

# It's a 'Race to the Top' for Portland Public Schools' CEO, but pink slips for lowest-paid

Portland Federation of School Professionals (PFSP) may have lost fewer members to layoffs this summer than in previous years, but union President Belinda Reagan says she's still bothered by what it says about school district priorities that her membership experienced staff cuts at the same time the district hired high-paid administrators and gave its CEO a massive raise.

PFSP, also known as American Federation of Teachers (AFT) Local 111, represents support staff at Portland Public Schools (PPS), including school secretaries, campus monitors, library assistants, and classroom educational assistants who help students learn to read or solve math problems. It was the classroom assistants — indispensable in kindergarten classes — who got layoffs this year: 27 of them got notice in April that they were "unassigned," meaning their positions were eliminated. Most of them found other positions in the district, but eight members won't be coming back in September: One full-time and seven half-time educational assistants. And 19 other educational assistants had their hours reduced.

"I don't understand the mentality of the district cutting services to students, when we're seeing an increase in the number of administrator positions," Reagan said.

Reagan said the district has at least six new administrators making over \$100,000.

The union held a forum July 25 to

help its laid off members access unemployment benefits and other services.

The following week, the PPS Board voted 5-2 to give district superintendent Carole Smith a \$66,000 raise, to \$277,000 a year. That's a 31 percent pay increase — more than 13 times the 2.3 percent raise PPS teachers got this year, and more than 20 times the 1.5 percent raise PFSP members got.

Educational assistants make about \$20,000 a year. So the district could have hired three of them — or another teacher — with the money that instead was added to the salary of its highest-paid employee.

The Board said Smith's raise was "below the market average for superintendents" for districts of similar size in other states.

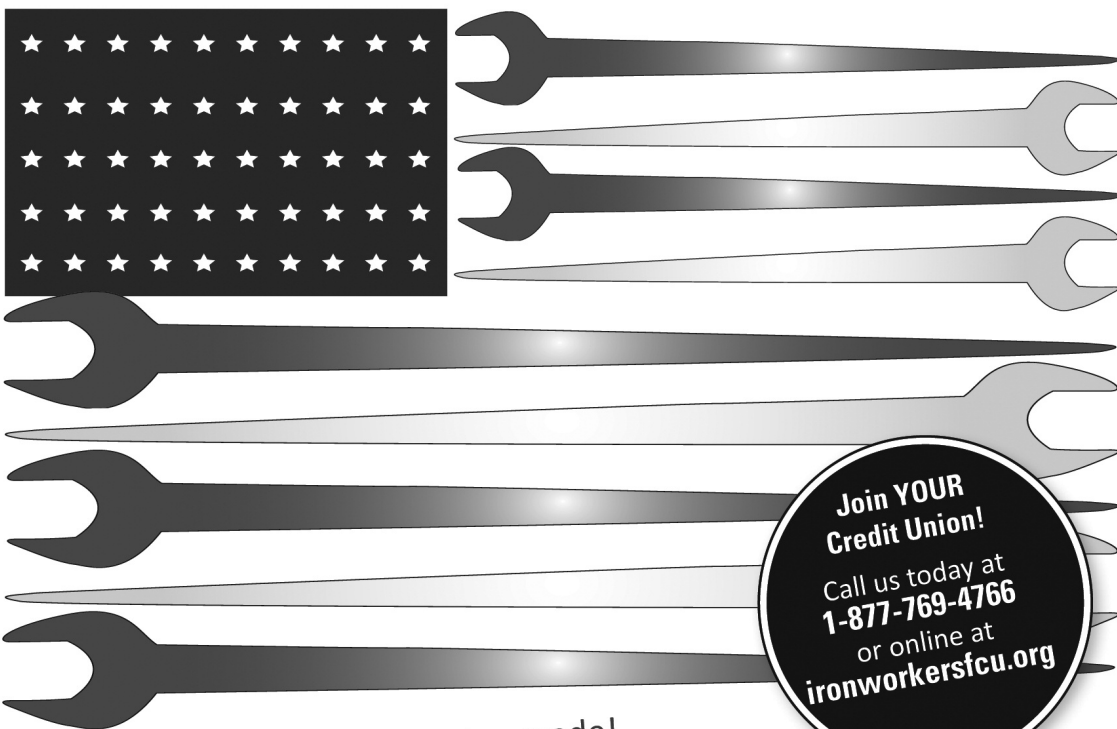
But appearances matter, and memory of Smith's pay raise could dampen voter appetite for future school funding measures. Some voters still remember the \$15,000 a month the district paid for part-time labor relations advice from retired City of Portland human relations director Yvonne Deckard.

Board members Steve Buel and Tom Koehler voted against Smith's raise. As for the others, Board members Ruth Adkins, Greg Belisle, Matt Morton and Bobbie Regan will face voters in 2015 if they want to be re-elected, and Pam Knowles will be up in 2017.

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**LOCAL 111 PRESIDENT  
BELINDA REAGAN**

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