

State plans to close Michigan school districts

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Michigan's state legislature has passed a bill that will allow the state's small school district heads to shut down their schools in response to budget deficits.

Under the new law, if the superintendent and treasurer lack the resources to consummate a "deficit-elimination plan," or do not submit one to state authorities, they can make the decision to shut down the district, thereby leaving students to commute to neighboring districts.

It is claimed that the bill is designed to help struggling districts in the Detroit and Saginaw areas. The legislation specifically targets Inkster district west of Detroit and Buena Vista district in the Saginaw area, both of which are expected to close in the immediate future.

The closing of these schools is a continuation of the assault on public education being carried out by both parties of big business. Detroit and other former industrial centers have been hard hit by brutal cuts in education funding, teacher firings, and school closures. Far from representing any reprieve from austerity, the closing down of school districts means more cuts in programs and staff as money is diverted away from education and for-profit charters explode in number to take their place.

The law was heavily pushed by the Republican administration in Michigan. Democrats in the state legislature voted against the bill. This empty gesture costs them nothing, as they have a minority in the chamber, allowing them to posture as defenders of education. In reality, the policies being imposed are entirely bipartisan in nature.

The Democratic party in Michigan and nationally has led the assault on public education. Detroit Public Schools, in collusion with the city's Democratic administration, has plans to close 28 public schools and lay off 1,688 teachers by 2016. Republican governor Rick Snyder and Democratic treasurer Andy Dillon

have attempted to divert public funds into for-profit charter schools, where any difference in operating cost achieved by adulterating education would go straight into investors' pockets. Obama's education secretary, Arne Duncan, the man infamous for declaring that Hurricane Katrina was "the best thing that happened to the education system in New Orleans," recently toured Michigan schools praising the progress made in dismantling and privatizing them.

Lawmakers defended the action by claiming that Inkster is an affluent community anyway. This is in fact not the truth—median income is well below the national average. Meanwhile, in the small community of Buena Vista, more than a third of children live below the poverty line after years of layoffs have decimated the area.

The issue at stake is not merely the two districts, which will be shuttered immediately. The prescriptions of the law will pave the way for further closings all over the state of Michigan. The condition that the district be between 300 and 2,400 is immaterial to the agenda being carried out: the further attack on education, meanwhile providing a foot in the door to expand the law to bigger districts.

Districts are making deep cuts all over the state, a number of them under the mandate of unaccountable state-appointed emergency managers when local superintendents fail to move quickly enough. The Lansing school board's new budget will cut administrators and supply budgets and has worked out a deal with the teachers' union whereby elementary teachers assume the instruction of whatever art, music and gym classes remain. Lansing schools will cut 111 teachers, or 10 percent of the teaching staff.

In Perry district, the board has decided teachers will take a 10 percent pay cut for the next two years, as well as urging older educators to retire without hiring replacements. The district's superintendent boasted that

“we have gone from a district that was living beyond its means to one that has a \$650,000 operating surplus.”



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