

On The Scranton School Board, Paige Cognetti Voted To Fire 51 Teachers And 23 Additional Union School Employees While Hiking Taxes...

Cognetti Voted To Approve The 2018 Budget, Despite Opposition From Citizens And The Teachers Union. It Included Cuts To 89 Staff Members, A \$3.5 Million Deficit, And An Estimated Tax Increase Of \$47 Per Homeowner.

In December 2017, The Scranton School Board Of Directors, Including Cognetti, Unanimously Passed The 2018 Budget. “The following was submitted by Director Schuster. (B-9, No. 1 through No.9) Scranton School Board 2018 Budget...The resolution was seconded by Director Casey and passed unanimously on roll call.” (Board Meeting, [Scranton School Board Of Directors](#), 12/28/17)

- **At The Meeting, Numerous Local Citizens Spoke In Opposition To The Budget.** “But even hearing that news didn’t make anyone happy. ‘I would just like to know, all of you listen to the radio correct?’ Scranton Senior Josh Radford asked the school board. ‘That’s music, why would you want to cut that away from us?’ One after the other, parents, students and staff in the Scranton School District made their last-ditch plea to the school board to not pass an extremely unpopular budget. ‘You want to cut art, music and teachers’ jobs and all you want to do is put a band-aid up,’ said Tom Miller.” (Peggy Lee, “Scranton School Board Passes Tentative \$157 Million Budget, Includes Staff Cuts And Deficit, [WNEP](#), 12/28/17)

NOTE: *A Right To Know request has been submitted for policy 311 (Formerly titled “Suspensions/Furloughs”) from page 25 of the December 28, 2017 meeting, which details the staff reductions.*

The Budget Included Layoffs To 89 Teachers In Specialty Programs. “The Scranton School Board approved a tentative budget for the 2018 school year. That \$157 million budget calls for the layoffs of 89 teachers in specialty programs and still contains a nearly \$4 million deficit.” (Peggy Lee, “Scranton School Board Passes Tentative \$157 Million Budget, Includes Staff Cuts And Deficit, [WNEP](#), 12/28/17)

The Budget Had A Deficit Of \$3.5 Million. “The district had been facing a nearly \$19 million shortfall in its 2018 spending plan but with those cuts to staff and an infusion of \$2 million of state money it was able to get the deficit down to \$3.5 million.” (Peggy Lee, “Scranton School Board Passes Tentative \$157 Million Budget, Includes Staff Cuts And Deficit, [WNEP](#), 12/28/17)

The Budget Also Included A Tax Increase Of Approximately \$47 Per Household Per Year. “This tentative budget does include a tax increase with the average homeowner paying an additional \$47 per year.” (Peggy Lee, “Scranton School Board Passes Tentative \$157 Million Budget, Includes Staff Cuts And Deficit, [WNEP](#), 12/28/17)

NOTE: *The budget passed in December 2017 was tentative and a final version was approved in March 2018.*

At A January 2018 School Board Meeting, Teachers Expressed Disapproval, Stating The Board Made The Cuts As The “First Option Chosen.” “‘What bothers me is that I feel like it was the first option chosen, and it should be the last option chosen,’ said teacher Suzanne Furey. ‘The mission of the Scranton School District is to quote: educate, inspire, and empower students, end quote. If you are willing to cut teachers before taking a hard look at other areas, then that is not your mission,’ said teacher Adam McCormick. The board initially proposed laying off 89 teachers in programs such as art and music. Now, those programs will remain as some of those positions are being kept.” (Peggy Lee, “51 Teachers To Be Laid Off In Scranton,” [WNEP](#), 1/25/18)

In Late January 2018, Teachers Began Receiving Furlough Letters. “Scranton School Board members and administrators say the vote Thursday night to lay off 51 teachers was a necessary step to avoid a financial takeover by the state.” (Stacy Lange, “Librarians: Layoffs Will Leave Hole In Scranton Education,” [WNEP](#), 1/26/18)

It Was Reported That 40 Maintenance And Clerical Workers Also Would Lose Their Jobs. “Those 51 teachers started receiving furlough notices Friday. 40 maintenance and clerical workers will also lose their jobs.” (Stacy Lange, “Librarians: Layoffs Will Leave Hole In Scranton Education,” [WNEP](#), 1/26/18)

WNEP HEADLINE: “Librarians: Layoffs Will Leave Hole In Scranton Education” (Stacy Lange, “Librarians: Layoffs Will Leave Hole In Scranton Education,” [WNEP](#), 1/26/18)

On March 28, 2018, The School Board And Cognetti Finalized The 2018 Budget. “BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Board of Directors of the School District of the City of Scranton hereby approve a final budget consisting of expenditures of \$161,863,185.00, revenue of \$152,403,369.00 and other sources consisting of transfers and other funding sources of \$9,370,694.00 as per attached. All other Budget Resolutions remain consistent with their adoption on December 28, 2017 and such matters including all revenue, taxing and other budget matters from 2017 are incorporated herein by reference.” (Special Meeting, [Scranton School Board Of Directors](#), 3/28/18)

