

NEWARK SCHOOL DISTRICT PLANNING "BUYOUT" OPTION FOR TEACHERS WITH ZUCKERBERG MONEY



Newark could follow in the footsteps of New York City, Houston and other cities, to offer buyouts to teachers, to save money, that will help plug monetary shortfalls that they face. Newark intends to pay off the teachers, willing to leave, with the money that they get from the Foundation started by Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg. The Schools Superintendent Cami Anderson has broached the topic with the union, telling them it would serve a dual purpose of giving the weak teachers enticement to leave and explore more apt options and also help balance the 'oversize payroll,' bringing it within manageable limits. Similar to New York City, Newark has 84 teachers, who do not have permanent teaching positions and serve as substitutes or teachers aides. To Ms Anderson, the \$8.5 million spent on them is an avoidable expense. Moreover, their number is likely to increase next year when the city closes and consolidates schools as part of reorganization. Anderson attempts to pare the payrolls, coincides with lawmakers attempts in Trenton to negotiate a bill that will assess teachers on how well their students have performed. This will weaken tenure protections and underperforming teachers could be relieved of their jobs, before their tenure is over. The bill has the support of Newark Mayor Cory Booker. At a meeting of education writers in Philadelphia on Friday, he said, "Superintendent Anderson has two hands tied behind her back. If we could fire the 300 to 400 lowest-performing teachers, she wouldn't have a financial crisis." In an interview the Mayor said, that he wished that Schools Superintendent Cami Anderson buyout attempts, were only a provisional measure for short-term remedies and that, ultimately it would be better if schools can remove teachers, based on their 'performance rather than seniority.' The Newark Mayor, unlike his New York counterpart Michael Bloomberg, does not exercise control over the schools nor is he a part of negotiations over a new contract. Ms Anderson said that contract negotiations, preventing her from commenting on the issue. With the increase in charter schools in Newark, traditional public schools have seen a sharp fall in enrollment and consequently a fall in their fees revenues. Newark school statistics show that District enrollment fell to 36,068 this year from nearly 39,695 in the 2007-08 school years, while charter enrollment grew to 7,878 from 3,940. Moreover, it is projected that charter schools will get increased funding from Newark, from \$93 million in 2010-11 to \$148 million next year. Apprised of Anderson's buyout scheme, union President Joseph Del Grosso said that he was receptive to the idea, if the buyout package was lucrative. He sounded a word of caution, saying that his union could face a loss of dues, if the highest-page teachers were lost to the union owing to the buyouts. He said, "I'm not financially stupid. I have to understand that that would cause a hardship to the union if that was done at a mass scale." In Dallas, teachers with not too many years of service behind them were offered \$1000, while those in the upper rung were offered as much as \$20,000. On Thursday, New York City Schools Chancellor Dennis Walcott said that he would be offering buyouts to hundreds of teachers, with temporary teaching positions. He said that the amounts to be paid to them would be decided after discussions with the union. It's premature to estimate how much the buyouts would cost Newark, but reasonable to assume that it will be one of the larger expenditures by the group that controls the Facebook money, the Foundation for Newark's Future. Greg Taylor, the foundation's new president and CEO, has said that he is willing to provide money from the foundation, for Ms Anderson's initiative, if it will lead to better teacher contracts. Teachers without permanent positions were a big drain on the treasury with, Gov. Chris Christie saying that the district was "paying them for doing nothing." "You're paying 70 people as we speak to eat lunch, read the newspaper, do the crossword puzzle," he said. "God forbid, don't let them near any children, for the harm they would cause to those kids." A Newark schools spokeswoman later said most of the teachers were in fact teaching, and all were working. However, a spokesman for the governor countered that saying "none of them are doing what they were hired to do."