury Street • Raleigh, North Carolina 27601
(919) 832-3000 or (800) 662-7924 extension 255 or (919) 413-2580 mobile

