

Paterson, Camden and other New Jersey school districts lay off over 1,000 teachers and support staff

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On May 4, the Paterson, New Jersey, Board of Education voted at a public hearing to lay off 39 teachers and 50 non-certified administrative workers, as a part of its approval of its \$851 million annual budget. This decision, while devastating on its own, represents only the tip of the iceberg for a district facing an unprecedented fiscal collapse. A further 234 vacant positions will not be filled, bringing the total reduction in the potential workforce to 323 positions in a single budget cycle.

The school board members, who voted 8-2 for the measures, are officially non-partisan, though most have close ties to the Democratic Party. In addition to the staffing cuts, the board also voted to raise property taxes for schools by 8 percent, close four schools and cut funds for building repairs by 90 percent. Maintenance funding will drop from \$9.2 million to just \$876,346, a significant concern for a district where many school buildings are nearly a century-old and require urgent maintenance.

The district has lost tens of millions of dollars due to the expiration of federal pandemic relief (ESSER) funds that had been used to supplement the operating budget. Student enrollment has declined, partly because of parents' fear of ICE kidnappings among the city's large immigrant population. Fixed costs have also risen, including a \$4.5 million increase in the district's healthcare costs this year alone. While the state increased aid by 6 percent (\$37.1 million), the maximum permitted by law, 75 percent of this sum will go to supporting charter schools rather than traditional public classrooms.

About 300 educators and parents rallied outside the meeting to protest the layoffs, and many students and educators spoke at the meeting, warning that the layoffs would have disastrous consequences for students. Anna, a school support staff worker, told the board, "I work with autistic children. They need to see consistency of routine. So when you think about us and you think about removing us, you're removing some valuable people in education."

Daria, a 4th grade teacher, testified, "The less staff we have, the less services we can provide for our kids, and education is all about our kids. And so that's why we are out here today, because we are fighting for more services and more people for our kids. It's across the country. Everybody needs to be on board with this because of the simple fact that it's happening to us today; it's going to happen to somebody else tomorrow."

Jay, an educator with 20 years of experience, told the *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS) outside at the rally: "All over New Jersey, we're cutting funding to schools, and now schools are having to reconcile budgets on the backs of teachers and staff. Roxbury, Montclair, Nutley, it's all over. Everybody's got budget shortfalls. They're telling us that there's no money for education. We can buy the billion-dollar-a-day-war, yeah, but we need funding for special ed. It's really an emergency at this point."

The crisis is equally acute in Camden, New Jersey's poorest city, where about 100 school employees are also expected to be laid off at the end of the school year as the district contends with financial difficulties due to increased costs and declining enrollment. On June 30, 75 employees are slated to be let go in the district's central administration office. Nine of the remaining 25 are teachers, with the rest are intervention and support staff, counseling services, child study team support, and pre-K program-related positions. The district also laid off 119 employees last year.

The district saw a decrease for the 2026-27 school year of about \$8 million compared to the 2025-26 budget of \$484.9 million. Employee benefits costs have nearly doubled as a share of salaries in just three years.

Camden and Paterson are among a group of school districts across the state facing layoffs, tax hikes or school closures due to the soaring cost of benefits, the loss of aid or rising transportation costs.

The crisis is not confined to lower-income urban areas. In Bernards Township, where the average property tax bill

exceeds \$14,700—roughly 65 percent of which goes to schools—officials are still facing a drop in state funding and rising costs. The district is cutting up to 30 teachers and is floating the idea of charging families between \$50 and \$200 for students to participate in extracurricular activities.

In Jackson, school officials say they have had to cut 385 teachers in recent years and sell two school buildings. Jackson officials attribute more than \$22 million in losses over eight years to the state’s contested funding formula. In Ocean Gate, the district’s only school is closing in June after the state slashed over \$600,000 in funding, producing an unmanageable \$700,000 deficit.

In Hackensack, officials face a \$17 million budget shortfall and are cutting up to 90 teaching jobs. Middletown plans to cut 40 teachers, close two schools, and raise school taxes by 3 percent. Roxbury is facing a structural deficit driven by a cumulative loss of \$7.7 million in state aid since 2019 and a \$4.1 million increase in healthcare costs.

Even wealthy Montclair, where the average resident pays nearly \$13,000 in school taxes alone, plans to cut more than 30 teachers. The Jefferson Township School District has already closed two schools and terminated 100 staff members and still faces a nearly \$3 million budget gap.

The New Jersey crisis is part of a national collapse of school funding that was years in the making. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Congress approved approximately \$190 billion in ESSER funds. Those funds, which many districts used to hire thousands of teachers and support staff, have now been fully exhausted. The Biden administration allowed the funding to expire, and the Trump administration then abruptly ended COVID-19 relief reimbursement extensions in April 2025, revoking \$3 billion in remaining funds nationwide.

The scale of the national fallout has been enormous. Tens of thousands of K-12 education jobs were cut across the United States in 2025 alone. Chicago Public Schools carried out more than 2,100 layoffs in one calendar year. California issued pink slips to more than 2,300 certificated staff. Florida’s Orange County issued non-reappointment notices to over 800 teachers. In Ohio, over 600 school districts reported funding shortfalls even as the state redirected \$1 billion in taxpayer money to private school vouchers. Last month, Philadelphia announced it was closing 17 schools.

All over Jersey, as in Paterson, the drain caused by charter schools compounds the underlying funding crisis. As public school enrollment declines—partly because charter schools siphon students away—the per-pupil state aid formula reduces allocations to traditional public districts, even as their fixed overhead costs remain largely constant. This dynamic is not accidental; as the WWSW has documented in its investigation of how Wall Street profits from charter schools

, corporate interests have “deliberately engineered this funding drain.”

Public school systems are being systematically hollowed out through deliberate policy choices, common to both Democratic and Republican politicians, that prioritize military spending, tax cuts for the wealthy and the expansion of private and charter school markets over the educational needs of working class children.

The trade union bureaucracy has played a critical role in enforcing the layoffs. Several bureaucrats from the Paterson Education Association (PEA) spoke at the hearing last week, offering to collaborate with the board in persuading the Democrat-controlled state legislature to provide more funding. John McEntee, the president of the PEA, testified that he understood the board’s budget had been “hollowed out by forces outside your purview.” PEA Vice-President Charles Ferrer, Sr. told the board: “We’re willing to work with you if you’re willing to take up that invitation.”

Behind these statements lurks the hostility of the bureaucrats to any movement of the working class to defend jobs and public education. Already this year, officials of the National Education Association and American Federation of Teachers have shut down or strangled some of the most significant educator struggles in decades: the San Francisco teachers’ strike of February 2026, the first in 50 years, was shut down after just four days despite looming layoffs and budget cuts that the tentative agreement did nothing to address; the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers rammed through a sellout contract in a sham vote after 94 percent of its 14,000 members had voted to strike; and in Los Angeles, union bureaucrats and Democratic Party officials cancelled a strike of 77,000 educators and school workers at the last moment.

This underscores the urgent need for educators to take the conduct of the fight to defend public education into their own hands through the establishment of rank-and-file committees, controlled democratically by workers themselves, in every school. These committees, which will operate independently of the union bureaucracies and both corporate-controlled parties, can organize and coordinate common action across schools, districts, states and even national borders to fight Trump’s war on public education, which is being enforced by Democrats on the state and local levels.



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