

Growing opposition to the Michigan EAA

Students and faculty protest EMU partnership with Education Achievement Authority

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About 30 students and faculty attended the Eastern Michigan University (EMU) governing body Board of Regents meeting to speak against and protest EMU's partnership with the state Education Achievement Authority (EAA).

The EAA was created in 2011 as a statewide school district for "failing schools," those that scored in the bottom five percent on standardized tests. So far, it has been handed fifteen Detroit public schools, and its backers are pushing it to expand into additional Michigan districts.

Many of the teachers the EAA brought in to replace Detroit teachers are from Teach for America, which recruits recent college graduates to teach for two years after undergoing only a five-week training course.

EAA schools are based on computer-based learning and are exempt from many public school regulations regarding subcontracting, curriculum, teacher pay, training and conditions, and even access to books and supplies. The requirements of special education students are routinely ignored.

As explained in a WSWs report last month, *What is Michigan's Education Achievement Authority?*, "Far from being designed to help children, the EAA is a Trojan horse for profit interests and a national model for the privatization of education. With most of the EAA students drawn from districts in deep poverty, the experiment preys on the most disadvantaged."

EMU is the only public university to partner with the EAA. Since the agreement governing the partnership designates only the "regents" as partners, the board has completely excluded educators in discussions about the

arrangement.

In response to a growing boycott of EMU by local public school unions and school districts over its partnership with the EAA, the dean of the College of Education, Jann Joseph, admitted difficulties in getting student teachers placed in local classrooms. Citing a conflict of interest, she resigned her position on the board of the EAA last December, the same month she oversaw the issuing of the layoff notices.

Like the chancellor of the EAA, John Covington, who was given the \$400,000 per year job one month after the Kansas City, Missouri district that he had been superintendent of was stripped of its state accreditation, Joseph is being rewarded for dismantling public education from the inside. She announced last week that she would be leaving EMU in June to become the Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs at Indiana University's South Bend campus, explaining to MLive.com that it was the next "logical, exciting and upward step in my career."

After the EAA's first year of operation, which included high teacher turnover and nearly a quarter drop in enrollment, Covington has been notified that the state is dissolving the contract that made the EAA the exclusive recipient of low-performing schools.

This move by the state superintendent came as four Democrats on the eight-member State Board of Education (the board has 6 Democrats and 2 Republicans) signed a statement earlier this month opposing the expansion of the EAA.

This, however, amounts to only nominal opposition to the EAA as the current vehicle for dismantling

public education, and amounts to window dressing in an election year. While the EAA was created by Republican Governor Rick Snyder, it is just as much the brainchild of the Democratic Party.

As part of its Race to the Top (RTTT) contest that coerces states into adopting the Common Core curriculum while expanding charter schools, the Obama Administration selected the EAA as the only Michigan RTTT finalist in 2012.

Former Democratic Governor Jennifer Granholm, working with the American Federation of Teachers, the same union that collects dues from the laid-off EMU faculty, created the State School Reform/Redesign District, which is the conduit through which schools are funneled to the EAA.

Ignoring the record of failure that the EAA already has—proficiency levels have dropped over the course of the year for many students—while thumbing its nose at the growing opposition, the state House passed legislation this month allowing the EAA to take control of more schools next year. In a transparent attempt to make the privatization scheme more palatable, the legislation also allows public intermediate school districts, districts run at the county level, to take over schools.

Many students and faculty attended the regents meeting with their mouths duct-taped and the world “silenced” written on the tape. Ashley Attar, a senior undergraduate in International Relations, explained the protest to the WSWS, “We’ve experienced a lot of police silencing. They’re saying if you protest you need to be careful because it could result in immediate arrest. We said that we should deliver the regents cake as a symbolic gesture. ‘Let them eat cake,’ we thought.”

After receiving in silence over a dozen comments that were all highly critical, the regents and president moved on to the business at hand: raising student housing and dining rates 4 percent on top of the 3.75 percent rise for the current year, and awarding the football coach a base annual salary of \$425,000 with possible bonuses of \$65,000 for each of the next five years. Earlier this month the university also found the funds to hire six more campus police officers.

“The way I come at this issue is from an economic development perspective, and this [EAA] widens the gap,” Ashley continued. “We’re performing so low in

the United States for a developed country. There’s no excuse for all these inequalities in our society.

“School should be free for everyone. I am \$16,000 in debt and that’s a really good, low number. Many are at \$60,000. Why is this happening? They don’t want us educated. That is backward. You would think they’d want to bail out student debt like they bailed out the banks.”



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