

# Education cuts in Fleming County, Kentucky

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Citing a grave financial situation in the Fleming County, Kentucky schools, Commissioner of Education Terry Holliday has placed the school system under state control and imposed a series of dramatic cuts to the 2014-15 school year budget. The cuts were announced in a May 1 letter to Superintendent Tom Price of the Fleming County School District. In it Holliday declares that “since Fleming County High School is a Priority School,” and receiving state assistance, he is assuming the “powers, duties, and authority” to make financial cuts.

Holliday has proposed cuts totaling nearly \$350,000. In addition to calling for the removal of Fleming County High School Principal Mark Leet, Holliday is also proposing the elimination of teaching positions in the fields of agriculture, business, family and consumer services, telemedia technology, autobody/collision repair, Spanish, physical education, and the cutting of three stipends for agriculture teachers.

Holliday’s letter stated that the decision to make these cuts was not taken lightly and was made to ensure that the high school would continue to function in a “responsible manner, while addressing the needs of all students appropriately.” This statement leads one to ask just how removing teaching positions will appropriately benefit the needs of the student population.

The budget cuts were discussed at a standing-room only meeting held by Superintendent Price on May 5. Many in the crowd voiced strong opposition to the cuts. As cited in the *Ledger Independent*, a discussion erupted between teacher Bobby Pease and local business owner Adam Hinton, who both opposed the laying off of an agricultural teacher. They asserted that they would acquire the \$60,000 necessary to keep the teacher on for the following school year. Jim Hamm, the Kentucky Department of Education representative, replied that it would have to go through Holliday before they could accept the money. A participant in the

meeting asked Hamm, “We can receive money from the state, but it can’t come from our own people? Why can’t we just give them the money?”

This question, along with the financial offers of those in attendance, demonstrates the commitment to education within the community. It underscores the fact that Holliday’s plans stand completely at odds with the wishes of the population in Fleming County. However, offers from individuals to make up for shortfalls in the budget are not a solution to the cuts, which require the development of a mass struggle by the working class to fight for a fundamental reorganization of social priorities.

On May 7, two days after the meeting, 400 Fleming County High School students staged a walkout to oppose the cuts and firings. John Johnson, a junior who led the walkout at the school, was quoted in the *Lexington Herald Leader*: “We feel like it’s an unfair decision to remove Mr. Leet. He’s done nothing wrong. He’s done nothing but good in the school system.”

Freshman Destiny Harmon told the *Ledger Independent*: “We are standing up to the state, because it’s not right. They can’t come in here and tell us to get rid of good teachers and a good principal.” Freshman Shayla Sparks added, “Firing our teachers is taking our lifeguards.”

One former Fleming County High School student told the *World Socialist Web Site* the walkout proved students were willing to stand up for their right to education and demonstrate that their voice can be heard. The former student also mentioned that the agricultural and autobody/collision repair positions that are now on the chopping block have benefited students in the region in the past. “These students who study welding and agricultural skills are able to become certified in this field,” she said, “Sometimes right out of high school they are able to find quality employment

that is above the minimum wage.”

Cuts such as those proposed by Holliday are nothing new in the state of Kentucky.

On May 6, Fayette County Schools Superintendent Tom Shelton proposed \$19.1 million in budget cuts for the 2014-15 school year. The Shelton budget would include the cutting of 50 staff workers and nearly 60 teachers along with as many as 30 teaching aides and maintenance workers.

The Rowan County School District has also begun making cuts. Rowan County has declared it will cut \$300,000, along with eliminating teaching positions, while other teachers will share responsibilities to fill the gaps left behind by the staff layoffs. This means that teachers will have to take on much more work and there will likely be an increase in classroom sizes.

The budget cuts that will be affecting the 2014-15 school year in districts across Kentucky are part of a process being carried out across the country. The Obama administration has been at the forefront of the assault on public education, cutting vital programs, victimizing teachers and funneling more money to charter schools. Since taking office Obama has presided over the wiping out of 330,000 teacher and public school employee jobs and the closure of some 4,000 schools, while doubling the number of students enrolled in charter schools.



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