

## Teachers fear new state laws weaken job security

Arizona teachers are worried new changes in state law are chipping away at their job security.

For example, the deadline for [school districts](#) to sign contracts with their returning teachers is gone. In most circumstances, schools had to have contracts in place by May 15 of the previous school year. Now, teachers may not know they have a teaching contract until the first day of the next school year.

Districts that can offer signed contracts early could easily “poach” needed teachers from other districts, said attorney Susan Sendrow of the Arizona Education Association.

“It puts everyone in a bizarre position,” she said. “(A teacher) who wants to plan for his or her family can't wait around to see what the district is going to do, so you grab the ready contract. It's a chaos-producing consequence.”

Also gone is the law commonly known as the “right of recall”, which required school districts to consider seniority when rehiring teachers who had been laid off.

While state lawmakers eliminated the “right of recall,” they created a new law that prohibits districts from using seniority to determine which teachers are laid off in the first place. Before this law was passed, the importance of a teacher's seniority during a reduction in staff had been left up to local governing boards and varied from district to district, Sendrow said.

“A (district's) policy would often say, first they would look at (a teacher's) credentials and experience and contributions to the district and, then, all other things being equal, seniority,” Sendrow said. “They can't do that now.”

Legislators changed the laws to make it easier for school districts to layoff and rehire teachers while the state is cutting school budgets.

“We think it makes sense, especially when we're in tough times,” said Janice Palmer, lobbyist for the Arizona School Boards Association. “We need to make sure we hire the teachers that we need, not just seniority being the first classification.”

The law takes affect in November. Watch for stories about changes to laws governing state teacher policies by Republic education reporter Alex Bloom.

— Pat Kossan