

Stop the closure of Benton Harbor schools! Defend public education!

The World Socialist Web Site Teacher Newsletter
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The *World Socialist Web Site Teacher Newsletter* calls on teachers, public school workers, students and residents to stop Democratic Governor Gretchen Whitmer's plans to force the closure of Benton Harbor High School and/or charterize the entire district.

The struggle to defend education requires uniting the working class; it is a class issue, not a racial one. It is imperative to reach out to all sections of the working class and young people—black, white and immigrant—to form independent rank-and-file organizations to mobilize workers and young people to defend the right to high quality public education for all.

Whitmer, a Democrat, speaks for the rich no less than former Governor Rick Snyder and the Republicans—all of whom are responsible for demonizing teachers and entire school districts for the problems created by the terrible growth of social inequality and poverty. Newly-elected Governor Whitmer—who campaigned as a defender of schools and children—has been quickly exposed as the willing ally of billionaire US Education Secretary Betsy DeVos, the nation's most fervent political opponent of public education. Last week, Whitmer's office pointedly refused to uphold Michigan children's right to literacy, opposing the long-running lawsuit demanding proper funding of state schools.

Behind Whitmer and DeVos are big Wall Street and hedge fund interests seeking to completely privatize education. With their yachts and mansions peppering the shores of Lake Michigan, the politicians, starting with former governor Democrat Jennifer Granholm, created "emergency management" for the transparent purpose of privatizing schools and city assets (as in Flint). Former president Barack Obama and his pro-privatization *Race to the Top*, Education Secretary Arne Duncan and Democratic emergency managers bear direct political responsibility for the crisis of the

education system.

Shamefully, as always, big business politicians are making the lying claim that Benton Harbor High School or the entire district must be shuttered because of "financial mismanagement" or "low test scores." On the contrary, the crumbling US school system has been starved of resources for decades enabling for-profit charter chains to rake in millions. At the same time, the destruction of well-paying jobs and the growth of social inequality and poverty has put terrible strains on public school educators seeking to support their students. While Whirlpool and other big businesses were handed lavish tax cuts, their owners made their billions and walked away.

This city is far from alone. The criminal plans to eviscerate the rights of young people and workers in Benton Harbor is part of a wholesale onslaught against public education nationally. From West Virginia, Oklahoma and California to Poland, China and New Zealand, teachers have been on the march, striking and protesting, seeking to improve schools conditions in the face of decades of budget cuts and punitive testing. The role of the unions, both American Federation of Labor and National Education Association, however, has been to isolate and localize each struggle and prevent a nationwide struggle to secure high quality public education for all.

The last year of teachers' struggles has underscored the need for educators and students to mobilize independently of the unions. Staffed by executives firmly in the upper one percent of earners, the unions are tied hand and foot to the corporate-controlled politicians and the capitalist profit system. Indicating the unions' contempt for the youth and their own membership, Michigan Education Association President Paul Herbart calls the closure of Benton

Harbor High School the “best solution for students and families.” As they did throughout the teacher rebellion of the last year, the unions will inevitably agree to rotten deals which accept the financial framework of the big business—accepting the mass closures of schools, the stripping of healthcare and the impoverishment of school workers.

The *WSWS Teacher Newsletter* calls on all workers and young people seeking to defend public education in Benton Harbor and beyond to establish their own, independent rank-and-file committees to fight for the resources which are so urgently required. These committees should fight to unite Benton Harbor educators with teachers in Detroit and across the country and every section of workers, including autoworkers who face the fight against plant closings, layoffs and wage and benefit cuts.

An infusion of billions of dollars is necessary to pay teachers a living wage, upgrade buildings and infrastructure, and provide tutoring and enrichment programs to all.

But such a fundamental change in society’s priorities cannot be accomplished by appealing to the powers-that-be to pay higher taxes and create a more humane capitalism. Instead, the working class must build a powerful political movement in opposition to Trump and the Republicans, as well as Whitmer, Biden, Sanders and the Democrats, to fight for a workers’ government and socialism. The reorganization of economic and political life based on human need, not private profit, will require the expropriation of the ill-gotten fortunes of the rich, a vast redistribution of the wealth and an infusion of resources necessary to raise the material and cultural level of the entire population.

The *WSWS Teacher Newsletter* urges you to contact us at WSWS.org/teachers to get involved.



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