

Mobilize workers and youth to stop the attack on Northern Virginia schools!

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality
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Last month, a task force appointed by Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) Superintendent Karen Garza outlined a proposal to cut up to \$100 million from the school system's budget in order to close a funding deficit of roughly equal size. As causes for the deficit, school officials cite the annual growth of student enrollment as well as the state of Virginia's elimination of more than \$20 million in yearly fund transfers to the district.

"Since school year 2007-08 (FY 2008), the school system has cut 2,175 positions and nearly a half-billion dollars from its budget, affecting every school and department. ... No more cuts can be made without touching the classrooms," states the FCPS web site under a section titled, "Why must the cuts in school year 2016-17 come from programs?" The web site cynically proclaims the cuts are necessary in order to offset planned cost-of-living adjustment payments to FCPS teachers, whom it admits are some of the lowest paid in the Washington DC region, with salaries averaging less than \$46,756 a year.

The proposed cuts would devastate dozens of vital school programs. On the agenda are cuts to essential services including band and drama courses, pre-school classes and afternoon bus services, as well as plans to expand class sizes in all grades. These proposals come even as FCPS classrooms are some of the most overcrowded in the region, according to the Washington Area Board of Education.

The FCPS, which resides within Washington DC's Northern Virginia suburbs, is the tenth largest school district in the United States, with a total student enrollment of over 187,000. Additionally, Fairfax County is the second wealthiest jurisdiction in the United States, with a median household income of over \$104,000. Youth and families, drawn from across the

country and the world in hopes of receiving a first-class public education from its schools, are justifiably outraged by the proposals to slash dozens of essential services from the school budget.

In announcing the proposals to cut programs from schools, FCPS officials have organized a number of "community meetings" with the stated aim of discussing the proposals with parents, students and teachers affected by these cuts. These events are a sham, intended to give an appearance of popular participation in budgetary decisions, which have been decided well in advance.

Parents, teachers and youth seeking to fight face a political struggle against all the big business politicians, both Democratic and Republican. Since the 2008 financial crisis banks, hedge funds and other financial groups have received infusions of cash from the federal government while local municipalities have been starved of essential resources.

President Obama, who, in addition to continuing the financial bailout of Wall Street begun by Bush, has encouraged the mass layoff of school employees and the destruction of their wages, pensions, health care and work conditions. As of 2013, more than 300,000 public school teachers across the US have been thrown out of their jobs. Obama's Race to the Top program has forced school districts to impose standardized testing regimes, victimize teachers and expand for-profit charter schools.

Waves of school closures and cuts to services have devastated school districts in places such as Philadelphia, Chicago, Detroit, Louisiana and nearby Washington DC, where half of the city's K-12 student body is enrolled in one of the district's 115 charter schools. In the working class Philadelphia suburb of Chester, Pennsylvania, schoolteachers have been forced

to work without pay.

The attack on Northern Virginia schools takes place as top defense contractors in the region, including CACI, General Dynamics and Northrop Grumman, rake in billions from Washington's ever-expanding military engagements while receive huge tax incentives. The price of one B-2 Spirit stealth bomber (\$747 million) could close the funding deficit for all of Fairfax County schools seven times over.

It is highly significant that this attack takes place in Virginia where Thomas Jefferson first championed "the diffusion of knowledge among the people" through tax-funded schools, insisting, "no other sure foundation can be devised for the preservation of freedom and happiness." Today, the American ruling class, drunk with wealth and power, refuses to pay for public education because it is hostile to its democratic and egalitarian foundations. In order to defend its own aristocratic rule, the corporate and financial elite and their paid political servants prefer to "leave the people in ignorance."

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) calls on young people, students, parents and teachers to reach out to the millions of workers, including Postal Service and other government employees, to build a powerful movement to oppose these attacks.

School and neighborhood actions committees should be built to unite the struggles of workers and young people seeking to defend education, decent housing, a livable wage and other social rights in a common political offensive against the source of the attacks on living standards: the capitalist system.

In doing so, workers and youth will find no ally in the trade unions. The Fairfax Education Association (FEA), the local chapter of the National Education Association (NEA), has done less than nothing. FEA president Kimberly Adams called on teachers in a recent blog post to assist the FCPS administration in singling out programs for slashing, saying, "Often the people on the front lines are the people who know the most about organizational inefficiencies. Are there projects that you work on that could be done with less expense?" Adams declares that the union wants nothing more than a "seat at the table and a voice in decision making."

For its part, the Fairfax County Federation of

Teachers (FCFT) has said nothing of the plan to slash millions from Northern Virginia public schools, although its president Steve Greenburg has been quoted in the local press as calling plans to introduce charter schools into Fairfax County a "wonderful" idea. These organizations, which are allied with the Obama administration, are solely concerned with protecting the income and institutional interests of the union executives.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality reject the lie that there is no money to provide high quality public education to all young people. We call for the confiscation of the ill-gotten gains of the financial criminals, the transformation of the banks, basic industries and public utilities under the common ownership of the working class, and the abolishing of the Pentagon budget. This would provide trillions of dollars for the vast improvement of public education throughout the US, and lay the basis for the socialist transformation of society to meet human need, not profit.

The IYSSE calls on parents, teachers and students to study the political perspective of the IYSSE and its parent organization, the Socialist Equality Party, and to contact the *World Socialist Web Site* to help build a movement of the working class throughout the Washington DC region to defend the right to education for all.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact