

Detroit's Catherine Ferguson Academy to be privatized

What is Evans Solutions, Inc.?

Nancy Hanover
21 June 2011

Detroit Public Schools' Emergency Financial Manager Roy Roberts announced last week that the Catherine Ferguson Academy (CFA), as well as two other alternative schools, the Barsamian Preparatory Center and the Hancock Preparatory Center, will be transformed into for-profit charters run by the Detroit corporation Evans Solutions, Inc. (see "An attack on public education: Detroit's Catherine Ferguson Academy to become for-profit charter school").

The survival of the nationally acclaimed CFA has been hailed as a victory by the Detroit political establishment and its supporters. The fact that the school has been transformed into a charter has been deliberately ignored or downplayed. It is quite possible that the closure announcement was a smokescreen, with the charter deal waiting in the works to be presented as a "victory."

This sordid deal is, first of all, about money. All three schools were targeted for charterization because their per-pupil costs exceeded Michigan's state aid formula. DPS receives about \$7,600 per pupil from the state and an additional \$500 million from grant funds. The cost to run CFA was \$12,619 per student, with Barsamian requiring \$35,636 per pupil, and Hancock \$31,689. EFM Roberts has stated that converting CFA to a charter will reduce spending by \$2 million.

The Barsamian and Hancock Prep Centers did not receive the press attention of Ferguson. They provided students who have been expelled from the Detroit Public School system with additional support, including counseling geared to the development of social skills and conflict-resolution services.

Evans Solutions is a for-profit Education Management Organization (EMO). One of its first tasks will be to brutally slash spending, a necessary step toward making the schools profitable. This will require

eliminating crucial services and slashing wages for teachers.

The aims of Evans Solutions can be deduced from a look at the company's current portfolio of schools. Evans now runs the Blanche Kelso Bruce Academy, begun in 2001 with two sites, and now expanded into six locations. These schools are designated "strict discipline academies." They only serve those young people who are required by law to attend them, due to adjudication by the legal system.

The only educational experience Evans Solutions currently has is with this law-and-order model. The company also works closely with "faith-based" operations such as the Samaritan Center, St. Jude Center and the Don Bosco Hall.

In a 2007 court settlement, Evans Solutions paid out a \$47,500 settlement to Doris Bennett, who was fired by the company after she revealed to her supervisor that she had breast cancer.

Blair Evans, the owner and superintendent of Evans Solutions, started his career in juvenile incarceration before entering the charter business in 2001. His ability to get control of CFA and the other schools is connected to his longstanding connections with the Democratic Party and the county police.

Blair Evans's older brother, Warren Evans, has held the positions of Detroit Police Chief, Wayne County Sheriff and Chief of Operations for the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office. He ran for mayor in the wake of the resignation of Kwame Kilpatrick. Evans oversaw the construction of the new juvenile detention center in Detroit, which contracted his brother's Blanche Kelso Bruce charter for its education services.

In his 2009 election campaign, the elder Evans crudely stated, "I don't care what you do to the [DPS] curriculum...the biggest problem with DPS is public

safety.”

Most notoriously, Warren Evans was forced to resign as Detroit police chief after deploying the TV reality show “The First 48” to film a raid that resulted in the death of seven-year-old Aiyana Stanley-Jones in 2010. Stanley-Jones was first burned by an incendiary flashbang grenade, then shot by police.

Warren Evans’s ex-wife was former Detroit Police Chief Ella Bully-Cummings, a close ally of the city’s former mayor, Democrat Kwame Kilpatrick.

Public School Academies (PSAs) or charters were first legalized in Michigan in 1994. Wayne County Regional Educational Service Agency (Wayne RESA), the agency that charters Evans Solutions, Inc., approved its first PSA in 1995. It now oversees 90 schools with 53,000 students, about 17 percent of the county’s 313,000 public school students.

According to the annual report, “Profiles of For-Profit Education Management Organizations,” put out by the National Education Policy Center, enrollment of students in for-profits nationally is growing at a rapid pace. Since its study began, the number of schools managed by for-profit EMOs has increased from 131 to 729. At present, 31 states have authorized the operation of for-profit EMOs.

Michigan is, by far, the state with the highest number of for-profits, at 185. The NEPC report also notes that while Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) is a crude indicator of school competence, of the schools managed by for-profits, 47 percent, or nearly half, failed.

The transformation of Catherine Ferguson Academy into a for-profit charter is an attack on the students, educational staff and population as a whole. It is part of a nationwide trend to undermine public education and privatize schools. Detroit, as Obama’s education secretary said, is “Ground Zero” in education “reform”—that is, the looting of public education by corporations and Wall Street speculators.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact