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Administrative bloat

The numbers don't lie - the LAUSD is a self-perpetuating bureaucracy

Los Angeles Unified School District administration is growing like a district on the rise. From 2001-07, the second-largest school district in the country increased the size of its nonteaching staff by 20percent, to more than 6,600, according to an examination of district payroll published today by the Daily News.

Trouble is, the LAUSD is not a district on the rise; it's one on a decline. And the uneven growth of its bureaucracy may be directly contributing to its descent.

Even while the district's central office was adding staffers at a quick rate, the student body was shrinking. During roughly the same time period, school population dropped every year, with enrollment down now to about 650,000 students - about 100,000 fewer students since the beginning of the century. Because there were fewer students, naturally the number of teachers in the district dropped as well - by about 500.

But the number of administrators continued to grow. Wouldn't it be logical to conclude that if there are fewer students and teachers, the district would need fewer administrators to oversee them?

So, why this disparity? That's exactly what the Daily News wanted to know as it embarked upon this project to publish the salaries of every single employee at the LAUSD.

Some of that administrative growth is entirely understandable. The district had to hire staffers to run its

massive \$19 billion school- construction project. Building that many new schools requires a team of folks to oversee the planning, construction and management.

The rest appears to be merely a case of an out-of- control bureaucracy that has started to become a self-perpetuating entity. As the LAUSD's senior deputy superintendent, Ramon Cortines, put it: There are assistants who have assistants. When an organization gets too big, its very size demands more bodies just to sustain itself.

It's not just its size that makes the LAUSD a bloated bureaucracy. It's the cost of that administrative bloat: \$490 million. More than 3,500 of the district's employees earn more than \$100,000 - and most are not teachers.

In fact, the LAUSD's teachers, who toil in some of the most dangerous classrooms in the country, have comparatively modest salaries - about 17 percent less than in nonteaching jobs. That doesn't signal the priority on education that the district needs. Worse still, the LAUSD's teachers on average earn less than their counterparts in other large cities such as San Francisco.

This information is particularly important given that Angelenos are about to decide whether to give \$7 billion more of their money to the district to maintain and upgrade facilities. Voters ought to know how their money is being spent before deciding, in these precarious economic times, whether to shell out more.

Considering the scope of the LAUSD's administrative bloat revealed in its staffing and salaries, it's clear the district's first priority is not educating students, but sustaining the bureaucracy.

And that's not the sign of a healthy, growing district on the rise that deserves the public's support.

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