

# Standing together for our schools – and sharing additional information

*Vancouver Public Schools • Wednesday, Apr 1 at 5:57 PM*

Dear VPS staff, families, and community,

We have been hearing that tomorrow morning, many staff, students, and community members are planning a “walk-in” to show support for our teachers and our schools.

We want to start by saying thank you.

We are grateful to be part of a community that cares deeply about educators and understands how important our staff are for students and families.

We also hear that some in our community feel we have not been fully transparent about our reduction in force (RIF) process. That is hard to hear. We care deeply about trust, and we want to share clear and full information about what is happening and why.

## **Our commitment to clear information**

Our reduction in force plan calls for reducing 107.3 FTE positions filled by certified teachers. It is important to note that 1 FTE does not always equal 1 person as some positions are part-time.

So far, 289 educators have received a layoff or nonrenewal notice.

We understand the difference in those numbers feels confusing and upsetting, and it is hard to understand why we would disrupt this many additional people’s lives when we know at the end of this process only 107.3 positions will ultimately be ended.

We would like to try to explain what is happening and why.

First, not all notices mean a loss of employment. Many of these people will be recalled into positions for which they are qualified for.

And, while it may seem we should work out all these logistics before notifying employees, these steps – and who receives notice – are determined by the constraints of our collective bargaining agreements (union contracts). We are required to follow them as written.

## **Why more people than FTE received notices**

Several required processes are happening at the same time, all guided by union contracts. This process is typical of most union agreements.

### **1. Yearly staffing changes**

Each year, we adjust staffing based on enrollment and program needs, following contract rules.

This year:

- Nearly 50 teachers are returning from leave (higher than usual)
- Far fewer staff are leaving or retiring than previous years (less attrition)
  - So far approximately 20 people have told us they will not be returning next year
  - In previous years the number has been closer to 80
- Enrollment is expected to decline more than projected 3 years ago

This means fewer open positions overall before we even began the reduction in force related to our budget.

## **2. Required steps in the union contract**

The reduction in force (RIF) process must follow the steps in the contract.

For educators, this means:

- Reductions are based solely on Washington State seniority
- Steps must happen in order
- We must consider all teachers in one VPS “pool”.
  - We cannot make case-by-case or building-by-building decisions

Only after reductions by seniority are complete can we look at specific certifications, and we must assure that teachers with more seniority are placed before teachers with less seniority *if* the senior teacher has the required certification needed to fill the open position. Again, this is required in the contract.

One limited agreement was reached with VEA for Special Education teachers. In all other areas, we must follow seniority and the steps outlined above as written in the contract without exception.

## **Why teachers with several years of experience are impacted**

The collective bargaining agreement requires us to make reductions based on seniority. Reductions based on seniority means we must give layoff notices to enough teachers to open up positions that allow us to move teachers with high seniority whose positions were eliminated into open positions for which they qualify.

To open up enough positions for this to happen, we had to initially give notice to all educators with 8 years or less of experience to reach the 107.3 FTE reduction required as we follow the contract.

We understand it is concerning to hear that teachers with up to 8 years of experience are affected. Because of earlier budget cuts, we now have fewer early-career teachers. The lowest years of experience for our basic education teachers is just under 3 years.

## **What “recall” means**

Our teachers who received layoff notices are now in a recall pool (sometimes also called a rehire list), which is also part of the contract process.

We will pull employees from this recall list back to work (if they choose to come back) to refill open positions after those employees who were in positions that were eliminated, but have more seniority than 8 years, are placed in their new roles.

As we complete staffing:

- If we need specific certifications (like advanced math, CTE, or world languages),
- And no one with higher seniority holds them,

those teachers with specific and less-common certifications may be recalled.

We are not able to make these decisions before issuing notices based on seniority, as that would not follow the contract requirements to place more senior teachers first if they qualify for the open position.

However, when the process is complete, the total number of completely reduced positions related to the reduction in force will meet the 107.3 full-time employment (FTE) reduction goal outlined in the plan.

### **Why Does The Recall Process Take So Long?**

We understand that receiving a notice and then being recalled is still emotional and difficult, and the waiting to know for sure even more so. While we would like to be able to do this as quickly as possible, we feel it is important to also do this carefully and with attention to detail to avoid mistakes and further disruption.

### **Is This the Process for All Employee Groups?**

It is important to note that this message is focused on our teaching staff and that contractual process, but reductions and changes are impacting all other employee groups as well. Their contracts may require different approaches and timelines. Our reductions also include our unrepresented staff, including administrators. In fact:

- Approximately 22% of building-level administrators have received reduction notices
- Approximately 15% of district-level administrators have received notices
- All director-level and above positions will have reduced contracts with 9 furlough (unpaid) days
  - These furlough days reduce those roles' salaries by approximately 4%

### **We know this is complicated and at times frustrating**

We know this is complex. There are many required steps and rules, and it can feel frustrating that this is happening even when we do fully understand.

We also understand there may be ideas for doing this differently that feel like it would be less emotionally tolling. However, because this process is governed by legally binding union contracts, we must follow those steps and cannot make adjustments outside of them.

We see the stress this is causing and know it reaches far beyond those directly impacted. We also know that when people find out the news that it is distressing for the person impacted and those who care for them. With the number of people impacted, there was no way to deliver all the notices at perfect times. However, we did prioritize that our delivery of notices were all done in person and directly by an employee's supervisor.

## **Standing together**

We are truly sorry for the strain this is placing on our community, and we wish there were an easier path forward.

We are also heartbroken that our budget does not allow us to keep all of the talented and valued employees who serve our students. We have kept these positions as long as possible because they each provide valuable support to our students and in hopes that state funding would improve, or be adjusted, to match the real world cost to run a school district. However, our current situation and low fund balance is not sustainable so we have no other option than making these cuts.

We fully support our community's desire to stand together for students, educators, and strong schools.

We are grateful for that, and our goal is to keep sharing clear and helpful information.

We will continue to share updates as we move forward.

Again, if you would like to learn more about our budget challenges, and also the state of school funding in Washington State, we encourage you to [take a look at our 2026-27 webpage](#).

Thank you for your care, your advocacy, and your continued support of our schools and staff.