

LAUSD expects to chop 500 jobs

Brewer targets administration

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Facing a \$95 million shortfall in next year's budget, Los Angeles Unified Superintendent David Brewer III on Thursday unveiled a plan to eliminate 500 administrative positions mostly from the district's downtown headquarters, while also shifting more money and staffing to local districts.

The staff reduction is about 10 percent of the district's nonteaching work force and would be achieved through attrition and retirements, he said.

The \$6.4 billion operating budget also calls for a \$2.5 million cut in classroom services, mostly through staffing reductions that also would be achieved through attrition.

The fiscal plan is Brewer's first as superintendent and reflects reduced government funding, declining enrollment, the impact of a 7.5 percent pay and health benefits increase promised to teachers, and the costs of reducing class sizes.

"It's going to be somewhat painful. We have to balance the budget, we have no choice," Brewer said. "Because of the 7.5 percent total compensation package, we had to make some significant cuts ... and the bottom line is we're going to take this opportunity to restructure the district into a 21st century organization."

The cuts and shifts in funds are in line with Brewer's vow to dramatically restructure LAUSD and its culture after a scathing management audit said local districts are not sufficiently empowered to do their jobs.

Cuts to districts

The superintendent said that to balance the budget he cut each of LAUSD's eight local districts about 10 percent, mostly in staffing. Cuts in the district's central office totaled about \$61.5 million or about 16 percent, he said.

But Brewer also said he shifted about \$11 million in professional development funds and about 20 positions to the local districts to boost school-based management.

Brewer said he collaborated with the local districts to construct the budget.

But the move to empower the local districts is likely to draw the ire of the teachers' union and comes even as a district study released Friday found that while LAUSD is underfunded, it still could squeeze out an extra \$160 million in savings.

A.J. Duffy, president of United Teachers Los Angeles, said Friday he is skeptical that moving more resources to local districts would give school sites greater authority over the budget and curriculum.

Duffy said he plans to have a lengthy discussion with Brewer to explain the union's perspective that the local districts have stood in the way of reform.

"We've seen this preacher before and once it gets to the mini-districts, it doesn't get to the school sites - not just the money but the authority to make decisions," Duffy said. "Mini-district folks don't understand local control. It's part of the bureaucratic culture."

Brewer also allocated \$5 million to his newly created "innovation division," which will create pilot programs

and consider proposals for small clusters of schools to improve student achievement.

Amid Brewer's proposed cuts, a report commissioned last year by the district and UTLA said Thursday that the nation's second-largest school district is one of the most underfunded urban districts in the country.

The report said that about \$2.5 billion that LAUSD receives from state and federal governments is "oppressively" restricted and that the district allocates a high percentage of its funds to instruction than other major school districts.

But the report also identified areas to which LAUSD could more effectively allocate resources and said provisions that are part of normal union contracts can become barriers to reform.

Seeking true reform

The report said the district and UTLA must get beyond district policies and union provisions to accomplish true reform.

"The district cannot transform its schools without the active support of UTLA and, in some cases, without a significant renegotiation of the UTLA contract that exchanges better working conditions for fewer restrictions around scheduling and staffing, and a longer school day that includes collaborative-planning time," wrote author Stephen Frank, director of the nonprofit Education Resource Strategies, which conducted the \$200,000 study.

Frank criticized the union's demand for a two-student reduction in class sizes in grades 4 to 12 that will cost LAUSD \$10 million over three years.

That money could have been leveraged more to reduce student loads for teachers by creating block schedules or spending it on small literacy groups for English-learners, Frank said.

"I don't know of any research to suggest that a class-size reduction of two is going to impact student learning," Frank said.

But Duffy disagreed that the class-size reduction negotiated in the recent three-year contract would be better used on other student programs.

"This is one of those no-brainers. It's more efficient to teach to 24 kids than to 34 kids," Duffy said.

Duffy said the union, however, is willing to partner with the district to bring innovative practices to school sites.

"But I'm not willing to give up teachers' traditional rights, which I think are critically important, like teachers participating in a deliberative process over bell schedules," Duffy said. "Until I see a formula that retains class-size reduction in a meaningful way and expands it to other grades, I'll fight like hell to keep K-3 class-size reduction."

The district's budget committee will consider the proposed budget in coming weeks. The district is required to submit a balanced budget to the county, with adoption by June 30.

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Key findings

LAUSD gets about \$9,300 per pupil in government funds compared with an average \$10,400 for the 20 largest urban districts.

English-learners receive significantly fewer resources than those in other urban districts.

LAUSD invests 59 percent of total expenses in instruction, higher than all benchmark districts except Chicago.

Funds are heavily restricted by state, federal, district and collective-bargaining rules, leading to programs that can undermine coherence in schools and foster inefficiencies.

Nearly \$160 million for everything from data-processing to program-management staff could be better used.

LAUSD could organize schools better to provide students with more individual attention and time for learning.

LAUSD invests significant resources in professional development but lacks a coherent strategy to address district priorities and match needs and performance.

Key action items

Implement a reading strategy for the 70 percent of secondary students who are several years behind grade level.

Create career and leadership opportunities for teachers that allow them to stay in the classroom.

Free up money from restrictive uses by redesigning the way it travels from the central office to the schools.

Support English-learners with more teachers and small literacy groups.

Source: Education Resource Strategies report on LAUSD