

Detroit financial manager announces drastic school closing plan

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Detroit Public Schools (DPS) Emergency Financial Manager Robert Bobb announced a new cost-cutting plan on Wednesday. At least 8 schools will close in June, and another 18 schools may be shuttered, depending on the willingness of charter school operators to submit proposals for the 18 named schools by June.

An additional 27 schools will be operated under drastic “turnaround charter options,” meaning they will be run as public schools, but the principals will be replaced and all teachers will either be fired or forced to work on a “merit pay” arrangement at reduced compensation.

Out of 74,000 students in the DPS, 16,000 will be affected by the plan.

Day School for the Deaf, in Detroit’s southwest side, is one of the eight schools that will close in June. Talisha Tyles told a *Detroit News* reporter that the school caters to her son’s needs and teaches parents sign language. She said, “This is wrong. It’s going to be hard to find somewhere else for him to go. There aren’t that many schools in Detroit for the deaf.”

The Catherine Ferguson Academy for Young Women was announced as one of the schools to close if not taken over by a charter school operator. It is an alternative high school for teenage mothers.

In a cynical use of Orwellian doublespeak, Bobb named the plan, “Renaissance 2012.”

Detroit schools are being used as a testing ground for Obama’s education plan, which advocates the transfer of so-called “failing schools” to the private sector, where, if possible, they will be exploited for money making. In a visit to the city almost two years ago, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan called Detroit “ground zero” for education reform.

Two weeks ago, just before Obama made his speech

appealing to Congress to fix the No Child Left Behind Act, Duncan made an appeal to Detroit to “challenge the status quo” and turn around underperforming schools.

Bobb was appointed in 2009 by Democratic Governor Jennifer Granholm as emergency financial manager when the DPS had a budget shortfall of \$200 million. After almost two years of school closures, teacher layoffs and firing principals, the deficit has grown to \$327 million.

Last month, the state of Michigan, now under the Republican administration of Governor Rick Snyder, approved Bobb’s “Deficit Elimination Plan” to close half of the city’s remaining 144 schools, laying off the teachers and creating the norm of sixty or more students per high school classroom. The recklessness of the right-wing agenda of the Snyder administration was made clear in the stipulation made by Michigan State School Superintendent Michael Flanagan that it was to be implemented immediately.

Bobb’s new plan is presented as an alternative to or as an initial phase of the “Deficit Elimination Plan.” The plan is just the beginning. The protracted decline of Detroit is a result of the decimation of its industrial base. The dismantling of the public education system is part and parcel of the drive of the financial elite to develop new ways of profiting from the social devastation of the population.

Bobb said that he would meet with Detroit mayor Dave Bing this week to coordinate the school closures with Bing’s “right-sizing Detroit” initiative.



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