

83 Cherokee County and Unlock The Waiting Lists Advocacy Efforts Needed by YOU and more!

Dearest Advocates:

For those families that live in Cherokee County- please read the below email I received from a fellow grassroots advocate regarding the cutting of 304 teachers in Cherokee County (including 80 special education paraprofessionals). If you live in this county, you need to get involved for your child's education! See below announcement regarding what you can do and get involved to make a difference. Grassroots advocacy does work!

In addition, additional information came out today regarding the need for continued "education" and advocacy efforts regarding services to those individuals with disabilities. Our legislators need to hear from **YOU** regarding the need for funding for important services and programs. See below Unlock the Waiting List's latest announcement. In addition, if you don't know who your legislators are go to: www.vote-smart.org and plug in your zip-code to find out. At this point, they need to hear from you via phone. They vote on 2010 budget on Monday!

Below is also information from the Governors Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD) regarding the need for Medicaid transformation. Please read the below information on clarification on what this means. If you agree, please go to this website to sign your support. <http://www.centerforself-determination.com/signon.html>

This is the time we must let our voices be heard. I hope you take the time to get involved to make change in your county, state and/or federal government!

Also for you south Atlantans - Dr. Steve Hall will be presenting in April regarding the new NOW/COMP waivers. See below for more information.

"UNITED - WE WILL MAKE A DIFFERENCE!"

Sincerely,

Heidi

(Proud Mother to Jacob - 9 yrs old with Down syndrome and Jared - 7 yrs old)

"Help the Children Now, So They Can Help Themselves Later!"

www.heidjmoore.com

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For residents of Cherokee County- Advocacy Needed:

The Cherokee County Superintendent has proposed the termination of 304 teachers for next school year, including all part-time faculty, 80 Kindergarten paraprofessionals, and 80 special education paraprofessionals as described in the Cherokee Tribune. While the loss of any of our

teachers is significant, I am particularly concerned about the proposed 33% reduction in special education paraprofessionals. This announcement comes before many students in the district have even held IEP meetings to determine their needs for next year.

My question is this: what if the number of students who need special education paraprofessionals exceeds the amount allocated in the current district proposal? Cherokee superintendent Dr. Frank R. Petruzielo has said that paraprofessionals create a very expensive model; however, it is also a model that often enables many students in special education to participate successfully in an inclusive setting. So, if the number of students who need paraprofessionals exceeds the number of paraprofessionals employed, what are the alternatives? Are those alternatives going to allow students to remain in the least restrictive environment as required by federal law (IDEA)?

My concern is that students who have used paraprofessionals in the past might not have access to that kind of support next year and could end up being placed in a more restrictive setting. My other concern is that students currently receiving services in their neighborhood schools could be moved to receive services in one location.

If this is also a concern for you, please contact Stephanie Meredith at stephaniem@canisterco.com to help coordinate an effort to educate district and state representatives about our concerns. We will be meeting at 4:00 on Tuesday, March 31 at the First Baptist park in Woodstock, as well as coordinating an email campaign for our district and state education representatives and our legislators. Please contact me if you are interested in getting involved or participating in an email campaign.

Stephanie Meredith

Cherokee Tribune:

No job, salary cuts for school district office

Kristal Dixon

Published: March 25, 2009

kdixon@cherokeetribune.com

While no job cuts or salary reductions are planned for its central office staff, the Cherokee County School District has frozen new hires and raises there.

County Superintendent of Schools Dr. Frank Petruzielo said Tuesday the salaries of principals and assistant principals also have been frozen, as the district eyes cuts system-wide.

Last week, he recommended the school board cut 144 part-time and job-sharing employees - the majority of which are classroom teachers - as well as 160 paraprofessional teachers: 80 from special education and 80 from kindergarten. The cuts would trim \$8.5 million from the budget now being drafted.

Three positions will be left vacant at the central office next school year: director of school improvement (vacated when Dr. Carla Cohen became assistant superintendent of educational programs, student support and professional development), director of planning and forecasting (vacated when Russ Sims became assistant superintendent of support services and facilities/construction) and director of maintenance (Jerry Dobson will retire at the end of the month).

"We will try to do more with less," Petruzielo said.

One addition has been made at the central office, as Shelia Garrison recently was asked to consult on community outreach, banking and human resources issues. A former vice president at Cherokee Bank, Mrs. Garrison is not a salaried employee, but will be paid \$32 an hour as needed through June.

