

Harrisburg, Pennsylvania schools eliminate kindergarten

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There will no longer be kindergarten for students of the Harrisburg school district. Harrisburg, the capital of Pennsylvania, is planning to eliminate all sports programs, bands, clubs and art programs.

Thirty teachers will lose their jobs along with as many support staff, according to a proposed budget passed Wednesday by the Harrisburg Board of School Directors. Class size would be forced up to 30 students per class in the elementary grades and 35 in the high school.

Harrisburg, like all the school districts in Pennsylvania, is facing a massive budget deficit. The city itself is buried in massive debts, and has cut basic services and attacked the city workforce to meet bond payments. (See “Federal judge rejects Harrisburg, Pennsylvania bankruptcy filing”)

Last month, 1,000 teachers, parents and students protested outside the state’s Capitol building to protest the education cuts and demand that funding be restored.

The proposed cuts will only eliminate less than half of the district’s \$13 million deficit. Board members will have to identify more than \$7.7 million in additional cuts before next week when they must submit their proposed budget for approval by the state’s Department of Education.

In the past two years, Harrisburg has already cut \$23 million from its budget, eliminating 288 teachers, 163 support staff and 57 administrative staffers and closed four schools as the district faced millions in cuts in federal and state aid. The district has already eliminated all its pre-kindergarten along with its emotional support programs.

Parents at the Wednesday board meeting pointed out that without kindergarten, students would be way behind when they began first grade and that many families would be faced with the cost of finding child

care.

Parents were also angry at the elimination of art, sports and clubs, which they pointed out are important both for learning and to motivate kids to enjoy school. Parents also noted that sports help students go to college because of scholarships.

Pennsylvania state government has cut Harrisburg’s school budget by \$6.2 million since the 2010-11 year. This represents about 5 percent of the school district’s \$125 million spending plan. The cuts are part of Governor Tom Corbett’s \$1.1 billion reduction to public education, forcing drastic cuts to public education throughout the state in districts both large and small.

The state is now considering legislation that would place financially strapped districts under direct state control. This will mean state-appointed administrators would force through budget cuts that elected school board members refuse to carry out.



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