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Grass-roots group targets education cuts

By [Joe Callahan](#)
Staff writer

Published: Monday, March 16, 2009 at 6:30 a.m.

ROMEEO — Kindergarten teachers Shannon Marinacci and Maelisse Torres are among 522 teachers who will not have a job next year due to \$44 million in proposed state cuts.

And they say it's time for the community to rise up to make educating Florida's children a top priority.

The women were informed that their contracts would not be renewed on Feb. 13, the morning before Valentine's Day parties at the school in western Marion County.

The women were among first- and second-year teachers who were informed of the news on that fateful day.

For a month they have pondered

what to do about the situation, and they decided to launch an offensive to get parents to lobby lawmakers to fund education.

Wearing "Save Our Schools" shirts, which had "Cuts Hurt Everybody" inscribed on the back, they are hoping the community will rally for teachers across the state.

"We're not just doing this to get our jobs back, but we're doing this to better education," said Marinacci, who has four years of teaching experience — only two in Marion County — and was one of the teachers let go.

Both women were pleased to learn that a large local grassroots

campaign called Marions United for Public Education is beginning to gather momentum.

"We, as teachers, need to stand up and be united," said Torres, adding that she will

join the new group that plans to target lawmakers for more education funding.

Marions United for Public Education held its first meeting Wednesday. The group is being headed by Ray Seaman, a University

of Florida senior from Marion County.

The group will focus on how to best reach Marion County's legislators to deliver the message that further cuts in funding public education are unacceptable.

Seaman, the son of Bruce Seaman, the local Democratic Party chairman,

said they were sitting around the table talking about the crisis and decided to do something.

"We want to reach out to our legislators," said Ray Seaman. "Now that we have Larry Cretul [of Ocala] as the speaker of the House, we do have an ear."

Supported by Progress Florida, Marions United has created a Web site, marionsunited.org.

The group's formation came just as a separate group of parents was trying to launch a similar grass-roots effort.

They attended Wednesday's

Marions United meeting and decided that they would just join that group instead.

"I want parents to join this fight," said Julie Moore, one of those parents.

"It is our constitutional right for our children to be afforded a level of high education," Moore said.
