

Substantial Disruption



Teacher, Leave Them Kids Alone

By Mike Tully

Imagine the federal government decided to devote one and a quarter billion dollars a year to help state educational institutions train teachers. These are many of the teachers who will spend time with our children, helping them learn the skills they will need to navigate the journey to adulthood. It's an important and challenging responsibility that not everybody can perform successfully. They are charged with our nation's future, one inquisitive mind at a time. So, imagine the federal government understands the challenge and decides to help. Would it not make sense to ensure the dollars dedicated to the process are spent wisely?

The government thought so and, in late 2016, [adopted regulations](#) to gauge the success of teacher training programs, both in terms of the programs themselves and the experience of the teachers they produced. The Department of Education regulations applied to teacher preparation programs, implementing the accountability provisions of Title II of the Higher Education Act (HEA) and amending regulations relating to the federal Teacher Education Assistance for the College and Higher Education grant program. The Department estimates there are 27,914 teacher preparation programs at 1,490 higher education institutions nationwide. According to the [Hogan Lovells law firm](#), "Programs that do not measure up—as determined by the states—risk losing access to federal student financial aid under Title IV of the HEA." There was flexibility built into the criteria, so that individual states could determine how their evaluation programs were designed and operated. It was an efficient and responsible approach that was created to make sure the public funds were spent wisely and that our children derived the maximum benefit from the expenditure. So, naturally, the new Republican government got rid of it. Congress [voted to kill the regulation](#) and President Trump [signed off on it](#) in their zeal to reverse as many Obama administration actions as possible. Fiscal responsibility and our children's welfare got lost in the backwash of partisanship.

Some states, hopefully, will step up for the kids and make sure programs supported by the federal dollars are well spent and that children derive the maximum benefit. Unfortunately, my home State of Arizona will not be one of them. Our Republican legislature and Koch-fueled Governor act like unformed adults unable to shake off residual animosity toward teachers who scolded them in their childhood. They have predicated Arizona education policy on knee-capping the teaching profession.

Arizona has the [lowest teachers' pay](#) in the nation and legislation recently passed was a metaphorical pie in the face of every K-12 teacher in the State, not to mention students and parents. Actually, a couple of pies. First of all, the Republican-dominated Legislature voted to increase teacher pay in Arizona by the equivalent of pocket change: a whopping one percent. As the [Capital Times](#) reported, teachers were not impressed. The unwillingness of Arizona Republican legislators to support a decent rate of pay has led, not surprisingly, to a [shortage of teachers](#). There are two ways to address a lack of teachers, one smart and one stupid. Guess

which option Arizona's Republican legislature and Governor opted for? (Spoiler alert: *they're with stupid.*) The smart way to address a teacher shortage is to increase teacher pay sufficiently to attract and retain qualified teachers. The stupid way is to increase the number of persons eligible to teach in the public schools by eliminating the traditional certification requirements. The Legislature passed, and Governor Ducey signed [legislation](#) that essentially did away with reasonable quality controls to ensure that our kids are taught by qualified individuals and opened the door to marginally qualified, if not unqualified individuals. The legislation states that these newly minted teacher wannabes have "at least two years to demonstrate professional knowledge proficiency" and, if they fail to do so, *may* have their teaching certificate temporarily suspended while they are given more time to get their act together. If that sounds reasonable, consider this question: how long is a two-year period in the K-12 school experience and how much damage can a bad teacher do in that time? The Legislature has decided to conduct a radical experiment and Arizona's public-school children and their parents are the unwilling guinea pigs.

The Legislature did pass what one teacher referred to as "[a huge bright spot](#)," a necessary change to the teacher evaluation system. In Arizona, teachers are evaluated based on student test results. The problem is that many of the students are tested in subjects the teacher did not teach, so the test results did not reflect actual teaching performance. As Joe Thomas, president of the Arizona Education Association [stated](#), "I never taught those kids — it makes no sense." The Legislature agreed and passed a correction, Senate Bill 1209, by a vote of 80-3. It was a rare outbreak of common sense and bipartisanship in Arizona, which was apparently too much for our narrow-minded Governor, [who vetoed it](#). According to his spokesman, Ducey, who has never taught, thought the existing system that everybody hates "[is working fine](#)." Right. Ignore the icebergs; rearrange the deck chairs.

Republicans at the state and national level are doing everything they can to denigrate teachers and degrade their profession and my beloved Arizona, tragically, is at Ground Zero of Operation Stupid. And, in education, more than any other profession, stupid is as stupid does.