

35,000 sign petition to provide full funding to Randolph schools in Massachusetts

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Randolph Public School District, located in a working-class area in the Greater Boston, Massachusetts region, has sent reduction in force (RIF) or nonrenewal notices to all of their arts, music, and physical education (PE) teachers, along with five social workers and six K-8 guidance counselors. These cuts, overseen by Superintendent Thea Stovell, have provoked a mass outcry. A petition to save the threatened programs has quickly amassed over 35,000 signatures, reaching its goal in only a week.

A petition signer wrote, “This decision will have long term ramifications for the school, the culture of the community, and the quality of education will diminish greatly. By cutting these programs you are massively and irreparably destroying your students’ life experiences and learning opportunities.”

A student who signed the petition wrote, “I want my art teacher back because I want to learn about art and how it could help me in the future. I also want to learn how to draw better and paint more creations, I always wanted to become an artist in the future.”

The petition, addressed to Massachusetts State Senator Walter Timilty, describes the poor social conditions facing the town: “Randolph is a low-income district where funding has always been an issue, but the pandemic has made this far worse and allowed for the district to justify these extreme losses. The students of Randolph deserve a quality and well-rounded education, which would be impossible to give them without these essential parts of the curriculum... The Legislature is exploring a 10% or 20% local aid reduction for FY 21, which would be a drastic cut for Randolph.”

State budgets across the US are facing massive cuts due to the economic crisis produced by the COVID-19 pandemic and the totally inadequate financial assistance

given to states by the federal government, which stands in sharp contrast to the skyrocketing of the stock market back to its pre-pandemic heights.

Learning of the situation in Randolph through social media, on May 30 the *World Socialist Web Site* broke the news to the public on the firing of all arts, PE and music teachers. This article, which interviewed a laid-off art teacher in the district, has now been read nearly half a million times, and has been shared tens of thousands of times on Facebook, with thousands of readers in nearly every state.

The devastating cuts are not just limited to Massachusetts, but are happening across the US and internationally. Many comments on social media in response to our viral article point to the various ways school districts are cutting back education spending, with one stating, “my district is trying for pay freeze for all.” Another comment says, “special teachers are turned into aides if they keep their jobs.”

The teacher interviewed in the May 30 article said the following about the article going viral: “I love the outpouring of support for our students and staff. I am humbled by everyone who has shared their testimonials of how we as departments and teachers have impacted our students while they were in school and beyond. I am hopeful our cries for help for our students will reach beyond the walls of Randolph, to the state and federal level, so that Randolph isn’t forever in this cycle of building up programs, making progress with really supporting our students only to have it knocked out from under us every 10-20 years.”

Attempts have been made to delegitimize the widely shared WSWs article, with School Committee Chairman Andrea Nixon describing the situation as “not as bleak as social media would lead you to believe,” shortly before the news of the cuts was

officially confirmed. Stovell bemoaned that “misinformation has created anxiety for students, staff, and the community and has exacerbated an already difficult situation,” as if it were not the cuts themselves causing the uproar.

Only 30 minutes away, the Public Schools of Brookline face a similar situation, with over half of their entire educator workforce being recently handed pink slips. On June 3, it was announced that the number of teachers receiving pink slips had increased from 300 to 362 (out of a total of 645 teachers in the district), while up to 300 paraprofessionals would also be receiving pink slips. In Brookline and Randolph, massive cuts predominantly impacted the arts, music, and PE, and official statements totally contradicted the actual pink slips given, which were only later officially confirmed.

The WWSWS spoke with a Brookline paraprofessional, who wished to remain anonymous because job cuts for paraprofessionals have not yet been distributed in the district. The paraprofessional stated, “From what I’ve heard, at my school they’ve completely gotten rid of all our PE teachers. Our music teacher is gone, our art teacher is still there, but they’ve gotten rid of so many other teachers. They initially said they wouldn’t completely get rid of entire departments, but they did.”

Mehring Books, the publishing arm of the Socialist Equality Party (US), is proud to announce the publication in epub format of Volume 1 of *COVID, Capitalism, and Class War: A Social and Political Chronology of the Pandemic*, a compilation of the *World Socialist Web Site's* coverage of this global crisis.

Speaking to the impact on the cuts to their specific role, our interviewee explained, “I’m a 1:1 para, I’m assigned to one particular student with special needs. What’s going to happen to these kids who have 1:1 paras, or those with literacy aides? The kids with special needs will suffer the most. They won’t understand why this is happening, and without anyone there to guide them they’ll regress. What we taught them will slowly disappear if they’re automatically thrown back into the general education class.”

The paraprofessional noted that the resources exist to give all students the support they need to thrive, but “only a select few people in America have tremendous wealth, and the bottom 99 percent is fighting for

survival while they’re sitting on more wealth than any of us could fathom in our lifetime.”

“I think it’s absolutely disgusting that they’ve given so much money to these big corporations, yet the kids who are going to grow up and go into the world, they’re giving them nothing. We have to teach these kids on a shoestring budget, it’s one of the worst things I can think of. If you don’t have educated people you can’t change the future. I think it’s intentional, they don’t want kids to change the world.”

Speaking on the crisis in Randolph, the paraeducator stated, “It’s appalling what they’re doing at Randolph. The kids do need the arts, that interaction, that creative outlet. Otherwise it will feel like you won’t have any creativity. In our union, I suggested reaching out to Randolph Public Schools. We support other districts that are going through the same thing and are more than willing to reach out and lend a hand if needed.”

With public education facing unprecedented budget cuts, educators must join the developing global protest movement *en masse*, incorporating their demands into this broad-based, multiracial movement of the working class and youth. The WWSWS *Educators Newsletter* fights to unify teachers, paraprofessionals, office staff, custodians, librarians, and all educators in a broad movement to defend public education. We urge you to sign up for our newsletter, follow us on Facebook, and contact us today to begin organizing the opposition to budget cuts at your school and across the US.



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