

# SPECIAL

# REPORT

**BOSTON MUNICIPAL RESEARCH BUREAU**  
333 Washing Street, Suite 853 Boston, MA 02108  
VOICE 617-227-1900 FAX 617-227-2815 [www.bmrb.org](http://www.bmrb.org)

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## BOSTON'S SHRINKING WORKFORCE

The city of Boston's municipal workforce levels decreased by 1,282 city-funded FTEs or 7.5% during 2003, reducing the total city-funded employee levels to 15,809. Since January 2002, Boston's employee totals have decreased by 1,762 FTEs or 10%. The Boston Public Schools (BPS) sustained the biggest proportion of the reduction (64.2%), but its share of the cut is commensurate with the large increases in staffing the BPS had received during recent years. From January through September 29, 2003, the time frame in which the FTE data in this report is based, city officials have been successful in shrinking the workforce through a combination of natural attrition, layoffs, a hiring freeze, and, most significantly, a voluntary retirement incentive program (VRI). While officials initially predicted that extensive layoffs would be necessary, layoffs eventually represented only a small portion of the overall reduction. City officials have now authorized several departments to hire new employees during the final quarter of this year, and workforce totals will rise correspondingly. Last spring, the Research Bureau reported that the city workforce had dropped to its lowest point in five years. At that time, we indicated that more reductions were both necessary and prudent in light of local aid cuts. Boston has been successful in paring its workforce while avoiding major impact to service delivery. Now, with the prospect of more local aid cuts in fiscal 2005, city officials should be very careful in new hiring decisions, and should take steps to increase service efficiencies planned in this year's budget and pursue additional operational improvements to mitigate further employee reductions.

Excluding the BPS, the effect of the reductions on departmental workforces has been more evident among the remaining staff than the general public. The departments are still providing basic services, but in some cases it is with reduced regularity. Workloads are being spread out among staff members in departments that have sustained sizeable losses of FTEs like the Police Department (-132), the Fire Department (-96), Boston Centers for Youth & Families (-50), and the Public Health Commission (-40). Some departments are employing creative scheduling to ensure proper coverage. For example, the Property Management Department is employing staff during odd hours to perform labor-intensive duties more efficiently. Also, officials at the Boston Centers for Youth & Families (BCYF) have clustered services at their centers in order to provide the maximum range of services to all regions of the city.

Workforce reductions have not had a noticeable effect on the delivery of emergency services. The Public Health Commission (PHC) has been able to avoid interruptions in EMS delivery despite losing 19 FTEs during the year by utilizing remaining staff on overtime shifts to cover vacancies. The Fire Department's (BFD) loss of staff, nearly all of it among its uniformed force, has compelled the department to transfer firefighters from support and administrative positions into the field division. As a result, fire support services like inspections, training, and fleet maintenance have been curtailed while the department's ability to maintain appropriate levels of emergency services has remained constant. The Police Department (BPD) has strengthened efforts to hire civilians to perform support services like dispatch, thereby freeing sworn staff to perform field services, and to centralize or cluster many of the administrative efforts that formerly had been performed in each district like paid detail administration and booking. New classes of police and EMT recruits are studying in their respective academies, and will be added to the forces upon graduation early next year.

City of Boston Workforce Summary					
Figures Shown in FTEs					
Department	January 2002	January 2003	September 2003	'03 Change Jan. - Sept.	% Change
Schools	8,509	8,440	7,617	(823)	-9.8%
Police	2,964	2,895	2,763	(132)	-4.6%
Fire	1,698	1,714	1,618	(96)	-5.6%
BCYF	402	375	325	(50)	-13.3%
PHC	768	745	705	(40)	-5.4%
All Others	3,230	2,923	2,783	(140)	-4.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>17,571</b>	<b>17,091</b>	<b>15,809</b>	<b>(1,282)</b>	<b>-7.5%</b>

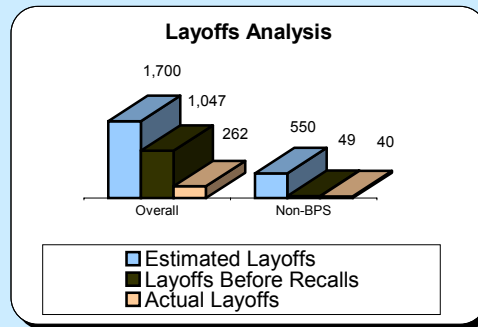
Detailed tables showing Boston's employee changes by department can be found on the Research Bureau's website at

