

Beaverton, Oregon school district cuts 10 percent of its teachers

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Beaverton School District, the third largest district in Oregon, announced last week that 204 teachers, counselors, and other licensed staff had been laid off. An additional 365 teachers will be transferred to other schools to teach different subjects or grade levels. Among those cut are all of the district's school librarians.

The school year ended with many uncertain about whether they would have jobs with the district, and if they did, where and what they would be. Last Thursday, principals started calling the newly-unemployed teachers and those about to be transferred to tell them of their status.

While the Oregonian reported that the principals were given training on how to make the phone calls, an employee who spoke with the World Socialist Web Site on condition of anonymity described the situation differently.

"The 'training' was a two-hour meeting where they just sat there waiting for them to give them the layoff letters. Because nothing they told them then could have registered," the employee said. "That was Wednesday afternoon. Thursday was calling day... and today, my principal at least, and I'm sure many others, still needed debriefing!"

Asked about the "sensitivity training" described in the paper, the employee commented, "I don't know how anyone can give sensitivity training to people that already know they'll have that burden."

Beaverton School district serves about 39,000 students, approximately half of whom are minorities with 5,000 being English as a Second Language learners. The district sits just outside of Portland, and saw steady enrollment growth for most of the last decade.

The layoffs come on top of an agreement by teachers

that includes five unpaid furlough days this coming school year, and four for the 2013-2014 year. With the teacher cuts, class sizes at the elementary schools will average between 28 and 30, middle schools approximately 35, and high schools 35 to 50.

The district has already imposed other cost-cutting measures. In April early retirement incentives were offered, and the idea of holding fundraisers to pay for teachers' salaries was proposed on the school board.

The use of Instructional Assistants (IAs) rather than certified teachers for 45-minute library and technology sessions 85 times in the last year allowed the district to slash "seat-time" for 4th and 5th graders. The minimum instruction time required to be delivered to 4th through 8th graders by a certified teacher per year is 900 hours (OAR 581-022-1620). The time now spent with certified teachers is barely within the limit to avoid penalties from the state of Oregon.

According to the May online newsletter of the Beaverton teacher's union, the IAs are not to instruct students, but to supervise them and check out library materials, and can provide "limited assistance" with research.

In mid-June, more than 100 parents and students attended a school board meeting to protest the loss of music and library services. The parents asked the board members to talk to the teachers about adding another furlough day, which would have saved \$1.2 million, in an attempt to "buy back" some of the teachers' positions.

Even this regressive measure was rejected by the board, with Beaverton School District spokesperson Maureen Wheeler saying that furlough days are not sustainable. "There will still be music in our schools," Wheeler said at the time. "Students will still have the opportunities for choir and band but we will not be able

to offer the same level of service. It's just not possible.”

Though the lay-off phone calls were completed by the end of Friday, the process is not yet over, as those who were laid off have the option of “bumping” teachers with less seniority in the district. Bumping directly pits worker against worker, since the onus to knock another person out of a job is laid directly on the shoulders of the person who would otherwise be unemployed.

In the cases of bumping into a new position, many senior teachers will be teaching subjects they might not have taught in years, in schools with which they are unfamiliar.



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