

Highland Park, Michigan teachers and staff go without pay after state refuses aid

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Teachers and support staff at Highland Park, Michigan schools did not get paid Friday following the refusal by the administration of Republican Governor Rick Snyder to advance funds to assist the cash-strapped district.

The Michigan Federation of Teachers advised teachers and union-represented staff to report for work, claiming that paychecks would be issued next week, although this is by no means certain.

The previous day the Michigan legislature voted a supplemental appropriation of \$4,000 per student that would follow students if they transferred to another district or charter school. None of the money, however, would go to the Highland Park School District, which the legislature appears determined to liquidate. The district faces a cumulative \$11.3 million deficit.

The move by the state legislature follows a court ruling last week voiding the appointment of an emergency manager brought in by Governor Snyder to run the Highland Park schools. A judge ruled that the review board that recommended the appointment violated the state's open meeting law.

A bill enacted last year by the state legislature gives expanded powers to state appointed emergency managers, including the right to tear up union contracts, impose budget cuts and sell public assets.

The refusal by the state legislature and the Snyder administration to aid the Highland Park schools is a transparent attempt to blackmail teachers and parents into accepting a state takeover of the district. The actions of the Snyder administration are consistent with a plan to dismantle the public school system in Highland Park and either merge it with another district or turn the schools over to for-profit charter operators.

Jack Martin, Snyder's choice to be Highland Park school's emergency manager, is a strong proponent of

for-profit charter schools. Within hours of his appointment in January, Martin announced the closure of Barber Focus School, one of three schools remaining in Highland Park, and its merger with Henry Ford Academy.

The Highland Park Board of Education voted Thursday night to waive its right to appeal the appointment of an emergency manager. The vote paves the way for the early reappointment of Martin by Snyder.

At the school board meeting parents and teachers packed the room. They reacted angrily to the prostration and passivity of board members, who could provide no answers to their questions.

"These teachers have families, they have bills, they need to know when they are going to get a paycheck," said one parent.

Michelle, another parent said, "What do you have for the children? I have three kids at Barber. I don't want to send my child to a teacher that doesn't have a paycheck. Who wants to teach if they don't know how their bills are going to be paid?"

"I have a nine-year-old child asking me if the doors are going to be open tomorrow. What do you tell a nine-year-old child? You are messing with their mental state."

Another former Highland Park resident added, "I want to know if anyone has any real clarification on what is going to happen. They say the teachers are not going to get paid, and that is a travesty. All of you need to go to jail for that."

The meeting exposed the posturing of those Democrats claiming to oppose Michigan's emergency manager law. Highland Park School Board Secretary Robert Davis, who filed the successful legal challenge to the appointment of Martin as emergency manager,

did not even attend the meeting. He admitted this was because he did not want to vote against the board resolution waiving its right to appeal the appointment of an emergency manager, a resolution he said he had written.

Democratic State Senator Bert Johnson, another self-professed opponent of the emergency manager law, came late to the meeting, after the vote had already taken place. While criticizing the board's vote, he offered no proposals on how parents could fight the impending shutdown of their schools. With the anger of parents boiling over, he came to the rescue of the school board by falsely assuring that teachers and staff would be paid, even though this contradicted the statements of Snyder administration. Johnson's timely intervention allowed the board to quickly end the meeting without allowing further questions.

Following the meeting, several parents spoke to the WSWS. Michelle Roth said, "I have four kids. Three of them are in the Highland Park Schools. I can't pull my kids out of Highland Park. I have nowhere to send them."

The WSWS also spoke to parents and teachers at Barber Focus School on Friday. Latoya Hill, who has a fifth grade daughter at Barber, said she was opposed to the allocated \$4,000 per student to encourage transfers out of Highland Park. "I hate it because there are not that many schools around here, and my daughter will have to go to the Detroit Public Schools or to Hamtramck. But Hamtramck is already full."

"They could have at least waited until the end of the school year to give us the summer to find a replacement."

Darnell Williams, another parent, said: "I don't agree with these cuts. My daughter is only four and they are talking about busing the kids? I don't think that is right to be busing a four-year-old to another school. She just started school this year and now they are ready to close them down."



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