

Vote No! Build rank-and-file committees to defend lives and public education!

Detroit public schools-DFT contract offers educators poverty, sickness and death!

WSWS Educators Newsletter
28 August 2021

The Detroit Federation of Teachers is trying to rush through a two-year agreement before educators have adequate time to study and discuss it. DFT President Terrence Martin emailed the agreement at 10:32 p.m. on Friday, August 27, and teachers are expected to vote on it today, less than 48 hours after it was released.

The anti-democratic way the DFT is attempting to ram through this contract is more than enough reason for teachers to decisively reject it. In addition, the contract terms, which include below-inflation raises and merit pay for new teachers, will do nothing to address the decades of eroding living standards and classroom conditions and the deliberate effort to drive teachers out of the profession, a process that has only accelerated since the pandemic.

The deal follows the decades-long pattern of DFT contracts and includes:

- A \$2,000 “retention supplement,” or more correctly a bribe, to get us back into the schools to risk our lives and those of our students and communities.
- Only one step raise for each year, up to Step 14.
- A 4 percent annual raise from Step 15, which is a de facto *pay cut* since inflation is currently running at 5.4 percent each year.
- Newly hired teachers will come in at Step 11 and \$51,000, but any salary increases will be “Performance Based,” in other words, based on the productivity metrics of the district’s merit pay system.

We must take a stand not only to protect our jobs and living standards but to defend the lives of our students, most of whom are ineligible for vaccines, along with fellow educators, school employees and our

communities.

The district and city, state and federal authorities are determined to reopen schools even as the more infectious Delta variant of COVID-19 is spreading across Michigan and the country. Infections, hospitalizations and deaths are surging, including among educators and young children being herded back into schools in Florida, California and other states. In the first week of classes in Los Angeles—where there is a mask mandate—over 1,200 tested positive among students and staff, and over 6,500 had to quarantine.

The Letter of Agreement signed by the DFT and the district is nothing but window dressing for a policy which will inevitably lead to more sickness and deaths, including among educators voting on this contract today.

Educators who opt to teach remotely for health reasons will still be compelled to report every day at a designated work location, including for staff meetings, parent-teacher conferences and open house activities. They will also be punished for choosing the Virtual School by losing their positions at their chosen schools.

The deal is filled with vague language, including “principals will adhere to social distancing standards” to “the greatest extent possible.” The three-foot standard is wholly inadequate and unenforceable. Class sizes are still too large, undermining social distancing. Being in “close contact” with an infected person is not clearly defined. Testing will not be daily but weekly and will not provide immediate results.

Installing air purifiers or fans in classrooms is not enough to overcome decaying ventilation systems.

There are no mandatory carbon dioxide monitors, which are critical to measure air quality and the presence of air-borne COVID particles. Teachers, students and school employees will not be protected by a “safety matrix,” which will be constantly manipulated to prevent “disruptive” school closures.

Finally, teachers and parents cannot trust a “Committee for School Reopenings,” made up of district and union officials, to tell the truth about outbreaks or to take the necessary measures to protect lives. The LOA begins with the language that “the parties recognize the need to fully reopen all schools with immediacy...”

The district and the DFT might agree on this murderous deal, but the teachers—whose health and lives are being put on the line—*never* agreed to it!

That is why the rejection of this contract must be combined with the preparation of collective strike action to prevent the reopening of the schools on September 7. To take up this fight, we urge Detroit teachers to join the Michigan Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee to fight to save lives, not corporate profits. The MERFC and similar rank-and-file committees in school districts and workplaces across the US and around the world are independent of the bought-off unions and big business politicians.

After spending decades cutting school funding and privatizing education, the Democrats and Republicans are hypocritically feigning concern about the emotional and academic well-being of our children. If they were really concerned, they would not be playing Russian roulette with their lives. And what about the emotional impact on children, who see their classmates, teachers, parents and grandparents die from COVID-19? Worldwide, 1.5 million kids have lost parents, grandparents or other caregivers to the virus, according to a new study published in *The Lancet*. Nearly 114,000 are from the US.

There is only one reason why this murderous policy is being implemented: The schools are being opened to get parents back to work making profits for the corporations. Ford, GM and other companies are bitterly complaining that they do not have enough workers—because many women are caring for their children.

Teachers and all workers must fight for the *elimination* and *eradication* of the virus once and for

all. This requires school closures, the shutdown of nonessential businesses, together with universal testing, contact tracing and the isolation of infected individuals. This must be combined with the provision of full income to workers and small business owners affected by the shutdown, and a massive infusion of resources to provide high-quality remote learning for all children.

Leading scientists have made clear that this policy is feasible and, with the assistance of powerful vaccines, can stop the pandemic in a matter of months.

“If we have transmission in the community, it’s not safe to reopen schools, full stop,” Dr. Malgorzata Gasperowicz of the University of Calgary explained at the WSWs online event, “For a global strategy to stop the pandemic and save lives!” last weekend. “If we combine both vaccines and public health measures ... we can stomp it out.”

If such a policy had been implemented at the beginning of the pandemic, millions of lives would have been saved. It is all the more necessary now, with the virus again surging out of control in the US and internationally.

There are plenty of resources to meet these demands. The bipartisan CARES Act handed over trillions to Wall Street and the corporations. America’s billionaires got \$1.2 trillion richer since the beginning of the pandemic, including Quicken Loans/Rocket Companies owner Dan Gilbert, whose personal fortune rose from \$7.5 billion in August 2020 to \$45 billion in August 2021.

The fight of educators to protect our children is inseparable from the fight of autoworkers and other workers to close the plants, guarantee full income and save lives. These struggles will not be carried out by the DFT or the UAW—which are led by corrupt business officials impervious to the lives of their members—but by workers and the committees we build.

We urge all Detroit teachers, school employees and parents to join the Michigan Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee to take up this fight.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact