

Detroit to close 40 more schools

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Speaking Wednesday at a forum of Detroit's business elite, Robert Bobb, the emergency financial manager of the city's public school system, announced he will order closed about 40 more schools. He also promised a new round of layoffs and wage and benefit cuts on teachers over the year in a bid to close an estimated \$200 million deficit.

At the same event, Detroit Mayor David Bing pledged that in 75 days' time he will slash by 10 percent pay for city workers in the handful of unions that have yet to force the give-back on their membership.

Bobb made the school closure announcement at an annual gathering sponsored by the newspaper *Crain's Business Detroit* called "Newsmakers of the Year," where he and Bing were praised as "change agents in charge."

Bobb did not outline which schools he intends to close, or when the pay cuts and furloughs for teachers would be put in effect. In the fall, he ordered 29 schools closed and, working in tandem with the Detroit Federation of Teachers (DFT), forced through unprecedented pay cuts on teachers.

Teachers' income will be slashed by as much as \$10,000 over the next two years, the proceeds turned over to the school district as part of a "Termination Incentive Plan." The plan, proposed by the DFT, will supposedly give the money back to teachers upon their retirement or dismissal. However, given the district's track record on contracts and the high likelihood it will go bankrupt, there is no reason to believe this will ever happen. Meanwhile, teachers, many of whom are forced to purchase their own supplies, will be forced to live on drastically reduced wages.

The contract also paves the way for the district to channel its limited funding into charter schools, or so-called "priority schools," in keeping with the Obama administration's "Race to the Top" education initiative. Race to the Top pits states against each other for meager federal funding, forcing them to tear up work rules and create an openly class-based system of public education by diverting money to "better-performing" schools.

The results of this program are coming into focus in Detroit, where Bobb and the DFT are putting in place a system in which the vast majority of schools will be little more than daytime holding pens for the youth.

One of the new charter schools, called University YES Academy, will open next year, it was reported Thursday. Presented as a college-preparation school, it will feature smaller class sizes and a longer school day and school year than existing public schools. "It's about creating a public marketplace for education, where we hold everyone...to standards of academic accountability," Doug Ross, who is with the management of the new school, told the *Detroit Free Press*.

The school, which will be located in a recently closed school building, will not be open to students in general. It will select a mere 120 sixth-graders next year, and ultimately 575 students. This is less than 1 percent of Detroit public schools' current enrollment of 84,000.

In spite of the school closures, layoffs, and wage cuts—which are laying waste to public education in Detroit—Bobb has only managed to pare down the district's current deficit to \$219 million from about \$300 million. "We are still under water, deep red water," Bobb admitted.

Bobb boasted to Detroit's business elite that his

policies have earned him widespread hatred in the city. “I’ve been called an Uncle Tom, it’s been said I hate black people,” he said. “I’ve been threatened to be beat upside the head.”

For his part, Mayor Bing told reporters he had just returned from a Chicago meeting with the two prominent credit ratings agencies, Moody’s and Standard & Poor’s, over the status of Detroit city bonds and its \$300 million budget deficit. He indicated that the firms expressed approval over his budget-slashing plans. Michigan Governor Jennifer Granholm recently signed legislation doubling the amount of fiscal stabilization bonds Detroit can sell, from \$125 million to \$250 million.

Moody’s and Standard & Poor’s hold enormous power over government spending because their ratings determine the interest rates, or yields, that governments from the municipal to the national must offer in order to sell their bonds and raise cash. They typically bless spending cuts and social austerity measures with upgrades in ratings, while high social spending and good pay for public sector workers tend to be punished with downgrades.

The ratings agencies express the dictates of international finance capital—the major banks and financial speculators. These are the same interests are currently demanding that the governments of Greece, other European countries, the US, and all 50 US states impose massive social spending cuts. In other words, the very banks and speculators that received trillions in bailout money from the US and other governments are now demanding that the working class, including the students and teachers of Detroit, foot the bill.



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