

New York City schools to ax 3,200 jobs

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One day after New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg sent 30-day layoff notices to 3,400 municipal workers, schools chancellor and Bloomberg appointee Joel Klein announced plans on Tuesday to lay off 3,200 more city school workers at the end of June. The latest job cuts will affect mostly part-time paraprofessionals who perform work such as lunchroom supervision and hallway monitoring. Board of Education officials said that the 3,200 part-time jobs being cut represent the equivalent of 1,958 full time positions, for an annual savings of \$180 million.

City officials also released a breakdown of the layoffs announced Monday. The Sanitation Department has been especially hard hit, with 941 jobs cut, along with 848 at the Administration for Children's Services, 382 civilian positions at the Fire Department, and 109 at the Department of Homeless Services, among others.

The job slashes announced so far this week add up to only a part of the \$1 billion in additional cuts that Bloomberg has ordered from city agencies in face of the likely refusal of state lawmakers to approve the re-imposition of an income tax on suburban commuters. Cuts announced earlier in the year have already eliminated 1,000 jobs, mostly through attrition, at the Board of Education headquarters and at the School Construction Authority.

Ironically, the layoff announcement came on the same day that Klein and state Education Commissioner Richard Mills announced incentives to recruit 11,000 new teachers for city schools in the fall, particularly for math, science and special education in schools regarded as failing. However, while job cuts in the classroom have been off the table up until now, there is no assurance that layoffs will not also be imposed on sections of teachers in the fall. Their current contract contains a no layoff clause, but it expires at the end of June.

The one-two punch of layoff announcements is

designed to intimidate the city workforce, making them wonder who will be next. Indeed, Bloomberg aides have hinted that up to 10,000 additional layoffs may be announced as early as next week, when Bloomberg releases a revised budget plan.

The hard-nosed approach of the Bloomberg administration is meant to impress upon the workers that the city's \$3.5 billion budget deficit is going to be resolved at their expense, no matter what. Any notion of job security or raises in upcoming contracts is to be thrown out the window.

As part of his get tough policy, Bloomberg rejected proposals from the city unions' umbrella group, the Municipal Labor Committee (MLC), to achieve \$600 million in savings through methods that would undermine working conditions and jeopardize their retirement funds, but would not actually rewrite their contracts. Their proposals included lending the city money from union pension funds and incentives for early retirement.

Bloomberg, however, will accept nothing less than the longer workdays and health care cost-sharing that he has demanded, seeking to establish the principle that any union contract can be ripped up at will in the name of balancing the budget.

While the layoff announcements are designed to step up the pressure on the union bureaucrats to get their members into line, it would be a mistake to see the announcements simply as a negotiating ploy. A mayoral spokesman underscored this point when he said Tuesday that it was now too late to rescind the layoffs, even if the unions gave Bloomberg everything he asked for, due to the depth of the budget crisis.

Union leaders are reacting with bewilderment. Typical is Randi Weingarten, head of the New York City teachers' union as well as the MLC, who told reporters, "We do not understand why the mayor has basically slapped our face."

For many years the municipal union bureaucrats have pushed through wage freezes or increases together with deteriorating conditions in the name of saving jobs. They now fear they will be unable to push through the wholesale destruction of both working conditions and jobs that is being required of them without losing control of the workers they supposedly represent.



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