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Dallas schools set to begin layoffs next week

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Nearly 1,100 Dallas Independent School District employees will lose their jobs this month under a layoff plan approved Thursday evening.

On the chopping block now are an estimated 550 teaching jobs, more than 400 of which are in "core" subject areas – math, science, social studies and English/language arts.

An additional 500 employees – including teacher aides, hall monitors and clerks – will also lose their jobs as the district scrambles to curtail spending while trying to salvage educational reforms that have boosted achievement in many schools.

The school board's vote capped a frenetic three weeks that saw the disclosure of an expected \$84 million budget deficit, three tense board meetings, a threat of intervention by the state, and residents calling for the resignation of Superintendent Michael Hinojosa.

Pink slips will begin going out at the end of next week, though many teachers will remain on the district payroll until mid-January.

Still in the hole

The outlined staff cuts are expected to save about \$30 million, while reductions to nonpersonnel budgets are expected to save an additional \$38 million.

But even those deep cuts won't get the district out of the hole. Administrators acknowledged that even with the reductions, they're still headed toward a \$15 million deficit. They have not yet disclosed how they will make up that gap.

Two top administrators will travel to Austin next week to try to persuade state officials to sign off on a key part of the plan – a proposal to pay about 300 teachers with federal grant money.

The district revealed Sept. 10 that it had overspent last year's budget by \$64 million, a deficit it covered by spending half of its cash reserves. Ten days later, officials revealed that the district was headed toward an \$84 million shortfall this fiscal year.

Each of the previous two weeks, trustees refused to approve Dr. Hinojosa's cut proposals, stymieing the superintendent's efforts to immediately begin shedding employees.

Administrators blamed the deficit on accounting problems, mathematical errors made during the budgeting process and "position creep" – jobs added when campuses hired hundreds more teachers than warranted by enrollments at their schools.

Trustees Lew Blackburn and Carla Ranger voted against the layoffs Thursday, while Ron Price abstained. He said he wanted to discuss further the possibility of reducing district spending on consultants.

Said Dr. Blackburn: "I wanted to hear more [top administrators] say, 'We're making \$10 million, \$20 million in [central office] cuts.' I'm trying to save teaching positions."

Trustee Edwin Flores said that it was difficult to vote in favor of firing employees but that the board needed "to act in order to provide certainty to the 95 percent [of remaining employees] who will stay with us and work hard for our children."

Dr. Hinojosa pledged a "deliberate and thoughtful" process in determining which teachers would lose their jobs. He said the district's two teacher groups will "watch over our shoulders" to make sure the layoffs are handled fairly.

Some trustees, though, wondered whether the administration was up to the task.

"I have questions about the administration's ability to do it right," Mr. Price said.

The criteria for determining who gets laid off are whether an employee has certification, recent performance evaluations, seniority and professional background.

Vulnerable to cuts

Aimee Bolender, president of the Alliance AFT teachers association, told teachers at the meeting that those with low seniority and low evaluations would be the most vulnerable to be cut. She also told the employees not to sign anything concerning job cuts until their employees association reviews the document.

Dale Kaiser, president of the NEA-Dallas employees association, called the layoff vote "a dark day for the district, a dark day for the children of the Dallas ISD."

Administrators said the process of identifying who will lose their jobs will begin Friday morning.

"This has been emotional," Dr. Hinojosa said. "Reducing by 550 teachers will be significant. ... It will be painful for those who leave, and it will be painful for those who stay."

How they voted



Yes

Jack Lowe: "This is not the end of the process, this is a step in the process. We're still going to have a deficit this year, most likely."

Edwin Flores: "This is serious stuff. Tough, tough questions, but this board has never worked as well together as we have on this."

Jerome Garza: "We had to stop the financial bleeding in this district. This brings us much closer to balancing our budget."

Leigh Ann Ellis: "If the teachers groups hadn't worked through the process [of advising on the layoff process], I wouldn't have been on board."

Adam Medrano: He did not speak at the meeting and left immediately after. He did not return messages seeking comment.

NO

Carla Ranger: "We want to avoid teachers losing their jobs. Whatever we can do [to reduce spending] on consultants and contracts, we should do."

Lew Blackburn: "This is going to affect us for three to five years. No teachers will want to come work for us. They'll be fearful."

ABSTAIN

Ron Price: "I have questions about this administration's ability to do it right."

Planned cuts

Cuts outlined for Dallas school trustees Thursday differed only slightly from presentations at previous meetings:

Staff cuts

- \$20 million: 550 teachers
- \$4.2 million: 250 campus-based support staff
- \$3.6 million: 164 central office jobs
- \$2.8 million: 70 campus-based employees (non-teachers)
- \$2.4 million: campus administrators

Other moves

- \$18 million: paying 300 workers with federal grants

- \$8 million: central office budget cuts
- \$5 million: technology reductions
- \$2.8 million: stipends and supplemental pay
- \$4 million: energy savings and consultant reductions

Estimated remaining deficit

- \$15 million

SOURCE: DISD

Live blog highlights

Dallas Morning News reporter Tawnell D. Hobbs blogged in real time during Thursday's school board meeting. The following are excerpts, including some of her dispatches as well as comments from some of more than 5,000 dallasnews.com viewers who participated. [Read the full transcript here.](#)

2:55 Tawnell D. Hobbs: Here we go again, folks – another live blog session. Will DISD trustees give Superintendent Michael Hinojosa the go-ahead to cut employees? In the last couple of weeks, the board has twice postponed voting to permit the cuts. Dr. Hinojosa says the RIF [reduction in force] will help offset an expected \$84 million budget shortfall. But the superintendent is going to have to provide the right answers at this meeting. The last thing this board seems to want to do is cut teachers before all other options are explored.

2:57 Tawnell D. Hobbs: I hear that trustee Edwin Flores is in the building. This would be good news for Dr. Hinojosa, considering that trustee Nancy Bingham is out of town and won't be at this meeting. Edwin and Nancy are two of Dr. Hinojosa's biggest supporters on the board.

2:59 Tawnell D. Hobbs: The meeting will start in a couple of minutes.

3:01 [Comment From pburkham] Will those chosen for lay-off be chosen fairly and not ... who the most popular teachers are?

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5:14 Tawnell D. Hobbs: We're two hours into this meeting, and the board doesn't appear to be close to making a decision on the layoffs.

5:15 [Comment From KingPin] Has DISD discussed severance pay for these poor people?

5:15 Tawnell D. Hobbs: Lew Blackburn thinks that the human resources department and the district's investigative unit (OPR office) could stand to lose some folks.

5:16 Tawnell D. Hobbs: The OPR had 11 people, and they're going to lose 7 people! What! That office would go down to 4 people.

5:16 p.m. [Comment From Red Shirt] It seems like we needed MORE investigative people!

5:17 p.m. [Comment From Guest] They should cut anyone but teachers!

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6:24 Tawnell D. Hobbs: VOTE PASSES!

6:25 Tawnell D. Hobbs: DISD TRUSTEES APPROVE RIF!

6:25 [Comment From fed up teacher] wow. they didn't have much trouble when it came down to it, did they?