

Detroit teachers face missing bonuses, inflation, and cuts: Join the fight to defend public education

Statement of the Michigan Educators Rank-and-File Committee
18 December 2024

The following statement was issued by the Michigan Educators Rank-and-File Committee. For information about joining the committee, fill out the form at the end of this article.

As the holidays approach, educators across the US are facing the harsh reality of continued layoffs, school closures, and inadequate pay.

The Michigan Educators Rank-and-File Committee is organizing opposition to these attacks and the existential threat to public education from the incoming Trump administration.

The ending of Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief funding to schools (ESSER), overseen by the Biden administration, has pushed already struggling school districts off a financial cliff. Across the US, parents, students and educators are protesting, striking and speaking out at school board meetings to fight against the layoffs of beloved educators and/or the abrupt shutdown of their neighborhood schools.

In Detroit, teachers are angry over inadequate pay, the loss of paraprofessionals and nurses, large class sizes and the persistence of crumbling infrastructure. Many are particularly insulted by the divisive system of bonuses put in place by Superintendent Nikolai Vitti and the school board. The bonuses—instead of wage increases pegged to rampaging inflation—were rubber-stamped by the Detroit Federation of Teachers (DFT) in sellout contracts this year and before.

Now workers are scrambling to figure out what bonus they will receive, when they will receive it, and how they can budget for the holidays. Promises of checks by Thanksgiving for longevity bonuses have been broken, likewise with other compensation, like payments for

oversized classes.

Educators are being deliberately pitted against one another. ESE (Exceptional Student Education) lead teachers are receiving bonuses of \$15,000, while their aides receive only \$2,000. There are “literacy bonuses,” “merit-based” rewards, etc.—a system designed to undermine our solidarity and seek to preempt a unified struggle for adequate pay for all.

Where has the money gone?

The Michigan Educators Rank-and-File Committee insists that there are plenty of resources to pay educators what they need and deserve. When we go to the store, we all pay the same prices—and we all deserve to live well. If schools and school workers are being starved of resources, where is the money going?

? **War.** Congress has just approved another \$1 trillion for US wars, supporting the genocide in Gaza, expanding the war against Russia, and vastly upgrading nuclear weapons. Behind the backs of the American people, there is a secret plan dedicated to “making America nuclear again” through the creation of a “modern arsenal for a volatile new nuclear age,” according to a lengthy expose by the *New York Times*. These are wars, not for freedom or democracy, but for control of the world’s resources and American economic hegemony.

? **The super wealthy.** The billionaire oligarchy is awash with cash. Elon Musk, the world’s richest man, has increased his wealth by \$180 billion since the election of Trump, and is now worth a record half trillion dollars. Collectively, the world’s 10 richest individuals have increased their wealth by \$305 billion in just six weeks, bringing their combined total to a staggering \$2.1 trillion. Their total wealth is more than

40 times the estimated annual cost to end world hunger.

? **The banks and corporations.** Detroit schools owe \$348 million to the state's School Loan Revolving Fund and \$1.4 billion in capital debt. Because of decades of shortfalls in school funding, schools everywhere are in hock to the banks, which are extracting enormous monthly interest payments, at the expense of students and their education. At the same time, state and local governments have handed GM and other corporations massive tax cuts and subsidies, although they have created few if any jobs and instead are carrying out layoffs.

ESSER supports, so desperately needed, were ended so that the Biden administration could funnel those massive resources to war and profit-taking!

Trump's existential threat to public education

The incoming Trump administration is determined to destroy public education. He plans to hand more public resources to for-profit schools and transform schools from centers of learning into centers of anti-immigrant hatred, America-first patriotism and religious indoctrination.

The way for this has been paved by the Democratic Party and the teachers' unions. Under the Democrats, schools have been defunded for decades, teachers have never been made whole for years of concessions and educators have been victimized for opposing such horrors as the genocide in Gaza.

Biden and the Democrats are now downplaying the dangers of Trump and repeatedly offering to seek "common ground." Expressing his craven solidarity with the fascist president-elect, Bernie Sanders stated he "look[ed] forward to working with the Trump Administration on fulfilling his promise to cap credit card interest rates at 10%."

AFT President Randi Weingarten also rushed to indicate her willingness to work with Linda McMahon, the billionaire wrestling executive tasked with shutting down the Department of Education. Weingarten told MSNBC, "I don't, I mean, my members don't really care about whether they have a bureaucracy of the Department of Education or not." This is entirely in line with the long record of the AFT bureaucracy, which has collaborated with both big business parties in blocking strikes and imposing austerity in exchange for a "seat at the table" and collection of dues money.

For its part, the DFT is a hollow shell headed by

corrupt careerists and Democratic Party functionaries. It initialed the sellout deals, allowing low pay, a divisive bonus structure, the layoffs of paraprofessionals, oversized classes, and an unforgivable lowering of educational quality.

2025 will see huge struggles by educators, as Trump and his fascist conspirators seek to not only close the Department of Education but end Title I and IDEA supports, begin the roundup of immigrants and their children, impose right-wing curriculum and book bans, and privatize education.

A new leadership is necessary, independent of both the pro-capitalist union apparatus and the two political parties of the oligarchy. That leadership is the Educators Rank-and-File Committee, which unites educators and workers around the world in the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees. The issues we face as educators are the same faced by Stellantis autoworkers, Amazon workers, nurses and the entire working class around the world.

We must end the control of the billionaire oligarchy over social life. Society can no longer afford the rich. There is not a single problem, including the defense of the most basic democratic rights, that can be addressed without a frontal assault on the wealth and power of the capitalist oligarchy. The defense of public education and all democratic rights is a political battle that requires uniting the working class against capitalism and fighting for a future based on social equality, ie., socialism.

The Michigan Educators Rank-and-File Committee needs you! Contact us, tell us your story, and get involved today. Go to wsws.org/edsafety and sign up today or contact us at educators@wsws.org.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact