

I would like to speak to the issue of unemployment benefits for classified school employees.

First of all, there is the obvious issue of unfairness. No other “seasonal” workers are exempt from being able to collect unemployment benefits when the employer shuts down. It is in fact, a forced layoff.

While I don’t believe that teachers and other certified staff members are overpaid, they certainly make a living wage and for the number of days they work, (few more than classified employees) they do pretty well comparatively.

Perhaps more importantly, is the impact that the denial of unemployment benefits has on classified school employees. To begin with, classified employees are just as hard working, conscientious, and giving of their own time as certified staff and administrators and in many cases, more so. Yet, they are not compensated in an equitable manner for their contribution to student success and the education system.

Most classified school employees are limited to working 6.5 hours or less per day and many, if not most, districts have equalized payroll where a portion of compensation earned is deferred until summer resulting in 12 equal pay periods.

Now, imagine working for 10 months and earning \$18,000 a year. Your \$1800 a month is now reduced to \$1500 a month with equalized checks. That is before taxes and deductions. It is pretty hard to pay rent AND buy groceries or raise children on that kind of income. For many classified employees this is a best case scenario because you are considered pretty lucky if you work 6.5 hours a day. As a result, many classified employees qualify for food stamps or other public assistance.

If you don’t have equalized pay and are living off of \$1800 a month throughout the school year, the summer is when you get behind in all of your bills or are forced to move or quit your job. It is pretty hard to put away money to live on for the summer when you are struggling to make ends meet.

Not many employers want to hire a 40 or 50 year old for summer work so while it may sound like an option, for most people it is not.

We lose a lot of high quality employees because they cannot afford to work in a school district.

Now is the time to end this inequity. You must also know that districts that currently cover employees with insurance benefits year round, threaten to discontinue summer insurance coverage if employees collect unemployment. That should not be allowed.

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