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LAUSD administration swells 20 percent from 2001 to 2007

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LAUSD SALARIES: A TWO-PART SERIES



On the edge of downtown Los Angeles, overlooking the 110 Freeway, stands a 29-story office building that boasts many of the trappings of a modern corporate headquarters: a cafeteria with flat-screen TVs, a state-of-the-art media production center, an on-site dry-cleaning service.

The tower is the headquarters of the Los Angeles Unified [School](#) District - home to more than 3,400 employees. They are the core of a massive bureaucracy that has surged in recent years even as the number of students and teachers has dropped.

And 3,200 more administrators and support staff are scattered throughout the city, as top officials acknowledge that the number of highly paid managers has swollen beyond what is needed to run the nation's second-largest school district.

"There are assistants to assistants," says Senior Deputy Superintendent Ramon Cortines, who was hired in May to oversee the district's day-to-day operations.

Managing almost 900 [schools](#) and more than 650,000 students is a huge task. But a Daily News review of salaries and staffing shows LAUSD's bureaucracy ballooned by nearly 20 percent from 2001 to 2007. Over the same period, 500 teaching positions were cut and enrollment dropped by 6 percent.

The district has approximately 4,000 administrators, managers and other nonschool-based employees - not including clerks and office workers - whose average annual salary is about \$95,000. About 2,400 administrators are among the 3,478 LAUSD employees who earn more than \$100,000 annually.

Meanwhile, the average salary for an LAUSD teacher is \$63,000. And the average household income in Los Angeles County is less than \$73,000.

The Daily News obtained the LAUSD salaries database through the California Public Records Act. The database - searchable by name, job title and salary range - is posted at dailynews.com.

"(The bureaucracy) grows whether it's fat or lean times," said United Teachers Los Angeles union leader A.J. Duffy, a longtime critic of the district's administrative staffing.

"It's indicative of an upper echelon, of a leadership cadre that doesn't want to use its authority to clean house."

District and union officials said some of the bureaucratic buildup may have come at the expense of teachers' compensation even as LAUSD continues to lag in statewide test scores and grapples with a 33.6 percent dropout rate that is far higher than the statewide average of 24.2 percent.

Now, LAUSD is bracing for more than \$400 million in state budget cuts that officials say will affect [education](#) programs.

Superintendent David Brewer III and Cortines said they are continuing to reduce the bureaucracy in the face of the looming budget cuts and as the district seeks voter approval for a new \$7 billion school construction bond in November.

"We will have a more decentralized and leaner headquarters," said Brewer, adding that most of the downsizing will come through attrition. But the superintendent said he and Cortines are in fundamental agreement about the need for cuts.

"I'm going to eliminate (administrative jobs), I'd say, by hundreds for next year out of necessity," said Cortines, "but also because I believe ... they should be in the (schools) and local districts."

The growth of LAUSD's bureaucracy is evident in the size of the union that represents district administrators. It has seen its membership grow from about 2,100 to 2,600 members in the past several years.

The Associated Administrators of Los Angeles has seen its membership grow.

Michael O'Sullivan, president of the administrators union, said the increase is due to a "proliferation" of extra programs over the past decade to support schools and [students](#). Among the additions: administrative staffing for a special-education consent decree, supervisors for Beyond the Bell after-school academic programs, instructional coaches, and backup for small learning communities.

"There was nothing added that didn't have a positive result," he said. O'Sullivan added that six-figure salaries for many administrators reflect their supervisory responsibilities, as well as more and longer work days.

Like teachers represented by UTLA, administrators received a 6 percent pay hike retroactive to July 2006, under a contract that ends in June.

Brewer said he has trimmed about 300 people from the bureaucracy over the past two years as student test scores have risen - a sign that principals and teachers no longer need the tight central controls they once did.

"My mantra is, 'Results will set you free.' We're starting to give more authority and flexibility to the school sites as they achieve," said Brewer, who became superintendent in November 2006.

Board President Monica Garcia said the cuts made so far have not led to real reform, and that an entirely new "model" is needed that combines reductions at Beaudry with a substantive shift in resources and responsibility to schools.

"It's not just changing little pieces around, but we have to figure out how to reinvent public education," Garcia said. "We have to move dollars and authority to school sites and give decision-making to them versus downtown."

Last year, officials estimate that 335 nonschool-based employees left the district, were reclassified or were moved into schools. They won't have a true count of who remains for a couple of months.

San Fernando Valley board member Tamar Galatzan said getting accurate staffing and budget numbers from the district has been difficult, but she said there is little question the bureaucracy - which includes eight local district offices - is too large.

"I truly believe the number of people who work in Beaudry and in the local districts is too big and needs to be cut," Galatzan said. "There might be waste at a school, but there are definitely people downtown and in local districts that are doing jobs that aren't as important as teaching our kids and keeping them safe."

The district hopes to save more than \$60 million this year, approximately \$50 million of it in salaries. But there is a lag between cutting positions and seeing the results because of the state Education Code's notification requirements for nonteaching workers who have "bumping rights" to displace other workers. And administrators holding teaching certificates generally are reassigned at the end of a school year.

Cortines, a former LAUSD superintendent, said he intends to transfer more administrators into schools, but said it needs to be done carefully.

"You could remove one of those compliance people, and I might lose millions of dollars from the federal or state government because we haven't gotten certain reports in," he said.

LAUSD's bureaucratic expansion accelerated under former Superintendent Roy Romer in 2001 as the 928,000-square-foot Beaudry Building was purchased and filled despite enrollment that was already beginning to stall. During Romer's tenure, nonschool-based employees increased by 18 percent, district records show.

Romer, now chairman of Strong American Schools, a nonprofit education-reform organization based in Washington, D.C., said strengthening the supervisory ranks was critical to improving student performance.

"The central office is easy to criticize," Romer said. "But look at the changes that would not have occurred without a driving strategy that was uniformly applied."

Romer said at times he reluctantly steered resources from classrooms - for example, to expand the district's police force and to increase the inspector general's staff to meet community demands.

But he said more managers also were necessary for the district's \$19 billion school building program and a [computer](#) system to track student performance.

Still, Cortines maintains that downtown employees have sometimes failed in their duties.

The deputy superintendent said he has discovered instances in which incompetent top managers at Beaudry were moved into paper-pushing jobs at the same salary, while others were hired to do their jobs - effectively doubling the district's costs.

Cortines has begun a review of staffing and salaries, but admitted he is hampered by incomplete personnel files.

"I'm dealing with situations that, on the face of it, I can't believe that person is on the job," he said. "But there is no data or information at all that says the person is outstanding, or mediocre or whatever."

Cortines said he also discovered that many employees downtown with extensive educational expertise believed they were required to stay in their offices rather than spend part of their time training teachers in schools. Included are about two dozen math, literacy and science experts, making \$85,000 to \$109,000. They have been ordered into schools, along with other instructional employees who have offices downtown.

But Cortines said he is disappointed that the district's headquarters has become such an entrenched fortress.

"Someone said to me, 'You don't know how many years I worked to get downtown.' And I said, Let me tell you, that's not where the work is.

"The work is in the schools and in the classroom."

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