

Massachusetts teachers union says 2,000 educators received layoff notices

Michael P. Norton

State House News Service

In 47 school districts where staff are represented by the Massachusetts Teachers Association, layoff and non-renewal notices were sent recently to more than 2,000 teachers and education support professionals, the union announced Tuesday.

The list of 2,030 notices only includes districts where local union officials reported that 10 or more educators received notices that haven't been rescinded. The union said some notices are issued annually due to enrollment and program changes, but there's a "spike" this year due to government funding issues.

State officials, in the face of historic revenue declines associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, are continuing fiscal 2020 local aid levels through July and August but have not made decisions about full fiscal 2021 local aid levels, which supplement property taxes to form the basis of K-12 education budgets.

Fiscal 2021 is supposed to be the start of a seven-year infusion of new state aid to school districts, but the funding landscape, like so many other things, is uncertain. Lawmakers continue to size up budget plans and options that could involve tax increases, reforms and spending cuts, reserves and federal aid.

House rules call for the House Ways and Means Committee to offer a full fiscal 2021 budget proposal sometime in the next seven days, by July 1.

Preliminary guidance from state education officials calls for schools to significantly reduce class sizes to enable social distancing, according to the MTA, which says that smaller class sizes would require districts to hire more staff.

“The state must live up to its constitutional obligation to provide the funding needed for schools to operate effectively and safely during the COVID-19 pandemic,” MTA President Merrie Najimy said. “Doing so is part of dismantling a system of institutionalized racism wherein students of color attend schools with significantly less funding. While the education and well-being of all students have been disrupted, our students of color have been harmed the most.”

Najimy called for taxes on “the very wealthy and profitable corporations” to help the state close any funding gaps.

After bungling the wording of a 2018 constitutional amendment raising taxes on the wealthy, supporters of a revised proposal tacking a surtax on household incomes above \$1 million a year hope to put their proposal before voters in 2022.