

No to the DFT's snap vote! Build rank-and-file committees!

Unite Detroit public school educators with autoworkers to defeat austerity and budget cuts!

Michigan Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee
21 August 2023

Register now to attend our online meeting on Saturday, August 26, 1 pm, EDT. To join the Michigan Educators Rank-and-File Committee, fill out the form at the end of this article.

With the contract of more than 4,200 teachers and support staff in the Detroit Public Schools Community District (DPSCD) only hours from expiring, the Detroit Federation of Teachers announced a last-minute agreement late Sunday night aimed at preventing a walkout in Michigan's largest school district.

Teachers are rightly furious at being told nothing about negotiations since the spring, blocked from input, and being given little or no information. The DFT has still not released the full contract but is giving workers only a few days to vote with ratification ending midday on Thursday.

On Monday evening, the DFT held an online meeting to discuss the tentative agreement, fearing the widespread opposition it would confront in a mass in-person membership meeting. During the meeting, union officials disabled the chat feature to block the 1,400 educators online from expressing their opposition and discussing with other educators how to defeat the sellout. They also restricted questions to the ones they wanted to answer.

According to the self-serving "highlights" presented at the meeting, the one-year contract includes various bonuses, according to length of service, which are taxable and will not go towards base pay or pensions. Experienced teachers at top pay, many of whom will retire over the next several years, will get an increase from \$82,120 to \$87,000. The roughly 6 percent raise—which translates to less than 3 percent in real terms given the current rate of inflation—is nowhere near what teachers lost during the previous two-year contract signed by the DFT. During the 2021-22 and 2022-23 school years, prices rose by approximately 9 percent and 4.7 percent respectively, while teachers received two 4 percent annual raises.

The "negotiations" began months ago, educators were stonewalled about the process throughout, and now are supposed to decide in a matter of a few hours or days.

This rushing through of a vote is a clear sign it is another sellout. Teachers have a long way to go to catch up with low pay and inadequate benefits. Already the unions have signed onto School

Superintendent Nikolai Vitti's \$300 million in job eliminations and program cuts.

Educators are in a powerful position. The battle at DPSCD is part of a major working class upsurge. A strike would put educators on course to link up with 170,000 autoworkers in the US and Canada whose contracts expire next month. That's just what the DFT apparatus is afraid of.

It is time to settle accounts. The Michigan Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee calls for:

- **No snap vote.** The full contract must be released immediately. School workers must have ample time to scrutinize the entire deal hatched behind our backs, including all letters of agreement (LOAs) between the DPSCD and the AFT apparatus. Any further discussions between these parties must be monitored by trusted rank-and-file workers and live-streamed publicly. Educators must demand the holding of a mass membership meeting in person, with proper Covid protocols, so that a democratic discussion can be held before any vote. A rank-and-file committee must be elected to ensure that every member receives a ballot and that the vote is accurately tallied.

- **An immediate 50 percent raise for all educators and school workers!** Educators have never been made whole from decades of concessions. The Detroit Academy of Arts and Sciences will pay teachers \$100,000 next school year. If the businesses behind this for-profit operation can pay this amount, we must demand that all educators have the necessary resources to live.

- **Increase staffing!** Learning loss is real, and schools must address this with robust learning support at every level. Class sizes must be brought down to no more than 20. Instead of layoffs, every school needs mental health professionals, a licensed registered nurse and full access to support systems for every student.

- **Expand funding!** Every family must be provided the tools needed for a modern education: computers, Internet access and options for high quality virtual learning. Every school needs a library with a credentialed librarian, instruction in music—both vocal and instrumental—art, science, field trips and more. This is the 21st century. We need to expand culture, not attack it.

• **A restored and expanded summer enrichment program for all youth!** No cuts to any enrichment programs under the guise that “Covid money” is over.

• **Modernize the schools!** In order to combat the ongoing pandemic and associated diseases, including RSV and Hib, modern HEPA air filtration and far UV technology must be safely deployed to minimize the spread of infectious diseases and protect public health. The death of DPSCD kindergartner Jimari Williams from the bacterial illness Hib is a terrible warning: Schools must be—and can be—made safe from all these airborne diseases.

Any deal that does not include these elemental demands should be rejected and tossed in the garbage where it belongs. But a rejection of the sellout is only the beginning. The Michigan Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee (MERFSC) is fighting for power and decision-making to be transferred from the DFT apparatus to rank-and-file educators in order to fight for what teachers, our students and our communities need, not what the corporate-controlled politicians and union bureaucrats say is affordable.

The MERFSC will hold a meeting on Saturday, August 26, 1 PM to discuss the strategy and organization of this fight. We urge all educators and their allies and supporters in other industries to attend. The meeting will allow ample time for discussion and questions from the floor.

Educators should be warned, the Michigan AFT is currently pushing through a poverty-wage contract for graduate student educators at the University of Michigan. We can be certain the TA, if there is one, has been dictated by Superintendent Vitti—and the Democratic Party politicians behind him—because the same pattern has taken place year after year.

It is essential to wrest control of our futures from this corrupt, pro-capitalist union apparatus and put it into the hands of educators themselves. DFT President Lokia Wilson-Lumpkins, the AFT, the Biden administration and the ruling class as a whole are fearful that educators will merge with the growing wave of working class strikes and rebellions against the trade union bureaucracy.

This includes thousands of actors and writers on strike, UPS workers voting on a sellout contract and autoworkers in the US and Canada prepared to strike when their current contracts expire. The ruling elite and its political representatives face the prospect of a massive eruption of working class struggle.

A decisive rejection of the deal by the DFT bureaucracy will send a powerful message to autoworkers and the entire working class and strengthen the counter-offensive of the working class against decades of union-backed concessions.

In this context, a warning must be made about the DFT faction BAMN, headed by former union president Steve Conn. This outfit simply wants to replace the personnel in the DFT apparatus, not abolish it. They exist as a “safety valve” for the union bureaucracy and the Democratic Party, yelling slogans without a strategy to mobilize the working class as a whole. Despite the “fire Vitti” rants, they align themselves politically with Vitti and Wilson-Lumpkins claiming the main division in society is race, i.e., between “black Detroit” and the supposedly privileged “white” suburbs.

The fundamental division in American society and throughout the world is not race, but class. Workers of all races share the same interests and face the same class enemy. The political establishment in Detroit has long been dominated by black Democratic Party politicians, who have conducted a decades-long attack on workers on behalf of big business, just as ruthlessly as their white counterparts. This includes the current all-African American and female school board. The racializing of problems caused by capitalism conceals the class interests of the corporate and political elite, divides the working class, and prevents class unity.

The Socialist Equality Party, the Michigan Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee and the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) takes the opposite approach. We fight for the unity of the working class in the US and internationally to fight for a program based on what educators, parents and students need.

We reject the lie that there are not enough resources to protect educators from the ravages of inflation, or to provide the highest quality public education to all youth. The Big Three auto companies—which have spent decades destroying jobs and cities like Detroit—have made more than \$22 billion in profits in the first half of 2023 alone. GM, Ford and Stellantis have received billions of dollars in tax cuts and other subsidies from the Biden and Whitmer administrations even as they use the transition to electric vehicles to destroy the jobs, wages and communities of workers. At the same time, the Biden White House is squandering billions on the US/NATO proxy war against Russia and the drive to World War III against China, which would end life on the planet.

The question is not the lack of resources but who controls them. We unite educators, autoworkers and every section of the working class, in the US and internationally, to end the sacrifice of public education to corporate profit and carry out a massive redistribution of wealth to provide excellent pay and benefits to those educating our youth and vastly expanding free, high quality education to all.

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