



we2.0

Washington Education Association
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Budget cuts
shouldn't be the end
of your career



Dear Colleagues:

With deep education funding cuts planned in the state budget this year, there is little doubt that we will see an increase in the number of Reduction-in-Force (RIF) notices being issued by school districts.

If this happens to you, you are not alone!

WEA is committed to helping you through this difficult time. Standing together, we will provide support and resources so you can navigate your way through a period of professional and personal challenge.

As a start, we've provided online resources highlighting your rights if you receive a RIF notice — and the steps you need to take to protect yourself. I strongly encourage you to look at these materials — even if you have not yet received a RIF notice. The old motto is highly applicable to this situation: Be prepared!

Additionally, we are asking colleagues who receive RIF notices to share their stories with other WEA members through our Web site at www.washingtonea.org. There is strength in sharing and it is important to know that no one needs to feel alone as they go through this trying process.

All of us at WEA are united with you in this tumultuous period. Get in touch with your UniServ representative and/or local president. Use the resources posted online as well as in this edition of *We 2.0*. Share your stories. Stay strong and focused.

Together, we'll get through this.



Sincerely,

Mary Lindquist
WEA President

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We're in a fight to save jobs, and to protect Washington's schools. While it's still too soon to know how many school employee jobs will be cut, it's not too early to take steps to protect your career.

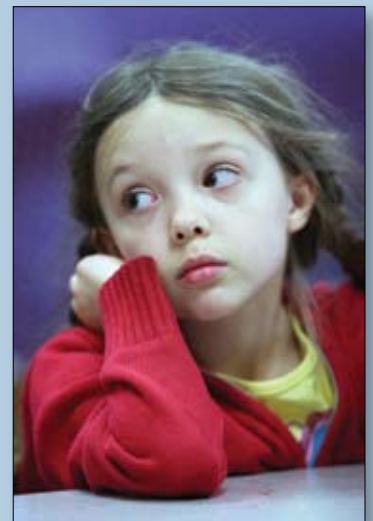
As educators, we are a community.

We've found power and strength through unity in reaching for our goals.

And we can find comfort and solace, a least a bit, in knowing that educators across Washington face these same challenges.

We will face them together.

Will the state Legislature ever live up to its constitutional duty and fully fund our students' education?





The reality of the 2009-11 budget is that significant K-12 funding cuts are being proposed that set the state back 20 years.

Anne Wellens already has been through the layoff-recall process since becoming a school employee two years ago.

But the prospect of that happening again isn't one she can chalk to experience making it any easier.

"It is all on our minds about the layoffs," says Wellens, a special-education instructional assistant at

Audubon Elementary School in Spokane.

May 15 is the state deadline for districts to notify teachers and others holding teaching certificates if they will be laid off.

Depending on locally bargained contracts, teachers in Washington generally are retained based on their seniority, with the most recently hired teachers being the first to lose their jobs. Reduction-in-Force (RIF) notices for education support professionals — secretaries, instructional assistants, custodians and others — are determined on a different basis.

Sustaining our schools

A fight for our jobs

‘Use the RIF notice as an opportunity to figure out if the job is *the love of your life.*’

— Kay Rice, second-grade teacher
Somerset Elementary, Bellevue



Legislators are poised to cut thousands of teaching jobs, slash successful education programs and pack our students into overcrowded classrooms. Instead of finding a solution to the immediate funding challenge, HB 2261 offers the false promise that someday, the Legislature will live up to its constitutional duty and fully fund our children’s education.

The picture that’s emerging is that Washington schools are poised to take significant hits. Given the budget uncertainties, school districts are bracing for substantial cuts to their budget for the next two years. While it’s still too soon to know how many school employee jobs will be cut, it’s not too early to take steps to protect your career.

Your Association can help ensure that the laws and contract language for Reductions in Force have been followed. We will be a watchdog over local districts to ensure that RIFs result from a true budget crisis, and not just poor planning or misguided priorities.

These layoffs will have real consequences, and not just for the employees involved, or even those who are thrust into new assignments because of staffing changes. These cuts impact our students, too: larger class sizes that make individual attention nearly impossible; fewer support employees to help students stay afloat as they begin to struggle; the narrowing of curriculum as electives are eliminated, and higher college tuition or fees that allow access only to the economically advantaged.

Seattle teacher Kent Daniels said budgetary decisions are issues of priority.

“You can reform the schools as much as you want. You can make more demands on the teachers, change the evaluation system, require that teachers get more training (and pay for it themselves) and you can test using WASLs or their alternative,” says Daniels, who teaches a fourth-fifth-grade class at Orca K-8. “The fact is: it just plain requires more

time to teach many of the kids today than it did in years gone by and no rearranging of things will change this fact.”

