

Over 1.4 million US education jobs slashed in April and May

Evan Blake
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As a result of statewide school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic, a staggering 779,000 K-12 public school educators lost their jobs throughout the US in the months of April and May. Over the same period, 239,000 public college professors and other employees and 424,000 educators at private K-12 schools and universities were laid off. The combined 1.44 million education-related job losses will in many cases be permanent and will have devastating repercussions for both educators and an entire generation of students.

These figures are based on the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) monthly unemployment surveys for April and May, which reported a combined loss of 1.1 million public and private K-12 and higher education jobs in April, and a further 340,000 education jobs lost in May. As dire as these figures are, there are reasons to believe that the BLS is doctoring jobless figures in the interests of the Trump administration, and that the real number of educator layoffs is even higher than reported.

In both months, the BLS acknowledged that there were “errors” in collecting data, which caused the agency to underestimate the true rate of unemployment by 5 percent in April and 3 percent in May. The reported decline in unemployment in May was seized upon by Trump to falsely claim that an economic recovery had begun.

The astonishing figures on education-related layoffs have largely gone unreported in the mainstream press, with only a handful of articles indicating the massive assault on both public and private education jobs over the past two months.

There is no specific breakdown of how the layoffs have affected each section of education workers—including teachers, custodial staff, counselors, cafeteria workers, social workers, nurses, paraprofessionals and others—but the bulk of the layoffs have likely not impacted teachers, whose contracts typically protect their jobs through the end of the school year. In all likelihood, districts significantly cut custodial and cafeteria staff, paraprofessionals and office staff when schools began closing *en masse* in mid-March due to the pandemic.

These sections of school workers, who are paid less than teachers and far less than administrators, typically have less savings and live from paycheck to paycheck. They are generally members of trade unions, primarily the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), while teachers are members of either the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) or the National Education Association (NEA). Not one of these organizations has lifted a finger to oppose the massive assault on jobs, continuing their decades-long complicity in the attack on public education.

Most school districts across the US have deadlines in March to give layoff notices to educators, which is an annual occurrence in many districts. For example, in March, Sacramento City Unified School District officially laid off 11 full-time teachers and 46.5 full-time equivalent classified positions, including bus drivers, clerks, campus monitors, yard duty employees and instructional aides. These cuts had been planned for some time. Since the pandemic, undoubtedly many more layoffs across the district have gone unreported, as they have across the US.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* has reported, numerous states across the US have announced major budget cuts planned for the end of the school year and in the coming months, indicating that even further job cuts are on the agenda. In New York City alone, \$185 million in K-12 education cuts have been implemented for the current fiscal year, primarily from the central office, and an additional \$642 million are being planned for the coming year.

Charity, a former substitute teacher in multiple districts in the Sacramento, California, metropolitan area, who was furloughed from her position in mid-March, told the *World Socialist Web Site*, “I’m not surprised, but I know that the students, families, furloughed and terminated workers and their communities will be negatively impacted. Many students were already lacking adequate food, housing, and mental health care.”

She continued, “I think educators, parents, workers

coming together to combat the coming austerity is what is necessary to right this horrible wrong, and it's lots of work, righteous work, but lots of work."

She added, "I am a socialist. Capitalism will not address the needs of the populace because it is not structured to do so. It is meant to extract as much profit as is possible. I think of the ventilators needed to save lives recently from the current pandemic. States were bidding against one another for their residents. That is ridiculous. So too, our schools should be equipped to teach future generations to maintain and advance our society. Capitalism doesn't want to pay taxes of any kind to support precious institutions—schools, hospitals, people."

A paraprofessional in Brookline, Massachusetts, where over half the teaching staff have received pink slips and over 300 paraprofessionals are now threatened with layoffs, told the *World Socialist Web Site*, "It is truly saddening to see and hear so many educators are being laid off around the country. In times like these we truly need more educators, not less. It is baffling as to why this is happening right now."

He said that the layoffs in Brookline "are troubling to say the least. This not only affects my colleagues and myself, but the students and families in Brookline who we work with."

Commenting on the broader political situation, he noted, "Capitalism has failed, plain and simple. I have yet to hear how capitalism has helped anyone but the top 1 percent and it is insane. I am on the side of humanity, and I see no way capitalism can truly benefit that."

The elimination of 779,000 K-12 public education jobs in April and May by far surpasses the estimated loss of education jobs in the aftermath of the 2008 financial collapse, and the public school system never recovered from the previous wave of cost-cutting and job-cutting.

In September 2019, the number of local education jobs was 60,000 less than the same figure in September 2008, but given the 1,419,000 increase in enrollment over the intervening period, there was an estimated shortage of 300,000 education jobs at the start of this school year, a figure that has more than tripled in the past two months alone.

As a result of the legacy of austerity from the Great Recession, beginning in 2018 teachers and other educators initiated a powerful wave of strikes across the US. Since the wildcat strike of West Virginia teachers in February 2018, over 700,000 educators have gone on strike in over a dozen states, contributing to the largest upsurge of the class struggle in the US since 1986.

As indicated by the recent mass, multiracial demonstrations against police violence, there is a growing radicalization taking place among workers and youth,

including many educators who have taken part in demonstrations. The militancy of educators at every point comes into conflict with the right-wing trade union apparatuses that have facilitated the mass layoffs and attacks on public schools.

The *WSWS Educators Newsletter* calls on educators to form independent rank-and-file committees at every school to begin organizing a systematic campaign against budget cuts and layoffs. The demand must be raised for full funding for education and all the social needs of the working class, to be paid for by heavy taxation of the rich and the reallocation of the trillions being funneled to Wall Street under the cover of the coronavirus pandemic.

In this struggle, educators can place no faith in the Democratic Party, which for decades has collaborated with the Republicans to destroy public education. In the CARES Act, which passed through Congress in two days with near-unanimous support from both parties, trillions of dollars were handed over to Wall Street, while states were left to starve and K-12 public education was allocated merely \$13.5 billion.

The so-called HEROES Act passed by the House of Representatives, and touted as the solution to the states' budget crises, is a fraud perpetrated by the Democrats and their allies in the trade unions, and has been declared "dead on arrival" by Trump and Senate Republicans. The act allocates merely \$60 billion for K-12 public education while states face deficits of at least \$230 billion in education funding through the coming school year.

Educators are acutely aware of the assault taking place on public education, which will only intensify in the coming months. When the *WSWS* broke the news May 30 about devastating cuts to public schools in Randolph, Massachusetts, the article went viral and has now been read nearly 700,000 times.

The silence on mass layoffs of educators imposed by the corporate media must be broken. We appeal to all educators to send us your stories, expose layoffs that have taken place or are being planned in your district, and subscribe to our newsletter to follow developments. Ultimately, the defense of public education is predicated on the abolition of capitalism, which subordinates all social needs to private profit. We urge the most class conscious educators to make the decision to join the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) today and take up the fight for socialism.



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