The funding comes from the professional services budget used for contractual services, said Mike McGowan, district director of public information, communication and partnerships.

"Her contract for services has nothing to do with the recommendation to eliminate part-time/job-share positions and modifying the parapro allocation due to budget constraints," he said.

While the school board will not vote to approve the budget and proposed job cuts until July 22, all part-time and job-share employees have been notified their roles may be eliminated.

"We are preparing for a scenario that does not look appealing," Petruzielo said of the economy, calling the early notification a "humane" decision.

Petruzielo said paid parapro, which district officials do not consider to be teachers, is a "very expensive" model. The district budgets about \$5 million a year for its 160 kindergarten parapro and 240 special education parapro.

Principals now are charged with the task of deciding which paraprofessional teachers they will cut. They and the personnel staff will use three factors in their determination, Petruzielo said: job performance, education background and experience.

"It's not any different from what principals do all the time," he said.

The number of parapro that need to be cut may change, officials said, depending on enrollment over the summer.

The main priority of the district, Petruzielo said, is to maintain its current full-time teachers.

As a result, teacher recruiting fairs have been canceled, and no new teachers will be hired.

If there are any teacher openings, the district first will look at displaced part-time employees as candidates, he said.

The district also has eliminated its Camp Cherokee orientation program for new teachers for the 2009-10 school year, which will reduce the budget by \$150,000.

School officials have come under fire since last week's announcement about job cuts, but Petruzielo noted that other metro school districts including in Cobb, Fulton and Gwinnett County are making the same hard decisions.

Petruzielo said the selection of which positions to cut isn't personal, adding he appreciates the work of part-time employees, and the district "is not trying to punish anyone.

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School Board to cut more than 300 jobs

Kristal Dixon

Published: March 21, 2009

kdixon@cherokeetribune.com

An economic downturn may force the Cherokee County School District to cut operations - and employees.

County Superintendent of Schools Dr. Frank Petruzielo has recommended that 304 teachers, or roughly 11 percent of those employed today, be eliminated this summer.

The layoffs would trim \$8.5 million from the budget, which this school year was set at \$639 million.

Positions up for elimination include 144 teachers who job share (when two teachers share a class), 80 kindergarten paraprofessional teachers and 80 special education paraprofessionals.

"There is almost no way to know how bad it's going to be," Petruzielo said of the economic outlook.

The proposal will be included in the recommended 2009-10 budget, which the school board will consider approving on July 22.

Petruzielo also may recommend staffing cuts from the district's 47 school nurses and graduation coach program.

The district employs nurses in all of its elementary and middle schools and graduation coaches in all of its middle and high schools.

The graduation coach program likely will be scaled back, Petruzielo said, to one per innovation zone, which each include a high school, middle school and feeder elementary schools.

The district is waiting to see if cuts in the school nurse program are made at the state level, as that will affect the direction they take, said Mike McGowan, district director of public information, communications and partnerships.

The district is the largest employer in the county, with more than 5,000 employees, 2,677 of which are teachers.

Layoffs are not the only way the district will be tightening its personnel spending.

"We don't foresee doing any hiring for new positions this year," McGowan said.

At the beginning of this school year, the district hired 181 classroom teachers to address the additional 1,137 students who enrolled, bringing its total enrollment to 37,413.

Officials said they do not expect to see a large increase in enrollment when classes begin this August, which may offset the need to hire more teachers.

The district projects it only will see an additional 673 students enroll over the summer - about half of the increase of 1,137 students seen at the beginning of this school year.

The new students expected to enroll before August also likely will be spread throughout the district, officials said, which would further decrease the possible strain and possible need to class-size waivers.

However, McGowan said the district would apply for the waivers from the state department of education when needed.

The budget woes are not limiting to operations, as the district's SPLOST (Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax) revenues for school construction and technology are \$40 million short.

As a result, the district has removed another elementary school from its five-year facilities construction plan.

Where this school would be built had not yet been designated nor had construction plans started, according to district Assistant Superintendent for Support Services and Facilities/Construction Management Russ Sims.

The SPLOST funds will cover the costs of the planned elementary schools on Univeter Road near Canton, Hunt Road in southwest Cherokee and in downtown Ball Ground as well as the Twin Forks bus depot and fuel island in Clayton community.

District officials earlier this year deleted another elementary school from the five-year plan when the SPLOST shortfall hit \$33.4 million.

