

The Council of School Supervisors and  
Administrators (CSA)



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Testimony Presented to  
The City Council Committee on Education  
*jointly with the*  
Finance Committee

*School Aid Layoffs*

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Good afternoon, Chairman Recchia, Chairman Jackson, and members of the New York City Council's Committees on Finance and Education. I am Ernest Logan, President of the Council of School Supervisors and Administrators (CSA). On behalf of CSA's nearly 13,000 members, I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify about the layoffs of nearly 700 workers in our public schools.

Over the course of the last three years -- in the name of economic necessity -- school budgets have been cut to the bone and finally beyond the bone. Our Principals have done all they could to preserve a productive and positive learning environment for students, teachers and the rest of the school community. Yet, at every turn, they face new demands to sacrifice resources: to do more with less. We are here today because this has happened again in a particularly heartbreaking way: Last Friday, October 7, the city sent pink slips to nearly 700 school and health aides, parent and community coordinators, lunch assistants and other critical support staff. Most of these employees were woefully underpaid and already fighting an uphill battle to make ends meet. Most of them were pulled from struggling schools in economically deprived districts where their loss will be felt most keenly.

Let us first look at the effect these layoffs will have on schools. As a former Principal, I can tell you that like the great City of New York, each school is run like a well-oiled machine—every nut and bolt is there for a reason, and if one gear falls off track, the machine as a whole is put at risk. The layoffs of these workers has put our schools at risk. Those who were laid off are the men and women who monitor the lunchroom, escort our special needs students, work with our parents, translate for non-English-speaking families, supervise children as they board buses, make sure they get lunch and engage with our school communities in many other critical ways. These workers are largely indispensable to the wellbeing of our children and their families.

Let us also consider the financial status of the workers themselves as well as the communities in which they work. The majority of those who have been laid off make less than \$15,000 per year working part-time in our schools. Understanding that, I hope the Council will challenge the DOE's assertion that cutting these 700 workers will save the city \$38 million dollars. In addition, these layoffs are mainly taking place in some of our poorest school districts, including the South Bronx, the East New York section of Brooklyn, and East Harlem. At the same time, many of our more prosperous school districts, and indeed the entire borough of Staten Island, appear to be exempt from layoffs. Hopefully, the Council will help us understand how this burden has fallen so disproportionately on the poor.

It is important to point out that our brothers and sisters at Local 372 and DC 37 have tried to negotiate to protect these workers, their families, and our schools. They have put three separate offers on the table. They have suggested cutting back hours, imposing furloughs and other alternatives to keep these workers in their crucial positions. Throughout the negotiations, the DOE has refused to present these options to Principals. Instead, it has claimed to be honoring the Principals' earlier staffing decisions. This conceals the fact that Principals were given no choices. They also believed that excessing would simply "bump" the employee to another school but not result in a layoff. Either way, Principals would have preferred to be presented with alternatives at the beginning. And, later, they would have preferred to hear about the offers that

Local 372 and DC 37 made to the city. I assure you that our school leaders would rather have a school aide for fewer hours a day than to have no school aide at all.

Finally, let us look at the economic reality of this situation. When you cut jobs, the workers do not go away—they turn to unemployment, COBRA, welfare and whatever resources they can find as they enter survival mode. Layoffs in the public sector simply shift one line item from one budget to the next and no one wins—our tax dollars either keep a worker employed and our schools running smoothly, or our tax dollars go to pay for unemployment and other social services needed as a result of job loss. Keeping these workers in their current jobs, on the other hand, protects our children, keeps our schools running smoothly and helps lessen the burden on our teachers, Assistant Principals and Principals.

Soon, agencies across the city will see their budgets slashed for a 4<sup>th</sup> year in a row. When the DOE presents its latest cuts to our Principals, our Principals will have virtually nothing left to cut. Therefore, I urge the Council, the Mayor, the DOE, and the unions to come together to examine the priorities. One priority should be to sacrifice high-priced consultants and extravagant data systems before sacrificing employees. Another should be to ensure that any cuts that are made do not fall disproportionately on poor and struggling schools. In the current situation, districts are being pitted against districts, schools against schools, and unions against unions. We are here today because we cannot let this happen now or in the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on this urgent issue. I am happy to answer questions you may have, and hope that you call on CSA in the near future so we can be of assistance in negotiating future budget cuts and join you in being a part of the solution.