Budget releases from both the House and Senate have proposed increasing class sizes in K-4, reducing health-care benefits, suspending cost-of-living adjustments, slashing professional development days and drastically cutting funding for colleges.

“By slashing the education budget, we are virtually guaranteeing the next generation of kids gets a lesser education than the previous one,” he says. “What do we tell them, ‘Sorry kid, you just happened to be born at the wrong time?’”

State lawmakers have proposed cutting as much as \$2 billion in state funding for K-12 and higher education. Legislators reportedly were working on a final state operating budget as *We 2.0* went to press. Budget updates will be posted on WEA’s Web site, www.washingtonea.org, as they become available.

“Rumor has it that there will probably be more layoffs this year than last year,” Spokane’s Wellens says. “It kind of makes sense with all the bad news we have been hearing lately.”

Even so, it’s still hard to think she can still lose her job — again.

“I realized that working with our Asperger friends was filling such a place in my heart that I did not completely understand,” she says. “I watched these kids grow in such a way that I did not expect.”

Bellevue teacher Kay Rice takes a pragmatic approach when it comes to layoff notices. She remembers receiving her first pink slip — after she and her teaching partner had just received a national award from the Environmental Protection Agency for their ecology classroom project.

“I’m going, ‘Wait a minute, how could this happen?’” she recalls. “I thought I was really keeping up on things.”

Rice says receiving a pink slip is a loss and those colleagues need to recognize and go through the grieving process. Use the RIF notice as an opportunity to figure out if your job is “the love of your life.”

If the answer is yes, then don’t give up on your passion, and arm yourself as any other smart job seeker would: maintain your networks, stay connected and apply, apply, apply.

“This is a loss and, until that next job, will be a loss,” she says, likening RIFs to a business downsizing. “It just is. We need to, at times like this, think as business people think.”

That means being prepared by making sure you have an updated resume and reference letters so that you are ready to fill out applications, if necessary.

In the event that an educator receives a layoff notice, Snohomish EA member Ted Teather says it shouldn’t be taken as a reflection on the person or his or her ability.

“It’s not fair to get a RIF notice,” he says. “I’m worried today. I don’t know what’s going to happen in my district but I know it’s not a reflection on me as a person. It’s simply a number and budgetary thing.”

He advises members to review their contracts and to talk to their union representatives and make sure

procedures are followed.

“If you do receive the RIF notice, continue to put out 100 percent,” says Teather, a counselor at Central Primary Center and Riverview Elementary in Snohomish. “This is a time when all that

hard work you’ve put in is going to come and support you. You will be able to go to your colleagues and supervisors for help and that help is generally in the form of reference letters.”

It’s a scary time for education, Teather admits, yet he wouldn’t trade his job even in these economic times.

“You should hold your head high, and when you go to apply for that next job know that you are good at what you do,” he says.

For Wellens, it’s a reminder she keeps close to heart.

“Can I keep my chin up?,” she asks. “Yeah, anything to keep working with these kids.

“I know that these special kids now love coming to school,” she says. “I will do anything to keep that in place.”

“These cuts impact our students, too: larger class sizes that make individual attention nearly impossible; fewer support employees to help students stay afloat as they begin to struggle ...”



Our students – and our educators – deserve better than more false promises.

‘By slashing the education budget, we are virtually guaranteeing the next generation of kids gets a lesser education than the previous one.’

— Kent Daniels, fourth/fifth-grade teacher
Orca K-8, Seattle

No time for Band-Aids



When RIF notices are distributed, an immediate — and understandable — reaction is often, “If we each give up two or three days of pay, we can save jobs.”

This is a very caring reaction, reflecting well on our humanity and kindness to each other. Unfortunately, it is, at best, a Band-Aid measure that fails to heal the arterial bleeding in our school districts brought on by major budget cuts.

Offering to surrender pay in exchange for job

retention fails to drive home the direct and devastating impact slashing district budgets and laying off educators has on a local community. Rather than placing the issue of RIFs up front and center, a “pay-to-play” option temporarily puts it on a back burner with the hope it will, ultimately, go away.

As locals and councils enter into RIF discussions with their school districts, this option should

not be on the negotiating table or in a back pocket. Everyone, from school administrators to parents, needs to see — and grasp — that the budget cuts are severe and everything, from class sizes to popular programs, will suffer from the harsh decisions being made.

If the grass on the football field starts to burn in the heat of summer, and goes brown because there are no longer sufficient funds for grounds maintenance, people will sit up and notice. If coaching staff are sent packing because the school sports budget has been eliminated, parents will become angry. And if five or 10 or more children are added to a class, then the impact of a reduced workforce will be fully felt by the community.

