

Michigan governor names 4th emergency manager for Detroit Public Schools

Nancy Hanover
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Last Tuesday, Michigan Governor Rick Snyder named Darnell Earley as the emergency manager (EM) of the 47,000-student Detroit Public Schools district. The appointment came just under the wire to circumvent the 18-month limit for emergency managers under Michigan's reactionary and anti-democratic law Public Act (PA) 436.

At a press conference announcing the appointment, Earley tied further cuts in the district to the broad redistribution of wealth effected with the bankruptcy of Detroit. "Detroit's rebirth won't be completed until the chapter on the Detroit Public Schools is rewritten," he said.

What Earley means by "rewriting the chapter" began to be spelled out at the press conference. He made a point of disagreeing with outgoing DPS EM Jack Martin who said, "You can only cut ... so much; the district has cut, in the last probably three years, a quarter of a billion dollars. There comes a point where you get to the bone and there's nothing to cut."

Earley jumped in saying, "You have to go through these budgets, you have to go through the services you're providing and there has to be reforms. Everything has to be on the table. ... It's tough work, but it's necessary."

Snyder has made the charterization/privatization of Detroit schools a major emphasis throughout his tenure, including the formation of the Education Achievement Authority and the Michigan Education Finance Project. Last month, the Republican governor indicated that the DPS had been "too long with an emergency manager," giving rise to some speculation that Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan might be given that responsibility.

At least for now, Snyder is sticking with the "tried and tested" approach of an unelected, unaccountable emergency manager. In Earley, the governor has found

a candidate who has made a career of decimating and outsourcing city services in former auto towns in Michigan. As he leaves the position of EM for Flint, \$6 million in cuts to Flint firefighters' health benefits and pensions is being imposed, with \$600,000 to take effect this year.

During Earley's tenure in Flint, he presided over the unsafe drinking water crisis facing city residents, following the municipality's decision to withdraw from the Detroit Water and Sewage Department in an effort to save costs. Prior, Earley was employed as the city manager of Saginaw, where he cut 10 percent of the city's workforce and slashed health benefits for city retirees.

Among his initial statements, Earley promised to work closely with Snyder's new pro-privatization coalition, the "Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren." The far-reaching nature of the group's ambitions is indicated by the fact that the governor's liaison with the group will be Paul Pastorek, the former Louisiana superintendent of schools who supervised the transition to an all-charter district in New Orleans in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

For services rendered to the Detroit Public Schools, Earley will be handsomely paid. His annual salary will rise from \$180,000 to \$212,000.

The timing of the appointment was designed to beat the 18-month deadline of January 16, preempt a removal vote by the school board and take advantage of a recent reactionary court decision.

According to the emergency manager law, Public Act (PA) 436, enacted in 2012 (despite the popular vote defeating a nearly identical measure, PA 4), the term of office of an appointed EM is 18 months. According to the provision, a governing body may remove the

manager by a two-thirds vote after the 18 months.

This window for democratic overturn of EM rule has now been, for all practical purposes, voided by the courts. Last year, the Detroit Public School Board voted three times to remove emergency manager, Jack Martin, to no avail. In the fall it sued, demanding the right to remove Martin 18 months after PA 436 went into effect. Denying the case, Circuit Court Judge Joyce Draganchuk ruled that the 18-month limit applied not to Emergency Management, but to individuals. Therefore, she concluded that if another manager is appointed prior to an individual's 18-month term, the ability to remove was voided and a succession of emergency managers could continue "in perpetuity."

This decision, which the School Board pledged to appeal, has far-reaching consequences for both the increasing numbers of cities and schools placed under Emergency Managers in Michigan and for democratic rights altogether. It literally places the power to override elections in the hands of the governor indefinitely into the future.

It was this provision that Snyder referred to at the press conference, justifying the appointment, stating he believes "the law of Michigan allows it."

Earley joins a string of DPS emergency managers, under various legal provisions, since March 2009, when Robert Bobb was named by Democrat Jennifer Granholm. The fiscal crisis of the schools has been used in every case to justify the elimination of locally elected school boards and to proceed with draconian cuts, school closures and privatization.

Under the impact of massive budget cuts, deindustrialization, population decline and the growth of charter schools, enrollment in Detroit Public Schools has dropped to less than half its size when it was put under state EM control. In 2008-2009, enrollment stood at 97,000 students. It is now 47,000 students attending 97 schools.

Despite hundreds of millions of dollars in cuts, the district's deficit now stands at \$169.4 million. Not only has enrollment collapsed, but per-student funding has been cut both on the state and federal levels. Since 2008, the state of Michigan has cut K-12 funding by 9.5 percent, while Obama has cut Title I funding by 10 percent and federal aid to Special Education by eight percent.

This is not just a Detroit problem. Each year more

Michigan school districts are bankrupted. Last year, 52 were running a deficit; this year it is 57.



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