

# The Journal News

## The concept of 'shared sacrifice' eludes local school districts

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Education advocates in the Hudson Valley and throughout New York state are predicting thousands of teachers and aides will lose their jobs if the Legislature adopts Gov. David Paterson's proposed school-aid cuts for the coming year. But budget cuts affecting services to children can be avoided - if the adults in the system are willing to make some minor sacrifices.

Take, for example, the situation in the Yonkers City School District, which reportedly has warned that adoption of the governor's budget would force at least 600 layoffs. Now, consider the following:

- The governor's proposed aid cut for Yonkers comes to \$10.9 million, according to the schools superintendent. That's about 2 percent of the current school budget and 4.2 percent of the district's salary costs.
- Under their current contract, the base salaries of Yonkers teachers have risen 6.6 percent since July 2007, with another 2.5 percent increase due to take effect next week. Their pay is due to increase by another 3 percent on July 1, and by 3 percent yet again in mid-2010.
- On top of those increases in base pay, many Yonkers teachers also are eligible for annual longevity "step" increases that can add 3 percent to 5 percent a year. Thus, for example, the salary of a teacher with a master's degree originally hired by the district in 1998 -typically a person now in his or her mid-30s - rose from \$75,700 in 2007-08 to \$80,335 last September. The same teacher's base pay will be boosted to \$82,343, effective Feb. 1, and is scheduled for a bump to \$91,751 next year. That's a total pay increase of 21 percent within two school years.
- In addition to longevity steps, teachers move to higher pay "lanes" if they complete additional graduate courses. The current top step in the teachers' contract, reached after 35 years, ranges from \$108,898 for teachers with master's degrees to \$119,682 for teachers with doctorates. (By the way, the cost-compounding combination of base pay increases, steps and lanes is not unique to Yonkers. The latest available copies of teachers' contracts for every district in New York can be downloaded at [www.SeeThroughNY.net](http://www.SeeThroughNY.net).)

The upshot: (a) Yonkers teachers are not poorly paid, and (b) given current and projected pay increases under their contract, a freeze in teacher pay and a partial giveback of the Feb. 1 pay hike would probably allow the school district to absorb Paterson's budget cut without laying off anyone.

This would not be an extreme or highly unusual sacrifice. After all, unions representing other Yonkers city workers already have agreed to postpone scheduled wage hikes as a way of preventing layoffs in their ranks.

As the global recession deepens and unemployment rises, workers throughout the nation's private sector are seeing their wages frozen or even cut by employers desperate to reduce costs to stay in business. Employees in some high-profile government agencies, including the White House staff, also are working under frozen salary scales.

And President Barack Obama obviously doesn't think these sacrifices are a bad thing. In his inaugural address, Obama singled out "the selflessness of workers who would rather cut their hours than see a friend lose their job" as an example of the kind of behavior "which sees us through our darkest hours."

Memo to teachers unions in Yonkers and elsewhere: These are very dark hours for New York taxpayers. How about pitching in?

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