

Build a committee to oppose Oakland school cuts! For a socialist program to expand public education!

The Socialist Equality Party (US)
16 December 2017

The Oakland Board of Education will vote tonight on whether to approve millions in mid-year budget cuts to the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD), which serves 50,119 students. The board, which is intimately connected to the Democratic Party and wealthy proponents of school privatization, is deliberately starving the public school system of resources so it can use the crisis it manufactured to close “failing schools” and replace them with for-profit charter operations.

This is evidenced by the fact that the current budget cuts include \$4.2 million from the 87 district-run public schools and not a penny in cuts for the 35 district-authorized charter schools.

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and the International Youth and Student for Social Equality (IYSSE) urge school workers, parents, students and everyone else who opposes these cuts to form an emergency committee to defend the right to high-quality public education. The entire working class in Oakland and across the Bay Area must be mobilized to stop this criminal attack, which is aimed at stripping working-class youth of an education and condemning them to a future of poverty and war.

Last week hundreds came to the board meeting to denounce the planned cuts. But appeals to the board, which answers to the corporate enemies of public education, is an exercise in futility. Instead all those who defend the schools must turn for support to the working class—city workers fighting wage and benefit cuts, workers opposed to outrageous housing costs, young people fighting student loan debts, immigrant workers angered over deportation threats. All of these forces must unite in a common fight against both big-business parties and the financial elite that stands

behind them.

We propose that the committee to defend public education be based on the following principles:

1) Public education is a social right and it is a lie to claim there is no money for the schools.

A recent study found just three billionaires—Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos, Microsoft’s Bill Gates and investor Warren Buffett—possess as much wealth as half the American population, or 162.5 million people. The Bay Area has the highest income inequality in California, with the top 1 percent in San Francisco pocketing 44 times the average income of the bottom 99 percent, and in Oakland 20 times.

To defend our social rights, including the right to high-quality public education, workers and young people must fight for a socialist program, including the expropriation of the ill-gotten gains of the billionaires, to vastly increase funding for public education and all other social services. The school district’s debts to the Wall Street bondholders must be canceled and taxes sharply increased on Silicon Valley and other corporate giants to finance public education.

2) Mobilize the working class independently of the two big-business parties.

While they demand austerity from workers, the Democratic and Republican politicians, from President Trump and Governor Brown to Mayor Schaaf and the school board, all support corporate tax cuts and other subsidies to “improve the business climate.” At the same time, Superintendent Kyla Johnson-Trammell is a Democratic Party functionary and President James Harris and Jumoke Hinton Hodge received \$225,000 and \$113,000 respectively from pro-charter business groups during the 2016 board elections.

Workers must break with the two corporate-controlled parties and constitute ourselves as a politically independent force fighting to take political power into our own hands. Only in this way can society's wealth—which is created through the collective labor of working people—be redistributed to serve the interests of the majority, not the wealthy few. Instead of squandering trillions on bank bailouts, corporate tax cuts and criminal wars, a workers' government would spend trillions on rebuilding the infrastructure, constructing low-rent housing and providing medical care, pensions and public and higher education, as a social right, free to everyone.

3) No confidence in the Oakland Education Association (OEA), AFSCME, SEIU and the other unions. Build rank-and-file committees to fight.

The unions long ago abandoned any struggle against budget cuts and the attacks on workers' jobs and living standards. The OEA and other unions are tied to the Democratic Party, which has utilized the unions to suppress the class struggle and impose its austerity measures.

Far from opposing corporate "school reform," highly paid union executives like NEA President Lily Eskelsen Garcia (\$416,633) and American Federation of Teachers chief President Randi Weingarten (\$497,300) have only sought seats at the table to protect their own business interests, including expanding the franchise into charter schools. The NEA and AFT helped Obama implement his corporate driven school agenda, accepted funding from the billionaire charter promoters Bill Gates and Eli Broad, and betrayed teacher battles in Wisconsin (2011), Chicago (2012) and Detroit (2016).

Outside of a few impotent protests, the OEA has done nothing to oppose the board's unending attacks, which include \$14 million in mid-year budget cuts last January, followed by \$22.6 million cut from the 2017-18 school year budget. When the most recent cuts were first announced, the union organized a few protest stunts on street corners, while promoting illusions that teachers and the schools could be defended by appealing to the school board to focus its cuts on higher-paid administrators. Even though teachers have been working without a contract, the OEA has suspended negotiations until the budget crisis is resolved. This means OEA officials are prepared to impose new

concessions on educators or demand that any meager wage or benefit improvements be offset by cuts elsewhere in the budget.

The role of the unions was on display again Monday night, when the SEIU shut down the week-long strike by 3,000 city workers without a settlement, setting the stage for a capitulation to Mayor Schaaf's demands for wage and benefit concessions.

That is why the workers and young people in Oakland must take matters into their own hands! There is no time to lose. The attacks on public education will only intensify with Trump's tax and budget cuts, which threaten to drain \$63 billion from California public schools over the next decade.

In order to carry out a genuine struggle in defense of public education, teachers, students, parents and all those opposed to these cuts should elect delegates to this fighting committee at their school sites and in their neighborhoods. The aim of these committees is to unite the entire working class—black, white, Asian, Hispanic, young and old, employed and unemployed—in common battle to defend the right to public education.

In this struggle, the SEP and the IYSSE will lend its fullest support and guidance.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact