



## Cut First, Ask Questions Later at DCPS

When Mayor Adrian M. Fenty and Chancellor Michelle A. Rhee announced last Wednesday in front of D.C. school headquarters that the District will lay off teachers as part of up to \$40 million in budget reductions, they said the public would have at least some voice in the process of deciding where and how to cut.

"Principals will spend the remainder of the month working with instructional superintendents and their school communities to determine the budget adjustments that best meet their needs," Rhee said in her formal statement.

It would appear, however, that the process is already more than well under way. On Friday, two days after the Fenty-Rhee announcement, director of school operations Jesus Aguirre told principals in a memo that they had until 10 a.m. Saturday to hand in their "Budget Reduction Worksheets" identifying the positions that they planned to eliminate to meet financial targets.

The expectation was that principals would consult school LSRTs (Local School Restructuring Teams), advisory bodies of parents, teachers and administrators that offer input on budget issues. Perhaps some teams were consulted, but if they were, it was done on the fly.

"Train has left," one veteran principal e-mailed today. "Cursory attention paid to school communities. There really wasn't time."

Starting today, principals began trekking to a sixth floor conference room in the human resources department at 825 North Capitol to discuss their choices with senior administrators. If, for example, a principal believes the school can get by with one less math teacher, he or she must "rate and provide a supporting narrative" for every math educator in that job classification. The rating and writing is to be done in the conference room.

The rating criteria is heavily weighted toward "office or school needs," which count for 75 percent of the 1-to-10 score. This includes just about everything Rhee preaches, including commitment to student achievement, positive classroom environment, using data to make decisions about instruction, etc. Ten percent will come from contributions to school community, such as after-school tutoring, or an exceptional prior-year performance, if there was one. Using special skills or life experiences to enrich student life will count for another ten.

The final five percent--length of service, veterans preference and past outstanding performance ratings--is to be calculated by human resources.

Sometime before the end of the month, the District will deliver termination notices to the principal, who must hand them out the following day after school hours. If they think the news might be met with hard feelings, or worse, they should be in touch with Aguirre.

"Please feel free to contact the Director of School Operations if there are unique security issues that you believe need to be addressed," he wrote.

**Bill Turque**

By Bill Turque | September 21, 2009; 4:48 PM ET