

San Francisco schools face \$125 million budget deficit and over 400 layoffs this year

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On November 2, San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) announced a \$125 million budget deficit for fiscal year 2021-2022. The district, which serves 54,000 students, has been losing students amid the growing social crisis from the COVID-19 pandemic and now faces a 10 percent budget shortfall. An additional deficit of \$21.6 million is anticipated for the following fiscal year.

SFUSD is planning to cut 360 school jobs and 55 central office jobs. Board of Education members who have vehemently pushed racist attacks on public art and school names have now meekly bowed down before this assault on education. United Educators of San Francisco (UESF), the union which represents roughly 6,200 teachers, remained silent on the issue until November 12 as rank-and-file members became increasingly restive.

In a leaflet announcing a series of toothless protests at upcoming school board meetings, the union encourages the district to simply shift the budget cuts to administration, writing, “A viable alternative plan is possible when we look at where else cuts can be made and increased revenue.” This would in fact deepen the crisis of public education in the city and in no way improve learning or school conditions for students.

The State of California as a whole is staring in the face of education disaster. Minimal federal support in the first two years of the pandemic has barely constituted a band-aid for longstanding budget shortfalls and will entirely evaporate by the 2023-2024 school year. Declining student enrollment and attendance due to the growing social crisis are further suppressing school budgets.

The top 10 districts with the greatest loss of attendance are the largest school districts in the state. The drop is blamed on an aging population, but the

fundamental issues are surging housing prices, pupils pulled from schools due to legitimate fears over COVID-19, and charter school growth.

West Contra Costa Unified School District in the Bay Area foresees a \$30 million deficit, Sacramento City Unified School District anticipates an \$18 million shortfall, and Los Angeles Unified School District faces a 20 percent drop in enrollment. The funding crisis is so severe that consultants are offering districts a “Planning for Reductions in Force” webinar to be held in January.

In addition to layoffs, many teachers have left the profession in response to the unsafe and exploitative conditions during the pandemic. School districts are responding to a continual loss of credentialed teachers with increased staffing of inexperienced employees via internships, emergency permits and waivers. Statewide, 13,380 teachers are working without the necessary training. In SFUSD, roughly 10 percent of teachers are without a preliminary or clear credential. The lack of special education teachers is significantly worse throughout the state and nationally.

The murderous policy of mandatory in-person learning, which has sickened many students and teachers this semester, was promoted by the California Governor Gavin Newsom, San Francisco Mayor London Breed, and American Federation of Teachers (AFT) President Randi Weingarten, all leading Democrats.

Democratic Party politicians and union bureaucrats have sacrificed the health of Californians to ensure that students return to school and their parents to return work to sustain corporate profit-making. The results could not be clearer. In California, children under 18 years old account for over 700,000 cases with nearly 10,000 infected each week.

In 2020, before the rollout of vaccines, Mayor Breed stated, “It is infuriating that our schools are not going to reopen for in-person learning in January. I can’t imagine how hard this is for our families and for our young people who haven’t been in the classroom since March and are falling further behind every single day. We should not be creating a false choice between education and a safe return to classrooms.” The fiction of a “safe” return to in-person instruction was demonstrated by California’s rate of pediatric COVID-19 hospitalizations soaring over eight-fold between June and September as schools fully reopened this fall.

Breed’s fury over the delay in reopening has played a role in her support for the recall election against three SFUSD school board members: Board President Gabriela López, Board Vice President Faauuga Moliga, and Commissioner Alison M. Collins. These individuals have backed the return to in-person instruction, but the recall campaign is being driven by a cabal of right-wing opponents of public education, in particular the two largest contributors, Arthur Rock and David Sacks.

Rock and his wife Toni Rembe Rock are enthusiastic supporters of Teach For America (TFA), an organization that regularly provides minimal training for inexperienced college graduates to become teachers at rock-bottom salaries.

Sacks is the co-author of *The Diversity Myth: Multiculturalism and Political Intolerance on Campus*. This book was published by the libertarian Independent Institute, which has supported climate change deniers. The book outlines “the transformation of Stanford University from an institution committed to preserving the values of Western civilization to one intent on engineering social change on campus to promote the dogmas of multiculturalism.” This right-wing diatribe is provided with a veneer of legitimacy by the equally right-wing identity politics pushed by members of the San Francisco Board of Education.

Alison Collins, a leading purveyor of identity politics on the Board of Education, made several anti-Asian statements on Twitter in 2016. When these tweets surfaced, she was removed from her position as vice president of the Board. She retaliated with an \$87 million lawsuit intended to destroy public education in San Francisco. The case was thrown out of court by

Federal Judge Haywood Gilliam, Jr., but only after the district had already squandered \$125,000 in attorney fees and expenses fighting Collins’ lawsuit.

Earlier this year, the Board of Education decided that 44 schools would be renamed. Like George Orwell’s *Newspeak* in 1984, which was realized with “the elimination of ideologically undesirable words,” the Board decided to erase figures with “dishonorable legacies,” including Abraham Lincoln, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison.

This despicable move was fought by half a dozen plaintiffs, including Laurence Tribe, a Harvard University professor emeritus, who denounced the denigration of Lincoln by stating, “I think it goes dangerously far when the Great Emancipator is treated as insufficiently woke.” In April, a Superior Court judge ordered the Board to reverse its vote and to pay \$60,000 to cover the legal fees of the plaintiffs.

In 2019, the Board voted to cover a mural in George Washington High School by left-wing artist Victor Arnautoff, which they considered politically incorrect. At least \$148,000 of education funds were spent on defending the censorship against legal challenges, but Judge Anne-Christine Massullo made a preliminary decision that the board violated state law, determining that the evidence supports the suit of the George Washington High School Alumni Association brought against the board.

Teachers and other school employees must rely on their own strength to defend their jobs and health. Concerned teachers should subscribe to the *World Socialist Web Site Educators Newsletter* and learn about the Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee. Worldwide, the unions are functioning to defend profits against members and it is only by building independent rank-and-file committees that school employees and public education as a whole will have a future.



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