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'Golden Apple' among WL teacher cuts

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One of the West Lafayette teachers notified that her position may be eliminated as part of district budget cuts this year was recognized last week as a recipient of the Golden Apple teaching award.

That annual award is given by Greater Lafayette Commerce to honor five top Tippecanoe County teachers.

First-grade teacher Emily Pool was one of the 2009 recipients. She also is among six Cumberland Elementary teachers who received a "reduction in force" notice earlier this spring.

The Cumberland teachers, each teaching two years or fewer at West Side, represent about half of the 12.5 positions the school board will consider approving for reduction at a board meeting tonight.

"It's horrible," said Mary Beth Boyd, a high school social studies teacher and president of the West Lafayette Education Association. "You look at (Pool), and she is such a model teacher. She's just a great educator, as so many of our young teachers are."

Boyd said altogether 16 teachers have been notified their positions could be eliminated or their jobs could be cut from full-time to part-time next year. There are 135 teachers total in the district.

Notices were sent based either on program needs at the high school or on seniority in the corporation at the elementary level. The teachers contract spells out a teacher's seniority is set basically by hire date. When reductions in force take place, the least senior person qualified for the position is first to be let go.

Pool came to West Lafayette two years ago, but has more than six years teaching experience. Pool did not want to comment for this story.

Boyd said her concerns in losing so many teachers would be increased class sizes.

"How are we going to be able to attract the best and brightest, if we don't have the money to offer them and the stability?" Boyd said. "I don't know."

Some of the threatened teaching positions could be recalled -- based on seniority -- if the district receives more funding than anticipated in the state budget or if other fundraising efforts bring in enough money to fund the teacher's salary and benefits next school year. Parents at Cumberland are planning a "Save Our Staff" barbecue in May, and the West Lafayette Schools Education Foundation is working to raise money this spring to secure some of those jobs.

"I don't want to lose any teacher," Superintendent Rocky Killion said Tuesday. "I'm with the hundreds of school districts in Indiana and thousands in the nation all dealing with an economic crisis. This is not a West Lafayette issue ... this is a national economy issue."
