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Bedford board to lay off third of teaching staff

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LAMBERTVILLE -- Bedford Public Schools, grappling with a projected \$4.3 million deficit, will send pink slips this week to 103 teachers, or more than a third of the teaching staff.

The Board of Education Tuesday night voted unanimously to implement the layoffs, cutting deep into the teacher seniority list. The action satisfies the May 20 deadline the district has with the 290-member Bedford Education Association to notify teachers of staff reductions that will be needed for next school year.

Howard Schwager, director of human resources and labor discussions, said the steep cuts will allow the district to work through the bumping process to get to certified teaching positions that it wants to eliminate.

"Are all these individuals going to be laid off for the 2011-12 school year? Absolutely not," Mr. Schwager said. "I look at this as one step in the process. A significant number of individuals, by the time we get to June 1, will be recalled."

Under contract provisions, the central administration office can begin the process in the next five days of recalling teachers being laid off to get to the targeted positions.

Superintendent Ted Magrum said legislation in Lansing that would drastically cut per-student funding necessitated the steep layoffs.

Under proposed House amendments to Gov. Rick Snyder's budget proposal, Michigan schools are looking at cuts ranging from \$256 to \$297 a student. That's on top of a \$170-a-student cut that's already in place.

"We are hopeful that in their judgment they will reduce the budget cuts they are going to give us. At this time we have to plan for the worst. We are estimating high to protect the budget," Mr. Magrum said.

The layoffs include 13 teachers who were given pink slips in early March. Those layoffs, which are expected to be permanent, are tied to the district's decision in January to close Smith Elementary School and redistribute students to the other four elementary buildings and send sixth graders into the junior high.

Last year, Bedford Schools sent pink slips to roughly 50 teachers, with all of them eventually being recalled before school began in September.

Natalie Ewing, a physical education teacher at Smith Road Elementary, was among the teachers who will receive pink slips. She said this was the fifth year that she has received the notice. However, because she teaches in a specialized area, she said she fears that this year she might actually lose her job.

"I just feel bad for our kids because they are the ones who are to suffer through all of this," she said.

Renee Way, a special education teacher, said she didn't know if she will receive a pink slip.

"Am I scared? Sure, and I have been here for 11 years," she said. The resolution given to The Blade showed that she was not on the list.

Colleen Jan, president of the teacher's union, said in an earlier interview that she felt the administration went too deep into the seniority list without knowing enrollment figures for next year.

"These people have absolutely no idea this is coming," she said. "They are really messing with people's lives."

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