

# Detroit schools plan new round of closings, layoffs

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The Detroit Public School District's "emergency financial manager" has announced that up to a third of the city's schools will be shut down over the next two years, with thousands of layoffs of teachers and staff.

Robert Bobb was appointed by Michigan's Democratic Governor Jennifer Granholm in January to impose massive cuts in order to balance the school district's budget deficit. In a report released on Wednesday, Bobb said that the district will face a \$300 million deficit by the end of the fiscal year.

Bobb said that about 20 schools will be closed before the beginning of the next school year in the fall, with up to 30 more the following year. He cited cost overruns due to "excessive overtime" and unbudgeted personnel costs, in addition to corruption and spending on unapproved services.

The emergency financial manager, who is paid \$260,000 a year for his services, told Detroit's WWJ news radio station that previous school superintendents should have implemented cuts more quickly. "A number of employees should have been laid off as part of the 2009 budget," he said.

Bobb ruled out solving the city's budget problems by increasing revenues. "We will definitely have to reduce spending," he said. He did not give figures on the number of teachers and personnel who will be laid off.

The announcement of a new round of school closings comes only a few years after 51 schools were closed beginning in January 2007. These closures have exacerbated an education crisis in Detroit, a city that has been devastated by the destruction of hundreds of thousands of jobs in the auto industry.

Official unemployment in Detroit stands at 22 percent, and the "Motor City" is now the poorest large city in the United States. Massive corporate tax cuts,

combined with the collapse of the auto industry, have drained the city of funds and starved essential social services, such as education.

The crisis of public education is not unique to Detroit, however. In nearby Pontiac, Michigan, the school board took the step last month of laying off all of its teachers and personnel in public schools, and is expected to rehire less than half of them next year. In Flint, Michigan, the school district will lay off 257 teachers at the end of the year, about a fifth of the total number of teachers in the district.

The state of California is carrying out major cuts in public education spending in order to balance its budget. In Florida, the Orange County school system recently announced a major budget deficit that would require the sacking of up to 700 teachers. States across the country face a similar situation.

The claim that there is not enough money to fund decent public education is a lie. Last month, the Obama administration unveiled a new program to bail out banks and large investors that places \$1 trillion of government financing on the line. This is more than 3,000 times the Detroit school budget deficit.

The Obama administration is touting \$44 billion in education money released this week as part of the government's "stimulus" package, but this financing is coming with many strings attached.

Education Secretary Arne Duncan said last week that the administration will "come down like a ton of bricks" on any school districts that do not use the funds to implement right-wing reforms. The demands of the administration include the implementation of merit pay for teachers, the expansion of charter schools, and the enforcement of strict testing standards under the No Child Left Behind Act.

Bobb has indicated his support for many of these

proposals. He has said that he will not use the funds received by Detroit to cover the budget deficit, as this would prevent the types of reforms needed to achieve longer term viability. The school district will attempt to press for many concessions from teachers after their contract expires in June.



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