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District rehires one-third of dismissed teachers

By Sara Cunningham
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Oldham County Schools has rehired 11 of the 32 teachers it fired at the end of June because of the weak economy, district officials said.

Superintendent Paul Upchurch said that while the district grew at a slower rate than it has in recent years, enough students showed up for the first week of school to rehire some teachers.

The district originally had 11,551 students enrolled for the first day, but by the fifth day, 168 more students had enrolled, bringing the total to 11,719, said Michael Williams, director of pupil personnel.

That number is lower than what the district would have seen if growth hadn't slowed the past two years, but it was more students than the district had expected when it made staffing decisions at the end of last year, Williams told board members Aug. 24.

Those additional students made it possible to hire 11 teachers, and the district pulled from the pool of teachers it cut, Upchurch said in an interview after the meeting.

"That still doesn't restore us to a 22-1 ratio, but it's something, at least," Upchurch said.

When the district eliminated teacher positions at the end of last year, it increased its student-teacher ratio to 23-1.

When the initial announcement about staffing cuts was made in April, Upchurch said the district typically cuts 15 to 20 teachers a year because of poor performance, but 32 additional teachers were cut because of the economy.

"We were very, very lucky to get back some of our teachers," said Rick McHargue, assistant superintendent. "We were sorry to lose that group in the first place and we're just really lucky we could get some of them back and that they wanted to come back."

Heather Dotson, president of the Oldham County Teachers Association, said teachers were pleased with the news.

"While disappointed in the number of Oldham County teachers that had to be let go last spring, OCTA was pleased that at least some of them were able to return to their positions this fall," Dotson said in an e-mail.

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