[www.bmrb.org](http://www.bmrb.org)

## REDUCTION FACTORS

### LAYOFFS

While original estimates indicated that as many as 1,700 employees, including 550 non-BPS employees, would be laid off this year, layoffs eventually represented only a small portion of the total reduction. (Figures in this section represent actual employees and not FTEs.) These estimates were worst-case scenarios, however, and the final totals show a large disparity from the initial estimates. The major factors in the disparity were the restoration of \$54.2 million in unanticipated local aid, which allowed Boston to fund more positions than it had initially expected, and the administration of the VRI, which provided funds for employees who had been at-risk for layoffs. Boston currently has 262 employees that remain on layoff lists after recalls – 222 in the BPS and 40 in all other departments. Most non-BPS layoffs eliminated employees whose duties department heads



determined could be spread out to remaining staff or who were no longer needed.

BPS officials, because of contractual and legal obligations, initially laid off 998 employees, far more than all other departments combined. The administration of the BPS teacher staffing process over the summer and the department's fulfillment of its contractual obligations to qualified employees allowed the BPS to recall 776 or 77.8% of those who originally were laid off. That the vast proportion of the city's layoffs occurred in the BPS is painful for educators, but analysis of the city's workforce levels in recent years reveals why the layoffs were concentrated there. The BPS added 928 FTEs to its staff

between January 1997 and January 2003. During the same time, all other departments reduced their staffs collectively by 254 FTEs.

### RETIREMENT INCENTIVES

Boston offered a voluntary retirement incentive program to employees already eligible for retirement during 2003. Having been offered an incentive of 20% of their salary to participate, 490 employees retired through the program on June 30<sup>th</sup>. Nearly 95% of the participants emanated from the School, Police, and Fire Departments, since teachers and uniformed public safety employees were not eligible for the previous retirement incentive offered by the city during 2002. Salary savings from this incentive was applied to fund various jobs for employees who otherwise would have been exposed to layoffs. During the past two years, 966 employees have retired through an incentive program.

### BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The BPS sustained a reduction of 823 FTEs through September 29<sup>th</sup>. The most significant losses to the department were in areas of student instruction – teachers and paraprofessionals, collectively representing 81% of the reduction. The department lost 421 FTEs among teachers, one third of the citywide cut, impeding its ability to provide important services like math and reading transition programs, after school programs, and high school electives. The paraprofessionals' total was reduced by 245 FTEs, including 101 lost during the implementation of the English immersion program with fewer bilingual classes. There was a small increase of 24 FTEs among custodians, the result of a new, and more expensive, policy of hiring part-time custodians to bolster the permanent staff as an alternative to contracting out custodial services in single-custodian schools.

### GRANT FUNDS

The reduction of 130 grant-funded FTEs in the BPS drove the citywide reduction of 99 grant-funded FTEs, producing a total of 2,627 grant-funded FTEs. Initial fears of a reduction in state grants for kindergarten funding caused a decline in kindergarten teachers and aides, but the funding has been provided and increased staff has already been hired. Other departments were able to make gains in grant-funded FTEs. The PHC benefited from a bio-terrorism grant that provided funding for increased staffing, and the BPL was able to shift existing staff from internally-funded to grant-funded FTEs. The grant funds, when combined with the city-funded total, produced an all-funds citywide total of 18,436 FTEs, a reduction of 1,381 since January.

### CONCLUSION

Since city officials have lifted the hiring freeze, certain departments are filling vacancies subject to the approval of a position control board. Specifically, more staff is anticipated in the Transportation and Police Departments, the BCYF, the PHC, and the BPS. The prospect of a third year of local aid cuts should cause officials to limit any staff increases to replacement of only the most essential positions. Efforts to increase efficiency in departments should be maintained, particularly in the BPD, where union resistance has stymied plans to civilianize administrative functions currently performed by sworn staff, and also in the BFD, where plans to consolidate fire districts have stalled. City officials should not abandon plans to pursue further operational improvements even though the financial outlook for the current fiscal year is better than they had initially predicted.