

Long Beach, California: Public schools targeted for massive cuts, layoffs

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Under the pretext of balancing the budget, California Democratic Governor Jerry Brown, in collaboration with city and local governments, as well as the state workers' unions, is preparing to implement massive cuts to pensions, public education, health care, and other social programs. In anticipation, school boards throughout the state are announcing school closures, eliminating programs and issuing layoff notices.

In a foretaste of the sweeping cuts to come across California, the Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD) authorized the sending out of nearly 1,200 preliminary layoff notices, or "pink slips," to teachers, counselors, and administrative staff. Over the past two months alone, the district has announced \$60 million in cuts.

Long Beach, once known as the "International City," is home to a large and growing population of immigrants from throughout the Pacific Rim and Central America. More than 87,000 students attend LBUSD schools, making the system the third largest in the state. Since 2008, LBUSD has slashed spending by more than \$200 million.

The latest round of cuts features school closures, an increase in kindergarten- through third-grade class sizes from an average of 20 to 30 students, and the reduction or elimination of educational programs that teach computer, health, and service skills. There are predictions that class sizes could reach as high as 40 in the coming years.

WSWS reporters recently spoke to teachers and school staff in Long Beach about the situation.

A teacher who has worked for 20 years at Burroughs Elementary School, which was just identified as one of the schools that will be shuttered, told the WSWS, "Our campus is beautiful. We have grass and trees. There are only 297 kids, so it's like a family. The

teachers are familiar with all the kids, and the kids know each other. And now they're fearful about the changes; they're feeling very nervous because they're going to get split up."

"I have 35 students in my classroom. My goal is to have a personal conversation with each child every day. But when you have 35 kids, I can't even give them two minutes of my time with all the material we have to get through and then get them ready for testing. I have a wide span of levels, from first to fifth grade levels. We have no specialists for ELD [English Language Development] kids."

Another teacher who had worked at the same school for 26 years said, "The district's been sending their people here with their clipboards and drawings of the school. They're coming in, examining things—and we haven't even left yet. We considered that very insensitive."

The public employee unions in Long Beach, which supported Brown and the Democratic Party in recent elections, have refused to mount any struggle against the closures and layoffs, while at the same time agreeing to major concessions from their members.

The Long Beach chapter of the California School Employees Association (CSEA), which represents custodians, maintenance workers, and other school support staff, recently entered into an agreement that raises employee health care contributions, suspends salary increases based on years of experience, and includes additional "furlough days," or unpaid leave.

The union's prostration before the cuts has elicited praise from state officials. "I deeply appreciate the willingness of CSEA's leadership to consider some reasonable compromises during these lean times for public schools," LBUSD Superintendent Chris Steinhauser said in a statement.

Asked about the union, a school custodian with 11 years experience in the district told the WSWs, “I know how they work—you pay your union dues, and you get laid off.”

The teachers and other school staff who provided interviews urged WSWs reporters not to use their names out of fear of being targeted in the next round of layoffs.



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