

San Diego Unified School District to cut at least 1,500 jobs

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The San Diego Unified School District Board of Trustees voted last week to eliminate at least 1,500 full-time education jobs to close the district's budget deficit of \$124 million. According to district documents, not widely reported in the corporate media, the second-largest school district in California will now have to teach 100,000 students with less money and less staff.

This comes despite California voters' approval of Proposition 55, promoted by the unions and the Democratic Party in particular as a measure to prevent such cuts and layoffs. Proposition 55 was designed to partially restore state taxes set to expire from Proposition 30, itself a reactionary bill (see "The reactionary essence of California's Proposition 30"). The new bill's proponents cynically used the threat of teacher layoffs and budget cuts to garner support. Now the bill has passed, and educators and others are being fired anyway.

While most of the San Diego media has reported that some 850 jobs will be eliminated, the actual number of full-time jobs set to go—including non-teaching positions such as school security, custodians, counselors, etc.—is 1,500.

To give some idea of the scope of the cuts, the Special Education department will have to make do with \$7.92 million less. Some classrooms assigned to moderately to severely disabled students will be closed at elementary schools, forcing 220 disabled students to be relocated.

The district's Visual and Performing Arts program faces a cut of \$1.4 million and the loss of 30 full-time education workers. School security will also be affected with the loss of \$2.4 million and the dismissal of 20 community patrol officers, as well as a sergeant and a detective.

Additional information from the school district has

not been forthcoming, and it is unclear how officials will cut and by how much in each department. Some of the announcements are vague and only refer to cuts to "Property" (\$6 million) and the "Civic Center" (\$1.5 million). The district has not provided details about other cuts, such as those to the Office of Language Acquisition (\$1.9 million), which helps English learners.

The reported layoffs include: 266 elementary teachers, 94 physical education jobs, 62 custodian jobs, 51 counselor jobs, 42 English teachers, 35 vice principals and 27 foreign language teachers, mostly Spanish teachers.

The district, like every other in California, is heavily dependent on Sacramento for state funding. Governor Jerry Brown released a January preview of his 2017-2018 budget proposal that increased funding for San Diego schools, but by less than the district had hoped for. Brown will release a new budget by May 30, allowing the districts to finalize their budgets by June.

Even a favorable state budget in May will not reverse cuts and layoffs, according to SD Unified's interim CFO Patricia Koch. She told the school board on February 21 that "even if the May revise restores the entirety of what was lost in January, we are still facing more than \$100 million in reductions in 17-18. So, the May revise is not the place to look for eliminating our problem. It may help, but we will still need to make reductions."

The district is mandated by state law to inform all workers by March 15 if they will still have a job this year. The district is already counting on \$6 million in unspecified "Ongoing '16-'17 Solutions." These "solutions" will likely include hiring and salary freezes, as well as early retirement incentives for older workers.

The exact terms being offered to older workers to

retire have not been finalized and are subject to negotiation with the unions. While the student school year will not be cut, the teachers' work year will. The exact days have been left to negotiations, but will probably mean the work days that fall in the summer, winter or other school breaks.

The district hopes to reduce employee work days by \$18.61 million, while the superintendent and the school board symbolically reduced their salaries by 5 percent. Superintendent Cindy Marten's current salary of \$275,000 a year will be reduced by \$15,400 to maintain the illusion the cuts are not only affecting teachers and others at the bottom of the economic ladder.

Public anger has boiled over at the school board meetings, where parents and teachers have come together to demonstrate their opposition to the cuts.

Peter Johnson, a plant operations supervisor at Point Loma High School, was quoted in the *San Diego Union-Tribune* as saying that the size of his custodial crew had dramatically declined over the years and the new cuts mean he would have just four workers to clean the campus once every four days.

Johnson told the board, "I know no one in the state has reduced their levels of custodians to this level," adding, "You'll be in charge of the filthiest high schools in the state of California."

The San Diego Education Association (SDEA), which ostensibly represents 6,000 education workers, has said that the cuts are unnecessary, but agrees that changes have to be made, including negotiating the "golden handshake" offered to older and better paid workers to retire early.

Lindsey Burningham, president of the SDEA, said, "We will be pushing back against any layoffs," before adding, "There are other ways to control the deficit—a retirement incentive and attrition. We are just now starting to have those conversations, about what should be on the table."

Once again, the unions in practice do not object to the cuts and the layoffs, but only the numbers and the degree of the cuts, and as long as they have "a seat at the table."

The decline in state funding for education goes back decades under Democratic and Republican administrations alike. Since Brown has re-entered office, the general fund for education has reached its lowest level since 1973. Since the financial collapse of

2008, some \$8.1 billion has been ripped away from California public education and community colleges, with another \$2 billion from higher education.

The claim by Democratic and Republican politicians and school administrators that there is "no money" for education is obscene. In the same week that administrators announced the school cuts and layoffs, Pentagon arms dealer Lockheed Martin announced a deal valued at \$1.1 billion with the US Navy to supply the F-35 fighter jet. The deal on the planes, costing \$95 million apiece and designed for a war with Russia and China, would cover San Diego's education deficit many times over.



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