Trading pay for jobs allows the district to negotiate from a position of strength. Without having to feel the impact of the cuts themselves, administrators can look at solving their budget dilemma on the backs of educators. Instead of

looking inward to see where, in their offices and administrative programs, savings might be achieved, it becomes easy to calculate and negotiate based on pay surrender.

Careful analysis and detection will frequently turn up evidence of district waste and administrative overspending. Negotiations on

Getting ready for RIFs



With significant cuts coming in the state education budget, WEA wants you to be prepared in case you receive a Reduction-in-Force (RIF) notice. Here are some important steps to take now, even if you have not received a RIF notice:

- Keep all notices and paperwork you receive from your employer, especially your RIF notification should you receive one. These explain your appeal rights and may be necessary for any potential challenge to a RIF.
- Make an appointment to check your personnel file. Make sure the information in it is accurate and complete. For example, make sure that your contracted FTE, endorsements and other information are recorded properly. If you find mistakes, correct them as soon as possible.
- Make sure the district has current contact information for you, and keep it updated (mailing address, phone number, e-mail address, etc.). If you do not have a personal, non-district e-mail address, sign up for a free one and provide it to the district. Accurate contact information is important in case of a recall.
- Get a complete copy of your personnel file. You may have to pay for the copy charges, but the investment will be worthwhile down the road.
- Obtain letters of recommendation from your principal or other key people and have these recommendations ready in the event you need to look for employment elsewhere.
- Make sure you know who your local association president and UniServ representatives are — and how to get hold of them.



Washington voters have said smaller class sizes and high-quality teachers and support professionals are a smart investment. It's a commitment to quality public schools, which are essential to our state's economy and our students' futures.

stretching limited budget dollars should focus on where — and how — the district can, in its own areas, make cuts and changes.

Once a local has placed the “pay-to-play” option on the negotiating table, it begins a cycle that can quickly spiral out of control. What if, for example, offering to surrender three days of pay does not restore or save all the positions about to be lost? At what point is a line drawn and a decision made if the district says, “We can restore this many positions, but sorry, these others still lose out?”

And what about the impact of surrendering pay on potential retirees? It almost certainly means that they will have to work at least another five years because “surrender” breaks the pension arrangement.

No one can fault educators for thinking of pay surrender as a viable compromise, and a way to avoid the painful process

of seeing colleagues and programs suffer as budget cuts are applied. But the effect of that pain should be seen and felt by all in a community, and not contained to those on the frontline. No one should be allowed to take advantage of or hide behind the generosity and compassion of public school employees.

The financial morass in which Washington and local districts find themselves was not caused or created by educators. It is a direct result of years of financial neglect and a refusal to take responsibility by those with the power of the purse. It is incumbent on the district and the state to offer solutions.

And if the district, in its infinite bargaining wisdom, should pose the question as to whether school employees will surrender days of pay to save jobs, the question should be turned around and asked, “Are district administrators and staff prepared to do the same?”

Checklist for members who have received RIF notices

If you have received a Reduction in Force (RIF) notice, here are the things you need to do now. As each of these is important, WEA suggests checking each item off once you have it done.

Remember, you are not alone.

Read the WEA Reduction-In-Force Assistance Guide for School Employees. This manual, available on WEA's Web site, www.washingtonea.org, provides details regarding RIFs, steps you can take and available resources.

Pay attention to all timelines in your notice. Your RIF notice will contain important filing deadlines. If you miss these deadlines, you will have waived your ability to appeal your RIF.

Contact your UniServ representative and/or local president and let him or her know you have received a RIF notice.

File for unemployment immediately. There is a one-week waiting period for payment of benefits, so do not delay.

www.washingtonea.org

Explore your options for maintaining health insurance coverage. Your employer is required to provide you information on continuation of health-care coverage under the Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (COBRA). The federal stimulus package substantially lowers the co-payment required of most laid-off employees. You may want to explore changing to a less expensive plan/option. Additionally, you could be eligible for coverage under the Washington State Basic Health Care Plan.

Use your employer's Employee Assistance Plan (EAP) if one is provided. Many employers have contracted services with an EAP to provide basic counseling and assistance for employees undergoing stressful and difficult situations. It helps to talk with someone about your situation.

Update your resumé and explore available job search resources. WEA has a “Find a Job” link on its Web site. Microsoft and Monster.com have created the Microsoft Office Online Career Center that contains resumé templates and other job-seeker resources. Your local Employment Security Department office also should have similar resources.

Check with the Department of Retirement Systems (DRS) regarding your retirement account status and options.



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We believe the state budget deficit cannot be solved on the backs of educators or our students, either in the short or long term. WEA does not support any legislation that allows our state to further reduce funding for schools, regardless of the promises and political rhetoric.