

March Update

Dear VEA members,

First and foremost we feel the pain and suffering all of our members, students and the broader VPS community are experiencing. Thank you for your patience as your union leadership group sorts through all the information — and misinformation — about the RIFs of Vancouver educators and VEA members. If you hear anything that doesn't sound right, please reach out to VEA so we can address it directly.

Please know that VEA has no authority in the decision to pursue a RIF or in the final decisions made in implementing the RIF. Under labor law, choices about how many people to employ belongs solely to district management under a concept called “management rights.” While district management will often collaborate and seek feedback from VEA leadership, and these discussions are appreciated, unless decisions violate our contract, final decisions are district management's alone to make.

Though we have requested it, we have not yet received confirmation from VPS management regarding the official number or names of those notified of layoff this week. While the Board authorized a total reduction of 107.3 FTE from the VEA bargaining unit, our unofficial estimates suggest closer to 300 of our members will have been impacted by layoffs. Approximately 20% of our bargaining unit received a RIF notice. Our calculations also indicate that reductions to our bargaining unit alone far exceed the \$24 million total reduction approved by the School Board at their March 10 meeting. VEA will be demanding that district management implement the recall as quickly as possible and we will ensure that when everything shakes out that there will be no more cuts than what the Board approved.



Myth: VEA isn't doing anything about the RIF.

Fact: The VEA has actively communicated news about the RIF throughout the year and encouraged members to actively participate in voicing concerns and impacts. We have requested that members share areas of budget reduction outside of personnel and shared that information with both district management and school board members. VEA leadership has also been actively advocating for members, demanding transparency from management, ensuring the contract is followed, and will be fighting for recalls for those unnecessarily notified.

Myth: VEA agreed (or did not agree) to protect choice programs/schools.

Fact: The VEA does not have the authority to determine protected programs or schools. That is a district management right. The VPS School Board protected only Special Education positions. VPS officials shared they would like the ability to identify groups of employees for protection from RIF, but there was no way the union could agree with that without also creating a pathway to circumvent the entire contractual RIF process. Our role is to ensure that the contract is followed. If actions are taken that violate the contract, we would have a responsibility to grieve those decisions – which is what we communicated to district management. Our contract follows Washington State statute and uses State seniority to determine layoffs as it is a neutral metric, and one that protects members against favoritism and other forms of bias.

Myth: Members aren't being kept informed or the VEA is not being transparent.

Fact: The VEA is committed to timely communication and updates. We have been sharing information throughout the year as quickly as possible. We are often not receiving communication from district management regarding the roll out. Instead, we are hearing from members who are hearing from colleagues or principals. Our communication on Wednesday afternoon was in response to not only district officials asking us to keep quiet, but also knowing that the information was already out there and our responsibility is to our members.

Myth: These extra cuts were made to make preferred placements TOSAs/coaches/specialists.

Fact: TOSAs/coaches/specialists are members of the VEA bargaining unit. They are our members and we cannot allow management to turn members against each other. While many may not understand the unique role that these individuals play in our district and the success of our students, the reality is that their positions were eliminated and they have the same contract rights to be placed according to seniority and endorsement area.

Myth: VEA is weak

Fact: A union is the collective group working together in coordinated ways for the same goal. While the role of educators has only increased and many are feeling the strain of their workload, our success relies on member participation and a unified front to ensure that our rights are protected and that our collective voice is heard. VEA is not one person - VEA is ALL of our members.

Reach out if you received a RIF notice this week so we can send you information about a webinar on Thursday, April 2nd starting at 4:30 pm.



There have been a number of calls for action in response to these cuts. We will be communicating with building reps and providing guidance on coordinated actions, including a pink slip campaign and walk INs district wide next Thursday, April 2. More information to come.

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