Other reductions in expenditures to appear in the proposed budget include:

? Reducing the number of teachers in the Teach 21 classroom technology program from 475 to 100 for next school year;

? Eliminating the use of the Rosetta Stone foreign language program except for in foreign language and English for Speakers of Other Language classes;

? Cutting \$1 million in SPLOST funds from the three-year technology plan by moving from a seven-year cycle to an eight-year cycle for computer purchasing; and

? Cutting at least three instructional technology positions.

In light of a nearly \$2 billion shortfall at the state level, school districts were mandated by Governor Sonny Perdue to cut 3 percent from their current budgets.

The district so far has reduced its current budget by \$4.4 million.

Some of the changes include: consolidating Polaris Evening School's north and south campuses; reassigning teachers; eliminating subsidies to schools for mileage reimbursements for field trips, shuttles and activities; reductions in staff travel, technology training and travel and teacher recruitment; extended service intervals for 75 fleet vehicles; and consolidating routes for school buses serving various schools and programs.

Amid all the proposed budget cuts, there is one new source of funding: President Barack Obama's federal stimulus package is expected to pump an additional \$19 million into the district over the next two years.

The district plans to use the funds for special education and Title I initiatives, which are for schools where a high percentage of students receive free or reduced-price lunch. The number of Title I schools in the county also may increase next school year, as Teasley Middle School in Canton could be reclassified as one.

School board members said they hope parents will give more volunteer time at their children's schools to compensate for the reduction in teachers.

"Now is the time for parents to step and fill the void," said school board member Debi Radcliff of Towne Lake.

And PTA members said they are willing to do just that.

On Friday, district staff met with the county's PTA leaders, who said they are interested in talking with teachers and principals on how parents can become more involved.

"When paraprofessionals have been cut, we can always use parents," said Debbie Rabjohn of Canton, president of the Cherokee County Council of PTA, which oversees individual school PTAs.

Mrs. Rabjohn said the PTA would survey parents, administrators, teachers and other staff to see how volunteers can take the load off teachers.

The PTA will begin drafting its survey on Monday and distribute them next week.

Mrs. Rabjohn said while parents are concerned about the staffing cuts, they seem confident the quality of education won't be affected.

"Every parent wants the best for their kids," she said, adding parents can "bridge the gap" by volunteering time at schools.

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From Unlock the Waiting Lists- Advocacy Needed NOW:

Please restore these two items to the FY10 budget in the Department of Human Resources Developmental Disability program accounts:

Reduce funds to reflect the revised revenue estimate. \$5,391,458 state funds

Reduce funds for 135 vacant Mental Retardation Waiver Program slots. \$3,368,458 state funds

The impact of the \$5,391,480 will be that existing services funded by state dollars for supported employment, days supports, day habilitation, residential, personal supports, family supports, respite will be cut for 559 people. This will be a 8% cut to the state funded supports for providers ON TOP of the cut they received in the fall 08 of 1%. Recently, when asked about additional cuts for FY2009 and FY2010 ranging anything over 6%, all providers reported that this possibility

will have a “significant impact.” Also part of this proposed cut is funding for respite for 266 people, as well as training for professionals, children and families with developmental disabilities, including autism for over 5,300 families and individuals.

The cut of \$3,368,458 in 135 vacant MRWP services will mean that regions will be less able to divert people back to the community from long periods of time in hospitals. These are services that become available when people pass away or move to another state and are used by regions to respond to significant crisis situations under what is called Temporary Intermediate Care or TIC. TIC is 100% state funded, while the COMP waiver is only 25% funded by the state. Therefore, the cost of hospital care is \$449.63 a day, instead of the COMP residential rate at a state cost of \$60.32 a day. This cut is especially important given that there are NO FUNDS for community NOW/COMP waivers for people on the waiting list. Because of the lack of funds, DHR is experiencing a dramatic rise in individuals presenting to institution and hospitals for temporary emergency care.

The Senate has a chance to restore these funds, but will vote on Monday...

DO SOMETHING...

<http://www.unlockthewaitinglists.com/advocate.html>

Dave Blanchard

Unlock the Waiting Lists Campaign

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From GCDD:

A BI-PARTISAN CALL TO TRANSFORM THE FEDERAL/STATE MEDICAID LONG-TERM CARE SYSTEM

We urge you to become a signatory to this plan by clicking <http://www.centerforself-determination.com>, click on "Medicaid Transformation, then Sign-on Letter, if you agree with the premises below and the proposed solution.

