



# Barbara Hollingsworth: Importing teachers in the District of Columbia

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District of Columbia Schools Chancellor Michelle Rhee is in hot water for firing 266 teachers and administrators Oct. 2, just weeks into the new school year and only a few months after inexplicably hiring hundreds of new teachers. But there may have been a method to her apparent madness.

According to the federal government's Foreign Labor Certification Data Center, D.C. Public Schools submitted 46 labor condition applications in 2007 and 2008, giving Rhee authority to import hundreds of foreign teachers on H1B visas without having to make any attempt to find eligible Americans.

With the jobless rate now topping 10 percent, tens of thousands of American engineers, scientists and other professionals would be more than happy to try a second career teaching. But like many of their blue-collar brethren who watched their jobs disappear overseas, the deck is now stacked against experienced domestic white-collar workers as well.

For years, we've been told that the thousands of immigrants admitted to the United States on such visas each year were needed for jobs Americans couldn't - or wouldn't - do, such as computer programming or picking lettuce. We're now supposed to believe that teaching K-12 falls into that category.

Of course, it's no coincidence that young immigrants are willing to work for far less than their American counterparts; the wage scale for hundreds of novice teachers in D.C., average age 32, is near the bottom of the District's unionized pay schedule. But when USA Today reports that there are not enough jobs for all the students graduating from U.S. colleges and universities, why are employers - including school districts - still allowed to import foreigners?

An eerily similar scenario unfolded at the Recovery School District in Baton Rouge, La., after Hurricane Katrina. Just two years after RSD Superintendent Paul Vallas (formerly head of Chicago's public schools) complained about a serious shortage of teachers, he announced major

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job cuts - and mainly older Americans were let go.

Guess how they were replaced. Lourdes Navarro, who ran a teacher "bodyshop," is accused of illegally withholding up to 20 percent of the pay of the young, inexperienced Filipino teachers she brought into the United States to staff RSD's low-performing schools.

Rob Sanchez, author of the Job Destruction Newsletter, says that teachers union officials have been reluctant "to challenge the liberal consensus that immigration is a good thing. As long as the imported teachers join the union, they are willing to sacrifice their American members."

Since visa holders can easily be coerced into joining the union and forced to do whatever the union bosses demand, union officials didn't bother to protect the 20,000 or so American educators who lost their teaching jobs to foreign competitors -- many of whom they were forced to train.

Teachers unions have enjoyed a stranglehold on urban school districts for decades, but have failed to deliver a quality education to children who need it most. Importing more union members from overseas will not solve this fundamental problem.

What urban school districts really need are right-to-work laws that empower school administrators to hire professional Americans with college degrees in needed core subject areas who are willing to give teaching a chance -- with a waiver to pay them entry-level salaries.

Their collective years of experience in the real world, extensive knowledge of American culture and history, and wisdom acquired over decades in the work force are an invaluable resource that should not be squandered.

And please, don't tell me you can't find any.

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