

fering more money, more recognition, more control over their work? After all, schools don't give stock options.

Money isn't the primary issue, says Datta. He lured talented young scientists into teaching in San Francisco. But frustration with bureaucracy drove them out of the classroom and into high-tech industry.

More important than raising teacher pay is raising teachers' ability to be effective, says Darling-Hammond. "The challenge is to create school environments where teachers can do the job well."

The good news is that Gray Davis, who longs to be California's education governor, has named a former teacher, Gary Hart, as his chief education adviser. After serving in the Legislature, where he chaired the Senate Education Committee, Hart became co-director of the California State University Institute for Education Reform, which has focused on ways to recruit, train, retain, and retrain good teachers.

Hart understands that teacher quality is job one for California schools. He will back credentialing reforms, funding for on-the-job help for new teachers, intensive training for experienced teachers.

The hardest challenge will be to make public schools places where the best and brightest can put their talents to use.

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## School Unions Shortchange Students

La Rae G. Munk

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"When school children start paying union dues, that's when I'll start representing the interests of school children." These candid words attributed to the late Al Shanker, longtime president of the American Federation of Teachers, remind us of an important but often-forgotten

fact: School employee unions exist first and foremost to bargain wages, hours, and terms and conditions of employment for their members, and there is nothing wrong with that. But the education of children is, by definition, a secondary consideration for union officials.

It is teachers and school boards, not unions, who are responsible for students' educations. Unfortunately, too many collective bargaining agreements between school districts and unions allow union interests to ignore, or even conflict with, what's best for students. Let's look at just three examples that illustrate the point.

Most union contracts discourage teachers from excelling in the classroom by paying all teachers according to a single salary "schedule." The single pay schedule does not distinguish between mediocre or ineffective teaching and the extra effort put in by the many dedicated educators who often sacrifice their personal time to help struggling students. Teachers are paid the same regardless of their performance, so there is no financial incentive for them to work to be their best. As one former school administrator recently wrote in *Education Week*, "Only the altruism of the best teachers prevents the public school system from collapsing."

Though most teachers do not rank salary as their highest priority, the single pay schedule does hurt morale, makes teachers feel unappreciated, and prevents districts from attracting and retaining the best educators, which in turn hurts the quality of students' education. Unions should drop their opposition to the many school boards who want to reward their best teachers with performance-based salaries but are prevented from doing so by shortsighted mandatory collective bargaining agreements.

At the same time that good teachers are being slighted, bad teachers' jobs and benefits are being protected by unions and union contracts even to the point of absurdity. One of the most outrageous examples of this involved a tenured gym teacher from Ann Arbor, who taught until 1980, when five of his female students testified that he had sexually molested them. The teacher was fired, challenged his dismissal, and his union, the Michigan Education Association (MEA), took up the case. In 1984, while the case was still pending, the former teacher got into a violent argument with his wife and murdered her on their front lawn with an axe. The MEA continued to press the case and in 1993, after 13 years of litigation, won \$200,000 in back pay for the convicted murderer (for more information on this and other cases, see [www.mackinac.org/mea/](http://www.mackinac.org/mea/)).

School districts fearing such costly and unreasonable legal action from unions are often reluctant to dismiss unqualified teachers from the

classroom, jeopardizing students' educations and even their safety. Unions should end practices that interfere with administrators who seek to discharge clearly unqualified employees and instead make their top priorities teacher training and development.

Finally, unions often propose contract language to reduce the number of students in each classroom as a way to improve educational performance. They argue that smaller classes will allow teachers to give each student more personal attention, helping to boost learning and test scores. While studies comparing larger and smaller classes are inconclusive about the efficacy of this approach, one thing is clear: The class size issue is easily exploited by some unions to gain greater pay for their members, or even to gain more dues-paying members.

Smaller class sizes are more expensive because districts must hire and pay more teachers to reduce student-to-teacher ratios. But unions do not mind if teachers handle larger classes provided they can bargain for more money for the teachers. For example, the Caro school district's collective bargaining agreement requires that a teacher be paid \$4 extra per day for every student above the contractually set maximum class size. So a class with two students over the union-negotiated maximum would net its teacher an additional \$176 during the typical month.

How does this hurt education? Professor Caroline Hoxby explained it this way in her 1996 study of compulsory unionism and public school employees: "Teachers unions increase school inputs [costs] but reduce productivity sufficiently to have a negative overall effect on student performance." In other words, the more money that is spent on union demands (in the form of either employee benefits or bureaucratic work rules), the less there is available for scholastic and educational materials for students.

A union's primary duty is to its members (as it should be), but a school district's obligation is to voters, taxpayers, parents, and students. When school employee unions' interests outweigh the responsibilities of school boards during the bargaining process, it is local schoolchildren who often get shortchanged.