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# **It May Be A Different Kind Of School Year**

**Buckle Up For Coverage**

By

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It happens every August and September across the country — the start of another school year. However, this one might be a little different than in past years.

Journalists — whether education is your ‘beat’ or a ‘general assignment’ story, be on the lookout for possible changes in public and private schools in your coverage area.

The University of Houston recently reported that Houston’s largest public school system is reducing its staff levels by more than 2,300 positions. The new school superintendent also announced that student enrollment dropped by about 27,000 students.

According to a slide shared during the presentation, 1,675 vacant positions were cut, as well as, 672 filled jobs as part of the reorganization process. In total, 2,347 positions will be cut from the central office.

KPRC-TV

Some large cities across the country will be able to defer layoffs even though student enrollments are down because they still have access to ‘major pandemic aid.’ However, that aid will run out for many cities after this new school year.

The Los Angeles school board approved an \$18.8-billion budget that includes the last major pandemic aid — government funding that will disappear in future years, putting jobs and services to students at risk.

Schools Supt. Alberto Carvalho said the district is prepared to manage the transition without layoffs — and he also pledged improved student support through lower class sizes, additional counselors and increased mental health services. [Los Angeles Times](#)

For some large cities, the ‘pandemic aid’ is already spent, leaving school districts with tough choices about how to handle major budget shortfalls —

Staff and parents upset about potential job cuts are pleading with Detroit Public Schools Community District officials to find other ways to address the budget gaps.

They brought their concerns to the Detroit school board Tuesday night. The district is weighing cutting more than 100 jobs, most of them central office employees as well as some school-based administrators and support staff.

The discussions are happening as the district prepares for the 2023-24 school year, when its nearly \$1.3 billion in federal COVID relief funds will be depleted and it will no longer have that money to cushion the blow from losing about \$20 million in state funding because of a large enrollment loss during the pandemic. The district has lost about 2,000 students, Superintendent Nikolai Vitti said during Tuesday's meeting. [Chalkbeat Detroit](#)

In addition to concerns for the 2023-2024 school year, some school districts are worried about how they'll handle budget cuts and fewer students in the 2024-2025 school year and beyond.

For the past few years, Seattle Public Schools has been under financial stress after losing thousands of students, and dealing with the aftermath of a school shooting that left one student dead. The new board will have to decide where to cut costs to avoid a \$104.4 million deficit in the 2024-25 school year, and will decide whether some schools should close because of dwindling enrollment. [Seattle Times](#)

Denver Public Schools is projected to lose nearly 1,000 kindergarten through 12th grade students in the upcoming school year compared to this past year, according to new data obtained by CBS News Colorado. DPS administrators also anticipate that by 2027, the district will lose 6,636 K-12 students that live in the city — a decline of 8.7%. [CBS News.com](#)

Many major news outlets have been reporting about students leaving public schools for private schools and homeschooling (e.g. [Why Are Americans Fleeing Public Schools?](#) Washington Post). That trend seems to be growing in many communities. What about yours?

**Census Bureau Releases School Enrollment Report —  
June 8, 2023**

# Story Ideas

Here are some story ideas reporters and editors may want to consider during the next month to get a jump on this expanding story —

- Are there any reorganizations in public school districts leading to staff cuts in your area? If so, how many and where? What about impact on student learning?
- What about student enrollment for the new school year? Up? Down? The same as last year?
- Are school boards talking about closing schools, school consolidation, not building previously proposed or planned new schools?
- Would closed schools be used for other school district purposes? Sold? If sold, how would money be used?
- How about private schools? Enrollments up, down, same? Any correlation between public enrollment down and private enrollment up (if that's what you find)?
- Are homeschooling numbers up, down, or the same in your community?



- How well did public, private, and homeschool students score in testing last year?
- How do school districts and individual schools plan to improve those scores this year?

## R-I-P – Research, Interview, Profile

Journalists use at least three basic tools in the process of gathering, confirming, and reporting news stories: **research** the topic, **interview** witnesses and experts, and **profile** some of the people affected.

Researching the topic of public, private, and home schools is easier today than in past years. Much of the information you'll need is available online. However, after you 'gather' the information, be sure to 'confirm' it. What you can't confirm online, you can get by phone or in-person.

Set up interviews with school board members, superintendents, principals, teachers, and support personnel. Also talk with laid-off school workers if that's part of your story. The research you've confirmed will give you many great questions to ask them.

Set up profiles with students and their parents who left public schools for private or homeschooling. Why did they do it? A profile allows your audience to get to know a family and their situation close-up and personal. It always helps to put names and faces to stories that impact people.

You can also profile laid-off school workers to help your audience understand the impact budget cuts are having on them.

## Story or Series?

Putting on my old news manager's hat, I can see this as both a story and a series. Managers might want to put one or two reporters on various aspects of the daily stories (e.g. public and private teachers getting classrooms ready for first day of school, students arriving on first day of school, homeschool parents' first day of teaching, etc), and have another team work on an in-depth series about your community's education situation for grades K-12. The depth and nature of what's happening in your community will guide you as to how much time (or space) and attention to give it.



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