

CLEVELAND SCHOOLS LAYOFF - CUT ARTS BUT KEEP SPORTS



When it comes to the city of Cleveland, Ohio the odds are good that you do not think about the schools in the city. Sadly, most of us who do not live in the state probably think about things like Drew Carrie, beer and bowling when the city comes to mind. It is not an accurate perception of this city, which is in a fairly dire financial state. How dire? Well, in order to help shore up the holes in its schooling budget the city's schools are going to have to cut back on 600 in-classroom jobs for the coming school year. The losses, which are expected to most heavily impact programs in the arts and physical education, are also going to lead to an increased number of shortened days as well, as 600 teachers get the axe at the end of the school year. These cuts are all attributed to the massive hole in the schools budget that must be shored up before the newest school year begins. How big is the budget hole? Well oddly enough even the school does not even seem to have a handle on that. They have more of a range, which is currently between \$55 million to \$65 million. The layoff measure is expected to save about \$40 million of the needed cuts. Other savings for the school will be done with a combination of an early retirement incentive plan and attrition efforts. As the Cleveland schools only employ about 4,000 teachers on the whole, making the loss of 600 teachers one that will represent a loss of more than 10% of the classroom jobs. In addition to increasing the number of students in a classroom these changes will also shorten the school day by just shy of a hour for kids in grades K thru 8. Interestingly enough the school had a cutting option that is being actively dismissed by the schools superintendent. He has chosen to shorten the school day for students and severely restrict their access to the arts in order to keep their sports and extracurricular activities in tact. So, if this reporter is understanding things right, the high school students will still have a football team, but the elementary school kids won't be able to have daily physical education. Something about that picture seems very skewed, as the plans do not service the highest number of students. Perhaps Cleveland should take a cue from schools in locations like Seattle, and institute a pay to play policy for extra curricular sports in order to offset those costs. Then perhaps they would be able to keep at least a few more teachers in the classroom and have kids learning for a full school day. Of course, the situation that the city of Cleveland finds itself in is not at all a unique one. Schools across the nation are looking to cut back as they are faced with ever shrinking budgets that create painful questions and force them to decide which services are the most important to their community.