

Detroit school czar targets 15 schools, 600 teachers

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The emergency manager of the Detroit Public Schools announced March 13 the next stage in the destruction of public education in Detroit, presenting a list of 15 schools, including six high schools, which will be removed from DPS at the end of the current school year and transferred to the state-run Education Achievement System.

Roy Roberts, the former GM executive who came out of retirement to take the \$250,000-a-year position as emergency manager, designated Central, Denby, Henry Ford, Mumford, Pershing and Southeastern high schools as “low-performing,” as well as nine middle and elementary schools.

The EAS and its overseer, the Education Achievement Administration, were established with much fanfare last summer by Roberts and Michigan Governor Rick Snyder, as a state-sponsored alternative supposedly designed to improve “failed” public schools.

In effect, the EAS will play the same role in the restructuring of the Detroit schools that “bad GM” played in the restructuring of General Motors by the Obama administration. The company was split into two components, one that received the most rundown and loss-making factories and liquidated them, while the other received the plants that would become profitable after huge wage and benefit concessions by the United Auto Workers.

The EAS schools will be essentially substandard holding pens for the poorest and most academically challenged students, while teachers working in these schools have their wages and benefits slashed and lose their pensions. Hundreds of teachers will lose their jobs.

The chancellor of the state-run school system is John Covington, a product of the Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation’s Superintendent’s Academy. He abruptly resigned from his post as the Superintendent of the Kansas City schools last year to head the EAA, where he will reportedly receive a yearly salary of \$450,000 plus

incentives.

Tuesday’s announcement is a frontal assault on all workers at the 14 schools, as well as on students and parents. Under the new regime all 600 current teachers, many of them with many years of seniority, will have to reapply for only 400 jobs. The other 200 teaching positions will be filled by Teach for America, the federal program that uses new college graduates, with no teaching experience, to replace veteran teachers.

During the re-hiring process seniority and tenure rights will be thrown out the window. As in the case of charter schools, teachers will be hired and fired at will. Many teachers will face draconian pay cuts, perhaps even as low as entry level step one, or around \$40,000 a year.

EAA teachers will additionally work a longer school day and school year. In addition, re-hired teachers will no longer be part of the state retirement system, either the MIP (Member Investment Plan) or the older Basic Plan, a further incentive for them to quit or retire.

There are drastic changes in working conditions. The work day will be lengthened one hour to eight hours, which does not take into account the added time most teachers normally spend preparing lessons, grading papers, and purchasing supplies.

The school year will be extended to eleven months a year, beginning right after Labor Day and continuing through August 6 of the following year. Teachers will receive a paltry sum of \$5,000 for the additional two months work, roughly the equivalent of pay for teaching summer school. There is no provision for air-conditioning, a virtual necessity for effective teaching during the heat of the summer.

The EAS project is little more than a scam whose purpose is to divert resources from the Detroit Public Schools to the tune of \$82 million in funding for the estimated 12,000 students who would make the transfer. There is ample opportunity for phony bookkeeping, since

the school buildings occupied by the EAS will remain the property of the DPS.

Despite claims by Roberts that each child in the EAS will have an “individualized learning plan,” this assumes a support staff of specialists that the alternative system is incapable of providing. The EAS currently has a total staff of only 12 people, and will be hard pressed to build an organization capable of running 15 public schools by this coming September.

While teachers have reacted angrily to the latest onslaught on their profession and economic security, the Detroit Federation of Teachers union will do nothing to challenge or mobilize popular working class opposition to these policies. The union is primarily concerned with maintaining its dues-paying base, and it remains unclear whether or not EAS teachers will remain in the DFT.

A recent pronouncement on the DFT web site declares: “The DFT will exhaust every resource to ensure that the rights of ALL MEMBERS are upheld in accordance with all applicable laws including state statutes and Public Employees Relations Act (PERA).” This is so much double talk, since the state and federal governments have used laws like No Child Left Behind to spearhead the assault on public education. The American Federation of Teachers, the DFT’s parent organization, as well as its rival the National Education Association, have both endorsed Obama’s re-election.

Teachers, students and parents must unite in a common political struggle to defend the right to an education. Public education cannot be defended within the framework of defending the capitalist profit system, or by backing the Obama administration as a supposed alternative to the Republicans. New organizations of the working class must be built that fight for a socialist alternative that re-prioritizes the wealth of society for the needs of the working class, and a decent and productive future for young people.



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