

Vote “No” on the Detroit Federation of Teachers contract!

Unite educators, students and parents to protect our lives against COVID-19

The Detroit Rank-and-File Educators Safety Committee
28 September 2020

The Detroit Rank-and-File Educators Safety Committee urges teachers to vote “no” on the tentative agreement approved by the executive board of the Detroit Federation of Teachers (DFT). Educators cannot be bound to an agreement, worked out behind their backs, which does nothing to protect them against the dangers of the pandemic or resolve the myriad problems that have made remote learning a disaster for teachers, students and parents alike.

Over the summer, educators voted by 91 percent to carry out a strike to protect ourselves and our community. That mandate was ignored by the DFT, which signed a letter of agreement for the opening of schools on September 8. The hybrid model accepted by the DFT has been the worst of all worlds. Teachers and students have been infected with COVID-19—although the real number is being concealed from the public by school officials and the DFT—and teachers and students have been subjected to outrageously long hours of screen time, endless technological problems, and to add insult to injury, the resumption of standardized testing.

After all of this, the DFT and School Superintendent Nikolai Vitti now want to ram through a new one-year contract by Tuesday that teachers have not had sufficient time to examine and discuss. What is known is that the contract is another austerity deal tailored to meet the needs of the corporate and political establishment in Detroit and Lansing, not the interests of educators and their students.

* After decades of falling real wages for teachers, veteran teachers who have exhausted their pay steps will receive a meager 2.74 percent pay increase, or less than \$100 per month after taxes. This means senior teachers will be bringing home paychecks that are, in real terms,

the same as 25 years ago.

* Newly hired teachers will earn between \$51,000 and \$58,000, roughly equivalent to what a secondary school teacher in the US made in 1985 after inflation is taken into account. At the same time, the district is aggressively pursuing teachers who agree to work in person.

* While the DFT boasts about the wage increases for para-pros, lunch aides, academic interventionists and other hourly workers, they will only be making a poverty wage of \$15 per hour to staff the Learning Centers and do other in-school tasks, which places their lives at risk.

* Most ominously, the DFT and the district have agreed to a reopener in January for health care benefits. Is there any doubt that the district will announce that teachers must sacrifice once again because there is no money? Whatever meager pay increases teachers get will be more than eaten up by increased out-of-pocket medical expenses.

* Finally, retired teachers who have returned to the classroom to assist with the teacher shortage get absolutely nothing—not even the \$1,500 signing bonus that is being used to get teachers to buy into this sellout agreement.

Even though we voted to strike against the unsafe opening of schools, and 80 percent of parents polled wanted remote-only learning, the DFT has sanctioned the deadly return to in-person schooling. “Whereas we recognize the need to reopen schools in conformity with COVID-19 guidelines issued by the CDC, the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, etc.,” one of the side letters in the tentative agreement says, “The District will implement academic-driven Learning Centers in all District schools to provide in person support for students for face to face and online learning.”

At present, para-pros and substitute teachers are forced to monitor these “Learning Centers,” putting themselves and their families at risk. The same is true for school bus drivers, cafeteria workers and educators who are currently in the schools. To be blunt, these workers are being used as guinea pigs in an experiment to prepare for the full reopening of schools.

Despite the false claims by Vitti and the DFT, there is no way to reopen “safely” under present conditions. The restart of in-person instruction at schools and colleges across the country has already led to tens of thousands of infections and the deaths of at least 40 educators. Scientists are warning of an “apocalyptic fall season” of the coronavirus, compounded by the outbreak of the flu.

There can be no other explanation for the haste in which the DPSCD and the union are pressing for a contract resolution, even before employees have had time to consider the contract, except that they want all contractual considerations out of the way as they prepare for full reopening of the schools.

This is in line with what the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) is doing around the country, including New York City, where in-person instruction is reopening Tuesday for hundreds of thousands of students. Far from uniting teachers against the homicidal opening of schools by Trump and Democrats like Governor Whitmer, the AFT has divided teachers district-by-district and sabotaged struggles when they have erupted, including the sellout of the nine-day strike by University of Michigan grad student instructors by the AFT-Michigan.

The corporate and political powers are not concerned about the plight of children. They have one purpose: to get the children out of their houses so their parents can be herded back into the factories to produce corporate profit, no matter how many people die. There is enormous opposition to this. Over the last few weeks alone, students in Detroit have held a sickout, U of M workers have struck, and teachers have engaged in job actions from New York City to cities in Florida, Louisiana and South Carolina.

We established the Detroit Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee to unite teachers and all school employees with students, parents and broader sections of workers, including autoworkers, throughout the metropolitan area. Similar committees, which are independent of the unions, have been set up in New York City, Los Angeles and in Texas and Florida.

In our founding statement, “Oppose unsafe school openings! Follow the science, not greed, say Detroit

educators,” we called for the closure of all schools; the provision of up-to-date computer technology and internet access for virtual learning. We also demand the refitting of all schools with modern ventilation systems; rapid on-site COVID-19 testing once a week for all students and staff; full transparency about the outbreak of infections; the protection of whistleblowers; no loss of income for educators who stay at or work from home, and full income protection to parents and other caregivers who stay home with children.

To pay for this and other improvements, including the wages and benefits of school workers, we call for a surcharge on Michigan’s billionaires, who control a combined net worth of about \$100 billion: Hank and Doug Meijer at \$9.5 billion, the DeVos and Van Andel families (Amway), \$12 billion; Daniel Gilbert at \$45 billion; Ronda Stryker and family \$11 billion (medical equipment); pizza and sports magnate Marian Ilitch at \$4.1 billion, and, of course, the multi-billion-dollar Ford family. We also call for the repeal of the corporate tax abatements showered on the automakers and parts manufacturers, and the multi-trillion-dollar CARES Act bailout to Wall Street.

The rejection of this sellout contract should be combined with a fight to mobilize educators, students, parents and other workers to protect our lives and our community. We urge all teachers who agree with this fight to join the Detroit Rank-and-File Educators Committee today. **Contact us today** and build the **Educators Rank and File Safety Committee** Facebook group.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact