

Chicago Public Schools lays off 1,150 workers

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In the latest attack on public education in the city of Chicago, Illinois, the city's public school system is laying off more than one thousand workers, including teachers, teacher assistants and school staff.

Layoff notices were given to 550 teachers and 600 other workers Thursday. Chicago Public Schools (CPS) encouraged teachers to reapply for jobs elsewhere in the district, positions that typically receive lower pay.

The city has not revealed what schools or neighborhoods are affected by the latest round of layoffs. Most teachers were notified individually by phone that they have lost their positions. Additionally, three public schools have been slated for "turnaround" this year—a process in which all teachers and staff at a so-called "failing" school are laid off and the schools are turned over to a private management company. In 2014, 176 teachers and staff have lost jobs in "turnarounds."

Even according to official reports, only 60 percent of laid-off teachers get rehired at CPS. Many teachers leave CPS to seek work in the suburbs. Many more have left the profession entirely. Nationwide, 300,000 teaching positions were eliminated between 2008 and 2013, with 11,000 layoffs in December 2013 alone.

CPS officially attributed the layoffs to declining school enrollments. The district uses the highest student-teacher ratio in the United States, at 31 students per classroom. One year ago, Chicago closed 50 schools, affecting the jobs of some 3,000 teachers, citing declining enrollment.

Overcrowding continues to be a problem. Far more than the 50 closed schools were impacted by the consolidation process, which contributed to serious classroom overcrowding problems and teacher overwork, in addition to forcing students to travel greater distances, some through dangerous neighborhoods, in order to get to school.

The Obama administration's aggressive privatization

of public schools, led in Chicago by former White House Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel, is extremely unpopular. At the same time, Democratic and Republican politicians have moved to slash city and state workers' pensions as part of an overall attack on the working class.

The bipartisan plan to gut public education could not have moved forward in Chicago without the assistance of the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU). The CTU cleared the path for a wave of school closings and teacher firings when it shut down the 2012 teachers' strike, attempting to prevent a political fight with its allies in the Democratic Party and the Obama administration.

As in other cities throughout the country, the institution of public education is under sustained attack, with teacher and staff layoffs accompanied by the shutting down of public schools and the opening up of charters. A legislative report this week noted that since 2011, the district has opened 33 new charter schools with seats for more than 23,000 students as it was closing publicly run schools for "underutilization." The city has approved the development of seven new charters in 2014.

The layoffs announced yesterday are the fourth time in the past five years where more than 1,000 CPS employees lost their jobs in the summer. More layoffs may come before the fall as CPS principals finalize budgets for individual schools.



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