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672 School Jobs Are Lost in Largest Single-Agency Layoff Under Bloomberg

By FERNANDA SANTOS

Some of them spent the past few days scouring the [wanted ads](#) on the New York City [Department of Education's](#) Web site. Others made sure they learned how to file for unemployment.

Of the [777 New York City school employees](#) who were sent pink slips two weeks ago, 672 lost their jobs on Friday in the largest single-agency layoff since Mayor [Michael R. Bloomberg](#) took office in 2002.

While the city managed to avert the layoffs of thousands of teachers in June by brokering an agreement with their union, it could not find a way to spare the school aides, parent coordinators, family workers and others who work in support jobs at roughly 350 schools.

In a statement, the schools chancellor, Dennis M. Walcott, said the union representing the workers, District Council 37, had squandered its chances to make a deal of its own last spring by rejecting a plan to give the city access to its health care fund to balance its books.

"I am sympathetic to these workers," Mr. Walcott said. "But in part because other unions would not work with us to find more savings, schools have to absorb cuts to their budgets, and from there our principals made the best staffing decisions for their students."

District Council 37 made three proposals to the city that included giving up paid holidays and reducing the maximum number of hours school aides were allowed to work as ways to save money. The city rejected all of them.

Union leaders, dressed in black as if in mourning, kept the pressure up until the last minute, holding a lunchtime rally Friday on the steps of City Hall to denounce the layoffs as political payback, a characterization city officials have dismissed.

For days, the leaders had been urging elected officials to intervene on behalf of the workers. Some of them took action. The City Council speaker, Christine C. Quinn, spoke to Mr. Bloomberg by phone, and 17 of the Council's 51 members signed a letter to the mayor that said, "The constant attack on our education system will continue to burden the most vulnerable population of this city — our children."

Officials at the [Education Department](#), meanwhile, combed through the list of layoffs, seeking to match workers to vacancies at other schools. The process helped a small fraction of them, but with more cuts due, the relief may be short-lived.

A letter sent to workers who were spared from layoffs after the department placed them in other jobs read, "Please note that going forward, there may be a second round of layoffs."

The union has vowed to fight on. At the rally, Santos Crespo, president of District Council 37's Local 372, which counts most of the laid-off workers among its members, said, "We are going to continue this fight until they're all brought back."

But Mr. Walcott has said he will not reverse decisions made by principals, who cut some of the workers while trimming their budgets.

The laid-off workers are among the city's lowest paid. School aides make \$14 an hour for four to eight hours of work a day, while parent coordinators and family workers are salaried employees whose pay is about \$35,000 a year, according to union representatives.

This week, the Bloomberg administration asked agencies to cut 2 percent from their budgets for the current fiscal year, then 6 percent from the budgets for next year.

The Council has called a hearing on Tuesday to ask officials if dismissing the workers could have been avoided had the Education Department chosen to cut other expenses. Henry Garrido, an associate director at District Council 37, said at the rally that the department's contracts budget had increased by \$700 million last year, climbing to \$4.4 billion in the school year that began last month.

Council members will also examine the disproportionate impact the layoffs will have on poor students and struggling schools, including 19 that are receiving millions of dollars in federal financing to improve their academic performance.

Councilwoman Letitia James, who represents an area that includes a school district that will lose roughly 15 percent of its school aides and other support staff, said at the City Hall rally, "The fact is that the decision this administration is making" will magnify inequalities.

School aides have been a recurrent target of layoffs. In the 2008-9 school year, 503 lost their jobs. Last year, an infusion of federal dollars averted layoffs, but some 410 aides were laid off on Friday. The other cuts include 82 family workers, whose role includes helping students resolve attendance issues, and 66 parent coordinators, who serve as liaisons between families and school administrators.

Most of the coordinators who lost their jobs were assigned to high schools, which, unlike elementary and middle schools, are not required to have them on staff.

Sungmi Kang, 47, is one of them. She had worked at Stuyvesant High School in Lower Manhattan until Friday, translating materials from English into Korean for immigrants whose children attend school there. Another, Regina Dudley, had been employed by the High School for Global Citizenship in Prospect Heights, Brooklyn, since 2003.

"When I'm on lunch, if I see kids in the street, I want to know why they're there," Ms. Dudley said. "I call parents to find out why children don't come to school."

City teachers who are laid off are required by contract to be placed in a reserve pool and reassigned. This year, for example, teachers in reserve will be assigned as short-term substitutes, working on a weekly rotation in different schools under a plan that education officials said would save \$40 million.

But there is no holding place for school support workers, who must leave the system if no school will employ them.

The teachers' union broke its silence on the layoffs on Friday, when its secretary, Michael Mendel, joined the lunchtime rally and said: "If it takes a village to raise a child, then these people are certainly part of that village. And no one is going to convince me that they couldn't find the money to save them."

Anna M. Phillips contributed reporting.



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