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## Montgomery County Public Schools sees 41 percent drop in new teacher hiring

Decline from last year reflects tough fiscal climate, increased class size

by Andrew Ujifusa | Staff Writer

New teacher hires at Montgomery County Public Schools have dropped more than 40 percent for the upcoming school year due to increasing class sizes and a struggling economy, MCPS officials said.

MCPS has hired 379 new teachers for the upcoming 2010-2011 school year, a 41 percent decrease from the 645 new hires for the 2009-2010 year and a 51 percent decline from the 779 new teachers hired for 2008-2009.

A variety of factors have played a role in the hiring decline, including the district's recent decision to increase the average classroom size by one student, said school board President Patricia O'Neill (Dist. 3). The larger financial picture also has played a role.

"I think a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, and I think people are happy to hang on to a job in this economy," O'Neill said.

The hiring process for the upcoming school year is not complete — MCPS still may hire a few additional special education teachers to fill positions, according to school district spokesman Dana Tofig. As of Friday, 264 of the new teacher hires were for full-time positions, while the remaining 115 hires were for part-time jobs.

Doug Prouty, president of the Montgomery County Education Association, the teachers union, said he has seen the Peer Assistance and Review program cut from 44 teachers four years ago to 24 teachers for the upcoming year. The program places consulting teachers with either new teachers or those who have been rated as underperforming to help their classroom performance. With fewer new teachers, the need for Peer Assistance and Review teachers decreases, Prouty said.

MCPS eliminated 450 positions in this year's budget, including 330 teaching positions. The cuts also eliminated some psychologist and counselor positions. Many of the employees who held the 450 positions have been reassigned within the school district due to resignations or retirements, although that number was not immediately available.

About 25 employees, including some teachers, lost their jobs with MCPS because they lacked the certifications or credentials to be transferred elsewhere, although because of later resignations or retirements some of those employees have been hired back, Tofig wrote in an e-mail.

As of June, there were about 500 retirements from MCPS at the end of the 2009-2010 school year, including teachers, Tofig wrote, adding that the number was typical.

The school system has about 12,500 teachers.