

Milwaukee Public Schools: Proposes reducing about 260 non-classroom positions and redeploying resources to classrooms

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(MILWAUKEE) — Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) Superintendent Brenda Cassellius today announced a series of budget proposals designed to address the district's \$46 million structural budget gap while continuing to protect and strengthen classroom instruction. The plan includes reducing about 260 non-classroom positions and shifting resources from Central Services to schools.

The reductions, which would take effect for the 2026–27 school year pending school board approval, would save about \$30 million and focus on administrative roles at Central Services and non-classroom roles in schools. Importantly, no classroom teacher positions are being cut to close the budget gap, though, as is the case every year, the district may need fewer teachers where there is lower enrollment. About 40 of the 263 positions being eliminated are already vacant, meaning that not all reductions will result in layoffs. Affected employees eligible for classroom-based roles will be encouraged to apply for available positions.

“Protecting classrooms and supporting high-quality instruction remains our top priority throughout this budget process,” said Dr. Cassellius. “These changes will be hard, but by reducing positions outside the classroom amid our budget challenges, we can put more resources where they matter most: in the classroom.”

Addressing a Structural Budget Imbalance

Recently completed financial audits confirmed the structural deficit, including a \$46 million gap at the end of last school year. A separate Human Resources audit, conducted at the district's request by the Council of the Great City Schools, found that MPS has one Central Services employee for every 138 students compared to the average of 166 students per central office employee across large urban districts nationwide. To realign spending and strengthen school-based instruction, the district is implementing a multi-year plan to eliminate the structural gap and rebalance staffing, including a soft hiring freeze of non-classroom positions and a review of contracts during the current school year with a \$5 million contract savings target.

Details of Position Reductions

The approximately 263 position reductions include:

- **Central Services:** About 116 positions from the offices of Academics; Communications; Family, Community, and Partnership; Finance; Human Resources; Operations; Schools office; and the Superintendent's office
- **Non-classroom school-based roles: About 147 positions**, including assistant principals, deans of students, and implementers

Strengthening Student Support

MPS will also establish a unified department for student support and belonging, bringing together staff dedicated to each of the following efforts: Black and Latino Male Achievement; Gender Identity and Inclusion; Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS); and Restorative Practices. While some of these areas had been expanded in prior years using federal COVID-19 relief funds, these funds are no longer available to support the increased number of coaching positions. MPS will work with this team to design districtwide professional development and school based strategies to support students that align with the work of existing school-based counselors, social workers, psychologists, nurses and other resources.

Continued Investment in Educators

Despite budget constraints, the district will maintain key investments in its workforce, including:

- Steps and lanes adjustments recognizing longevity and advanced education (approximate cost of \$10 million)
- No changes to employee healthcare plan design
- Transitioning principals to 12-month contracts to help make sure schools are fully staffed in the fall, provide more professional development, and better support summer school.

Looking Ahead

Superintendent Cassellius also emphasized that, like all districts statewide, MPS faces rising costs while receiving a \$0 state increase in general aid for 2026-27 public school students, despite a \$2.4 billion state government surplus. The referendum, generously supported by Milwaukee taxpayers in 2024, has helped to bridge this gap and continues to support arts, physical education, mental health services, and career exploration. However, it does not make up for the lack of state-funded inflation increases for nearly two decades.

“While these decisions are difficult, they put MPS on a stronger long-term foundation,” Superintendent Cassellius said. “We are restoring our fiscal health, protecting classrooms, and strengthening the educational experience for all MPS students.”

The district continues to bargain in good faith with its union partners. If the process does not achieve savings, additional strategies may be needed to reduce the budget gap.