- **In Total, 51 Teachers Were Planned To Be Laid Off, Including 28 Tenured And 23 Non-Tenured Teachers.** “In an attempt to get the district out of its financial distress, 28 tenured teachers and 23 non-tenured teachers will be let go effective August 31 before the start of the 2018 school year. Before the vote was taken, members of the audience pleaded with the board to reconsider. ‘What bothers me is that I feel like it was the first option chosen, and it should be the last option chosen,’ said teacher Suzanne Furey. ‘The mission of the Scranton School District is to quote: educate, inspire, and empower students, end quote. If you are willing to cut teachers before taking a hard look at other areas, then that is not your mission,’ said teacher Adam McCormick. The board initially proposed laying off 89 teachers in programs such as art and music. Now, those programs will remain as some of those positions are being kept.” (Peggy Lee, “51 Teachers To Be Laid Off In Scranton,” [WNEP](#), 1/25/18)
- **The School Board Budget Cut 10 Special Education Teachers.** “Over the last several months, the district has found money by making several cuts. Many of those have been unfavorable with district employees and union representatives. Some of those cuts include those to sports teams, as well as 10 special education teachers and all librarians.” (Brian Sheehan, “Scranton School Board Balances Budget; Confirms 51 Teacher Layoffs,” [WOLF](#), 3/28/18)
- **The School District Eliminated All Librarians.** “And along with the furloughs the district is also doing away with all its librarians. ‘Library in 2018 has been eliminated in a public school system. I find that incomprehensible,’ said teacher Patrick Festa.” (Peggy Lee, “Scranton Teachers Rally Before School Board Meeting, Demand To Know The Future Of Their Jobs,” [WNEP](#), 6/4/18)

NOTE: *The furloughs agreed to in December 2017 were included in the final budget.*

After Paige Cognetti Expressed That She Was “Eager” To Work On The 2019 Budget, On August 6, 2018, The Scranton School Board Voted Unanimously To Pass A Preliminary Budget Which Included A 7.7 Percent Tax Increase

As Chairwoman Of The Board’s Budget And Finance Committee, Paige Cognetti “Said She Is Eager To Get To Work On The 2019 Budget.” “Director Paige Gebhardt Cognetti, chairwoman of the board's budget and finance committee, said she is eager to get to work on the 2019 budget. Although the district has a massive deficit to overcome, starting the budgeting process now will help the district, she said. ‘I look forward to working with the board, Superintendent Kirijan to find areas where we might be able to increase revenue, and also find as much savings as possible, without eroding the quality or the breadth of the district's educational offerings,’ Cognetti said.” (Sarah Hofius Hall, “Scranton School District 2019 Preliminary Budget Shows \$11.5M Shortfall,” [Scranton Times-Tribune](#), 7/20/18)

- **Cognetti Said, “We Want To Give Ourselves All The Options We Have,” Which Included The Tax Raises.** “With the Scranton School District facing a growing deficit, city residents could see their school tax bill increase by as much as 7.7 percent next year. As school directors try to trim the 2019 budget, they stressed during their meeting Monday night that a tax

increase is not definite -- only a possible option. With a 7.7 percent tax hike, which is about 9.9 mills, a homeowner with a property assessed at \$10,000 would see taxes go up by about \$100. A mill is a \$1 tax on each \$1,000 of assessed value. 'We want to give ourselves all the options we have,' school Director Paige Gebhardt Cognetti said before the board unanimously passed the 2019 preliminary budget of \$163 million." (Sarah Hofius Hall, Scranton Residents Could See School Taxes Increase 7.7 Percent," [Scranton Times-Tribune](#), 8/7/18)

On August 6, 2018, The Scranton School Board Voted Unanimously To Pass A Preliminary Budget, Which Included A 7.7 Percent Tax Increase. "The board unanimously passed a \$163 million preliminary budget for 2019 on Aug. 6. The budget includes a gap of \$8.5 million and a 7.7 percent tax increase or 9.9 mills. A homeowner with a property assessed at \$10,000 would see taxes go up by about \$100. A mill is a \$1 tax on each \$1,000 of assessed value. Scranton must seek approval from the state to raise taxes that high." (Kathleen Bolus, "Scranton School District To Receive \$6m More From State This Year," [Scranton Times-Tribune](#), 8/15/19)

Even Admitting On The Record That She Knew Firing Those Teachers Would Hurt Our Children.

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During The Process Of The Firings, Cognetti Suggested That Students Would Hurt From The Policy Decision By "Making Sacrifices." "'Everyone has been making sacrifices and that includes the taxpayers, teachers, our students. Every single element of our district has had some sort of sacrifice,' said Cognetti during the work session." (Kat Bolus, "Scranton School Board Passes Budget, Plans 51 Teacher Layoffs, \$4 Million In Borrowing," [Scranton Times-Tribune](#), 3/28/18)