For information please click <http://www.centerforself-determination.com/docs/Bi-Partisan.pdf> and click on the “Medicaid Transformation” button. Click the following link to read the long version of this plan entitled, The Perfect Storm: The Impending Collapse of Medicaid and a Plan for Transformation You can read the Executive Summary by clicking the following link The Executive Summary of the Medicaid Transformation To review the CMS actuarial report: <http://www.centerforself-determination.com/docs/MedicaidReport2008.pdf> or go to <http://www.cms.hhs.gov/ActuarialStudies/downloads/MedicaidReport2008.pdf>

(Below is page three of the Bi-Partisan Call To Transform the Federal/State Medicaid Long-term Care System document - please click <http://www.centerforself-determination.com/docs/Bi-Partisan.pdf>

Medicaid reform is both good public policy and fiscally sound.

Medicaid reform is both good public policy and fiscally sound. We propose a 10-point transformation approach (one among many possibilities) that will:

- Invest \$100 million in up to ten states, in the first of several rounds, that will allow those states to completely realign and rebalance their long-term care systems and make home and community-based services and supports available to anyone who so chooses, no matter the significance or type of their disability. Each redesigned state plan would have to cover all of those who are Medicaid eligible who have a disability, regardless of diagnosis or the categorical label, if they require assistance. This redesigned state plan must be developed in active partnerships between state officials and disability and aging leaders.
- Assist all Medicaid beneficiaries now in institutional settings who want to move to the community to do so, as in the limited “Money Follows the Person” grants currently in practice.
- Serve all of Medicaid beneficiaries on waiting lists for services and supports related to their disability or age. This requires a long-term plan and clear implementation policies. The savings will come from the current cost of institutional and facility-based care.
- Enable beneficiaries to direct their community supports by providing control over how the Medicaid benefit is spent directly for the beneficiary through self-determination budgets, person-directed planning, consumer-directed peer supports, and appropriate fiscal intermediary supports for anyone who so desires it.
- Allow Medicaid dollars to be used to supplement beneficiaries’ SSI/SSDI benefits for room and board costs.
- Coordinate all federal and state sources of funds, including Medicaid, and make them available to create completely accessible homes and provide needed technology as required to ensure accessibility, communication, and mobility.
- Provide a Social Security Waiver, and/or changes in policy/regulation that will remove all disincentives to work that penalize earnings in the SSI/SSDI programs.
- Establish special savings accounts that enable people to save funds that are targeted to improving the quality of life of Medicaid beneficiaries without jeopardizing benefits that provide for survival costs (similar to Individual Development Accounts and PASS plans).
- Allow families and friends to supplement public benefits by providing resources in special trust accounts that will be tax-deductible and available to provide assistance with housing, work, transportation and other important quality of life expenses.
- Add a new benefit for direct support workers that will enable them to create matched savings accounts (similar to Individual Development Accounts) for housing down payments, post-secondary education, other training opportunities, and transportation.

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From: ExceptionalOps

Proudly Presents a Town Hall Forum

Featuring Dr. Steve Hall

Director of the Dept. of Developmental Disabilities of GA DHR

Tuesday, April 14th from 7:00-9:00PM

First Christian Church, 294 Jenkins Road, Tyrone, GA

For directions go to:

<http://www.mapquest.com/maps?city=Tyrone&state=GA&address=294+Jenkins+Road&zipcode=30290>

This Forum will provide an overview of the two new federal Medicaid waivers and plans for implementing the changes in 2009:

NOW: New Options Waiver for persons who live with family members or in their own home

COMP: Comprehensive Supports Waiver Program for persons who need a full range of out-of-home services or intensive, in-home services who do not otherwise qualify for the NOW program

This seminar is designed to provide and clarify information for participants, families, and representatives about the “new” waivers which are designed to offer persons more control over how their service dollars are spent. The session will include overviews of both waivers and specific roles and responsibilities for participants, representatives, families, and support networks.

If you have been following the efforts of Dr. Hall to revamp the Medicaid waiver program in GA

If you have a loved one with a developmental disability who needs support services

If you are on the short or long term Medicaid waiver waiting list

If you are an educator who serves children with special needs

If you are a provider of Medicaid waiver services or wish to become a service provider

If you have a million questions about what to do next

If you have questions or concerns about the transition process

Then this is the meeting for you! Come meet the expert, ask your questions and become part of the process of turning the tide for increased services for people with DD in GA.

For more information please contact ExOPS Executive Director Janet Smola 770 631-1035 or cell phone 770 639-9169, Email: janetsmola@numail.org

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