

Hundreds of San Diego teachers slated to receive layoff notices due to \$30 million budget deficit

Evelyn Rios
24 February 2020

Hundreds of teachers in San Diego, California's Sweetwater Union High School District (SUHSD) will receive pink slips in March due to a \$30 million budget deficit for the 2020-2021 school year.

Last Friday, District Superintendent Dr. Karen Janney released the proposal to issue approximately 237 layoff notices to teachers and staff in addition to closing all learning centers throughout the district. There are 1,500 teachers, 40,000 students and 22,000 adult learners in the district.

Janney will ask the board of trustees at a board meeting tonight to approve the closures and layoffs. Large number of educators, students and parents are expected to protest the cuts prior to the meeting and during public comments. In an undemocratic move aimed at stifling opposition, the board has pushed any discussion of the layoffs and budget cuts down to the 43rd agenda item in the 45-point meeting, which could run well past 11pm.

Once the layoffs are approved, teachers and staff will receive Reduction in Force (RIF) layoff notices on March 15. These teachers will remain on the job through the end of the current school year but will be told not to return the following year.

Those being axed include all 23 librarians in the district. Another 32 teachers attached to alternative education learning centers would be cut under the superintendent's plant which would close all 12 centers by July 2020.

The learning centers provide alternative services for the most vulnerable students, including those with mental or behavioral issues, homeless students, pregnant students and others who need an alternative setting to complete classes and graduate high school.

About 1,300 students attend the learning centers and approximately 800 of those students receive a high school diploma each year. The district plans on placing those students on "Independent Study," a system that limits communication between students and teachers.

The cumulative effect of these closures and layoffs will prove to be disastrous and drastically undermine the ability to provide high quality public education to students. In addition to eliminating the livelihoods of hundreds of teachers and staff, the slated budget cuts will continue to place a heavy burden on existing teachers and staff. Remaining teachers will face higher class sizes with an increased population of special education students in general education classrooms, class schedules will be uncertain and chaotic for weeks at the beginning of the school year and school sites will rely on substitute teachers to fill in for cut positions.

It is clear that district officials are determined to implement the maximum austerity measures to cover the deficit for the upcoming school year. It has been emboldened by the subservience of the teacher union, Sweetwater Education Association (SEA), which has made it clear it will do nothing to stop the layoffs and cuts. Since budget deficits were initially revealed to the public in October 2018, the SEA has dedicated itself to preventing rank-and-file educators from mobilizing the support of parents, students and area workers to fight the layoffs.

SEA officials have told teachers they can do nothing more than plead with the same board members who conducting the brutal cuts. The school board, however, is responsible for the loss of \$68 million in public assets and has blamed this on faulty software and declining enrollment.

At the same time, SEA officials have warned teachers against calling for strike action. This is not because Sweetwater teachers lack support. On the contrary, there is a growing sentiment for a fight against the attack on public education. Hundreds of educators in the neighboring Chula Vista elementary school district walked out earlier this month to demand wage increases and to oppose their district's plan to remove caps on class sizes, which are currently set at an average of 31 students per class.

Last week, after a rally held by hundreds of teachers, parents and students, the Chula Vista Educators (CVE) union reached a tentative agreement with the district. Ignoring the teachers' demand for a 3.75 percent pay increase, the union agreed to a 1.5 percent increase and a one-time 2 percent bonus that would take effect in July 2020.

Allied with the Democratic Party, which runs the state of California, the teacher unions are complicit in the austerity and school privatization efforts that have been implemented in Los Angeles, Oakland and cities throughout the state.

Since 2008, over \$8 billion in funding has been slashed from California's public education and community colleges, and another \$2 billion from its other higher education institutions. In carrying out this assault Governor Newsom and his Democratic predecessor Jerry Brown (governor from 2011 to 2019, and before that from 1975 to 1983) have relied on the California Teachers Association and the National Education Association to block any unified opposition by teachers, parents and students.

To carry their struggle forward, Sweetwater teachers should move now to form rank-and-file committees, independent of the SEA/CTA, to fight against all layoffs and budget cuts. They should appeal to teachers and workers throughout the state and beyond, including the University of California grad students conducting a wildcat strike in defiance of the United Auto Workers union, to wage a common fight in defense of the right to high quality public education for all.

These committees must be controlled democratically, based on the needs of teachers, staff and students. Demands should not be dictated by what the state, district or union officials deem is available, but on what is necessary for teachers and their students.

A group of Sweetwater teachers have begun calling

for the formation of rank-and-file committees to mobilize parents, students and broader sections of workers throughout the county and the state to fight the cuts and layoffs. Despite protests from the SEA, these teachers have been picketing outside of the schools to draw attention to their struggle and appeal beyond their school sites.

The fight facing Sweetwater teachers is not confined to the district, the state of California or even the US. Sweetwater teachers must draw the lessons of Oakland, Los Angeles, and the movement of teachers throughout the world, and break the isolation of their struggles imposed by the unions.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact