

## When Is Enough, Enough?

By: Dr. Sue Skidmore

In 1890, I was 19-years old. I could read and cipher as well as anyone I knew. My parents were struggling financially, and I was weary of tending to my younger siblings. I answered an ad: Teacher Wanted; within six weeks I received an invitation to teach in Singerman—part of the Arizona territory. After several weeks of traveling, I arrived in Singerman; I was reeking of sweat and covered with dust. As I disembarked from the wagon, I was welcomed by several men, AKA school board, who escorted me to the Widow Johnson's one-room adobe house. They posed a number of questions about my moral character, my family upbringing, and my religious faith. Of course, none of them asked me if I could write a paragraph because they couldn't read it if I did. They pronounced me, "Suitable to teach." In their contractual terms, I was forbidden from marrying and from drinking alcohol. Further, I was expected to exude high moral behavior and to attend regular Sunday services at their only church.

I readily agreed—probably, a decision I should have thought about it, but I was young, eager, and enthusiastic. Little did I know I'd have to be at school early to carry in firewood, stoke the fire, shoo varmints, wasps, and an occasional snake from the schoolhouse. My students were delightful, even the boys whose attendance was so sporadic I was frustrated. Yet, every one of my students learn to read and cipher. I spent five years in **my** schoolhouse, until a I met Mr. Mount. He was so handsome I knew I wanted to marry him. When I informed the school board of my intentions, I was fired. No longer would I receive \$10 a month and free room and board at the Widow Johnson's.

Fast forward. My great, great, great (oh, I forget how many greats I need to add) granddaughter is a teacher. Once in a while, she visits my grave and recounts her tales. Unlike me, she has a bachelor's degree and a master's degree in elementary education. True, I'm old and very forgetful, but her visits seem to me to have increased. And while I'm delighted to see her, I'm saddened by her despair.

Allow me to share what she's told me. Perhaps, those of you among the living can help ease her pain and show her she is a member of the most important profession in the world; there's nothing without a teacher.

Please don't infer her list is necessarily a state and local mandate—she says it's a societal expectation.

1. At age 5, every child must come to school willing and ready to learn. All children must read by the end of third grade. The teachers are held accountable if Johnny can't read.
2. At the minimum breakfast and lunch will be provided to all children; those who can't afford meals will be either partially or entirely given to all them. The teacher must monitor these repasts.
3. All children will dress appropriately. If they don't, the teacher must enforce the dress code.
4. The teacher must instruct on drug abuse, gang membership, and sex education.
5. All children will have access to enriching educational materials in their home. If they don't have said materials the teacher shall send these home each night with the child in need.
6. Teachers must hold parent conferences. If 80% of the parents don't come, the teacher must document how she/he has tried to hunt them down.
7. Teachers must test, test, and test. Classroom scores are compared with school scores, school scores, are compared with state scores. State scores are compared with national scores. National scores are compared with international scores. International scores will soon be compared with interplanetary scores. According to my granddaughter, the bottom line is: it is her sole responsibility to ensure each child learns. (I so wished I could tell her, my children didn't even come to school during harvesting time! How could I be held accountable?)

Then my granddaughter wept. "Now, I've been told to go to gun school. Yep, I must carry a gun to protect my students in case some crazy person comes into my room."

Ye gods! I'm overwhelmed. Enough is enough; she can't do it all. I'm resting peacefully, and it's far too early for my granddaughter to join me. I need a favor. If my granddaughter teaches your child, will you send her a card or nominate her for a UPC teacher appreciation award?