

Los Angeles schools suffer more job cuts

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In the largest set of personnel reductions this school year, Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) laid off just over 1,000 non-teaching staff on December 1. An additional 1,600 had their pay reduced, and 2,040 were transferred to different sites at the same pay grade. In total, almost one in six non-teaching employees have been affected by this reorganization.

The cuts are a continuation of prior layoffs, furloughs, pay cuts, and a shortened school year made by the district in an effort to cover its growing budget deficits. The most recent cuts target school nurses, librarians, plant managers, assistant principals and other workers responsible for maintaining a safe and effective environment for students.

The cutbacks will have a significant impact on schools throughout the district. A teacher at Los Angeles High School, which has about 2,200 students, told the WSWs, “Our main concerns have been safety and cleanliness. Due to our challenges in this area, fewer parents of girls are willing to send their children to our school; thus we have a boy to girl ratio of about 2 to 1.

“The cuts have a direct bearing on the atmosphere of the school,” she said. “Our loss of one assistant principal, five clerks and five custodians is of concern.”

Another teacher at Tweedy Elementary in South Gate said, “Our plant manager has been sent to a different site, and at least one of our custodians has been laid off. Our librarian’s hours have been cut, and her lost hours have been taken over by a lower paid assistant. Our students are really sad to have our plant manager, George, leave. He was friendly and involved with them.”

The latest cuts, like those that have come before, are being implemented without any serious opposition from the trade union, the United Teachers of Los Angeles. In a move to dissipate outrage over these continuing cuts to education, the UTLA held a rally of

some 700 people outside of LAUSD headquarters on November 30. The rally’s goal was to direct anger locally at the school board’s excesses and to turn attention away from the broader attack on public education.

The only written demand presented by the UTLA since the rally is that LAUSD apply the Federal Education Jobs Bill funds—\$103 million, equivalent to funding for around 2,000 jobs—to this year’s budget instead of next year’s.

According to the district’s superintendent, Ramon Cortines, next year’s budget faces a \$142 million shortfall. This estimate does not even take into account the expected end of federal stimulus funding, which the superintendent has said is currently supporting approximately 12,000 jobs.

The deficits are likely to get much worse. At both the state and federal level, there are increasing bipartisan demands for austerity. California as a whole is facing an estimated \$25.4 billion budget deficit, and Democratic Governor-elect Jerry Brown—who was backed by the trade unions—has stated: “My philosophy has always been one of frugality and living within our means.” California’s schools can expect further cuts to the minimal state funding guaranteed by Proposition 98.

On his web site, Brown champions austerity measures he enacted during his previous terms as governor. In an attack on state workers, Brown vetoed pay raises for state employees twice and made pension cuts. All this demonstrates that politicians of both political parties are determined to force through austerity measures. The only debate left for them is how to make the working class pay for the budget deficits while corporations continue to rake in record profits.

Worldwide, politicians have been working with unions to place the burden of the current financial crisis on the workers and all levels of public education. In

Britain, university tuition fees are being tripled, and there is to be a pay freeze on all public workers, including teachers, earning more than ?21,000 (\$33,000) a year. In response, the National Union of Teachers has issued a statement discouraging walkouts. Similar attacks on education, with union complicity, have occurred in France, Italy, Australia, and many other countries.

Accompanying these global attacks on education are moves towards privatizing public schools. The logic behind corporate support of these attacks is clear. By underfunding public schools and underpaying administrators, teachers, and staff, conditions at public schools will only get worse. Poor test scores are used as a pretext to bring in the “innovation” of the market through expanding charter schools and shutting down public schools.

In the Los Angeles area, the political establishment and the mass media have launched a vicious campaign to blame teachers for the crisis in public education. The *Los Angeles Times* recently published a ranking of teachers by “value-added” ratings. In response a teacher, who prefers to remain anonymous, wrote the following to the *Times*:

“I’m tired of teacher scapegoating. I never thought I’d see it come to this after 27 years in this field: a public ‘flogging’ of teachers. Can you imagine what it’s going to be like after you publish these lists of teachers and test scores? This is the most counterproductive behavior yet: the oversimplification of educational outcomes based on testing within one very limited time period in a students’ education.

“One thing hasn’t changed historically, though. The institutions of our society reflect the ills of society, and those in charge believe the solution is to point the finger at the most vulnerable, the underpaid, overworked teacher. How ironic—teachers go into this profession to be of service to others, and get blamed for the downfalls of our society.”

The *Times* declined to print the letter.



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