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## **Possible Teacher Layoffs Would Have Big Impact**

By **JENNIFER MEDINA**

For more than three decades, New York City schools have soldiered on through turmoil, politics, recessions, budget crises and a changing cast of mayors and chancellors. But since 1976, the system has never carried out significant layoffs of teachers.

That may soon change. Mayor [Michael R. Bloomberg](#) has said that if the city does not wring pay concessions from the teachers' union and all of Gov. [David A. Paterson's proposed budget cuts](#) are approved — a worst case — the city may have to get rid of 11,000 of its 79,000 teachers. Last year, about 3,800 were lost through attrition, mostly retirement, so if similar numbers are recorded this year, several thousand could receive pink slips.

Layoffs would hurt schools by increasing class sizes, which have already been inching up. They would also upset parents and students. And they would force the schools chancellor, [Joel I. Klein](#), to retreat from some of his fundamental strategies, including giving principals the prerogative to hire any candidate they wish.

Layoffs could be carried out in a couple of ways, but in the end would be based on seniority and teacher specialty. The system could decide how many of each kind of position to eliminate; for example, 600 general elementary school teachers and 200 high school math teachers. More likely, it could allow each of the 1,500 principals to decide which individual jobs to cut, like a

music teacher or a Spanish teacher.

In either case, according to the teachers' contract, teachers whose jobs were eliminated would be able to "bump" less senior teachers at other schools whose jobs require the same type of license. So if 200 math positions were being cut, the city's 200 most recently hired math teachers would lose their jobs and more senior teachers would move to replace them.

"Depending on the number of people you are talking about, the whole thing becomes very, very unstable," Mr. Klein said on Thursday. "You might not just lose people to layoffs, what you see is a lot of motion and people moving to a lot of schools."

Mr. Klein has long used the doomsday outlook to illustrate his opposition to seniority clauses in the teacher contract. In a speech last fall, Mr. Bloomberg said he planned to press Albany to pass legislation allowing for merit-based layoffs. Such changes are anathema to the union, and lawmakers have responded coolly. The last contract expired in October, and the new contract is headed for arbitration.

Michael Mulgrew, the president of the teachers' union, the [United Federation of Teachers](#), said that Mr. Klein was playing politics and that it was far from clear that layoffs would be necessary. He said the union planned to propose a series of cost cuts, including a retirement incentive plan that he said would save the city as much as \$300 million.

"How do you make that assumption? We've done all sorts of things to make things happen that nobody thought was possible," on past budgets, Mr. Mulgrew said. He said that he and Mr. Klein should be working together to fight state cutbacks in aid.

In his budget speech on Thursday, the mayor said he would avoid layoffs by limiting teachers'

and principals' raises for the next two years to 2 percent a year for the first \$70,000 in salary, and nothing for any pay above that. The teachers' union called the proposal unacceptable and is hoping for 4 percent annual raises applied to the whole salary, as other city unions have received in the last couple of years.

In speaking publicly about layoffs, Mr. Klein seemed to up the ante on the increasingly tense relationship between the city and the union. Mr. Klein said he planned to renew his case on how teachers should be laid off to the Legislature when he testified on the budget in Albany on Tuesday.

Mr. Klein said he planned to fight for a restoration of the \$500 million cut proposed in the governor's budget, but said that even if the cut was smaller, layoffs remained a significant possibility, partly because of continued increases in salaries and pensions, as well as energy and bus contracts. "People say can't you make any other cuts," he said. But, he said, "We're going to have to make some personnel decisions because that is where the bulk of the money is."

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