



THE DETROIT teacher

VOL. 49 — NO. 7

POSTMASTER: All forms 3579 are to be forwarded to Detroit Federation of Teachers, 2875 W. Grand Blvd., Detroit, MI 48202



April 2011

Teachers in Charge at Palmer Park Prep

By Ann K. Crowley

When a Detroit public school lands on the cover of a national magazine, it's not usually a good news story. But there was our school, Palmer Park Preparatory Academy, leading a recent edition of Education Week as an innovative management model.

Palmer Park is the only teacher-led school in Detroit, and its premise is, "Where teachers lead, children succeed."

In our first year, we are proving this is more than a slogan. We are convinced that Palmer Park is going to put Detroit on the map for how to make urban education work.

While we've not been immune from the layoffs and cutbacks that have affected Detroit Public Schools, we have managed to hold onto a core group of teachers extremely committed to making this experiment work.

The final product was not what we hoped for either. Enrollment is much larger than ideal (we planned for 350 students but ended up with 700). And it is not purely teacher run; there is

an executive administrator. But we are doing things no other school in the district can do.

High quality teachers are stepping up to make the children the No. 1 priority. Teachers are dealing with the same issues as their colleagues at other schools — not enough supplies, textbooks and technology. We are determined to overcome those obstacles. Teachers share whatever materials they bring from home.

The advantage our school has over traditional public schools is that teachers have the flexibility to practice their craft. They can approach children as individuals, building learning programs designed to meet individual needs.

The staff does not wait for the district to advance academic initiatives. The Elementary Leadership Team works with teachers to create small groups in which children are serviced for remediation and acceleration.

Teachers have Response Intervention Time built into their schedules to do intense instruction in reading and math for those students who are falling behind.



Palmer Park teacher Sherry Andrews with top speller Keimon Gordon.

Teachers send children to enrichment classes in art, music, gross motor skills and language training, based on their interests. Teachers in first through third grades participate in a University of Michigan Case Studies Reading Program to analyze

and improve their instructional techniques, part of our commitment to be the best teachers we can be.

Wherever technology is available, teachers infuse it into their lessons. A first-grade teacher has her children

Continued on Page 4



THE DFT GOES TO LANSING

DFT members made their voices heard with thousands of others at two Lansing rallies in March. DFT leaders visited the state capital more than a dozen times to persuade leaders not to pass the Emergency Manager bill and propose amendments to improve the bill. The bill gives the governor's appointee wide-reaching powers, including voiding parts of contracts.

Although the law passed, the DFT and AFT Michigan are fighting other measures locally and in Lansing to charter more schools in Detroit, and turn public education and public dollars over to corporations.

A coalition of labor unions is organizing another rally April 13 in Lansing to fight its attacks on public education. We want to get 10,000 people to the rally. To attend, watch for details on the DFT website at www.dft231.com.



Opposite: AFT Michigan President David Hecker addresses a Lansing rally.

Photos by Ricardo Thomas



DON'T THROW DETROIT CHILDREN'S EDUCATION TO THE WIND

Keith R. Johnson
DFT President

Robert Bobb's announced plan to offer up to 41 schools to become charters is educationally irresponsible, fiscally impractical, and morally contemptible.

This plan is like taking the educational futures of as many as 16,000

President's Report



**Keith
Johnson**

students, tossing them in the air, and hoping the winds of change will lead to their academic success. This is not how you perpetuate educational reform. Rather it is abandoning the children of Detroit without touching the debt.

Any charter school that is successful, and the data shows there are very few, would be foolish to take over any of these schools without having an academic plan in place that fits the culture of these schools. This is consistent with what has plagued this

district for years — jumping into an initiative without proper planning and development. Anyone who has delved into school initiatives will tell you it takes at least a year to plan and develop properly. Academic models cannot be microwave ventures.

On the other hand, for a charter agency that is simply looking to establish a profit margin, this would be a golden goose. Should the schools fail, they would have the ready-made excuse of trying to improve these schools “on the fly,” in effect eliminating their own accountability.

Highly qualified certified teachers would not work in a charter school for poor pay, little or no benefits, no protections through just cause and due process, and to not be part of the state pension plan. As a result, these schools would be more inclined to staff unqualified teachers or teachers who have previously been rated unsatisfactory and simply need a job.

Therein lies the rub. The REAL savings in Bobb's plan is not paying the 24 percent contribution into the pension fund. While this would reduce the district's incoming and future budget, it would do NOTHING to address what is at the core of



Photo by Jim West

BREAKFAST AT THE DFT – DFT President Keith Johnson welcomed more than 75 Detroit and Michigan political and community leaders at a Feb. 18 Community Breakfast at the DFT. The purpose was to start a partnership with them on issues that affect Detroit children and parents. Pictured with Johnson are, from left, Detroit City Councilwomen Joann Watson and Saunteel Jenkins; Ruby Newbold, president of the Detroit Association of Educational Office Employees; and Donna Jackson, president of the Detroit Federation of Paraprofessionals.

the district's problem, the deficit.

For Bobb to announce this plan as he prepares to walk away from DPS calls into question whether he has admitted defeat in his effort to restore DPS to fiscal solvency, and is content to allow the children in DPS to become the victims of his failure. He'll look at DPS through his

rearview mirror and not be around to answer for the disastrous results.

I call upon the political, educational, and community leaders, as well as those who truly care about Detroit's children and their education, to publicly and forcefully denounce this plan. This is not in the best interest of children, PERIOD!

Why Do I Stay Here?

When Barry Cannon played basketball at Northeastern High School, he didn't miss a practice in four years.

“I guess that carried over to the workforce,” Cannon says. Cannon doesn't like to short his obligations. When he got in a motorcycle accident a few years ago, it happened in the summer.

“I was laid up all summer but I came right back in the fall,” said the Southeastern High School English and language arts teacher.

One day Cannon had to be out of the classroom at a hearing. A rumor circulated that Cannon had been laid off. He took it as a back-handed compliment that the kids thought something had to be up if he wasn't in his classroom.

The 22-year teacher knows what Woody Allen once said: “80 percent of success is just showing up.” And he knows kids need consistency in their adults.

“I've been here a long time,” he said. “That's what they understand and expect – consistency.”

The consistency he displays as the public service announcer at Southeastern's games earned him a special announcing booth with a huge



banner. “Cannon's Corner” is a place accessed by invitation only.

Students tell him they can't wait till he announces their name in his inimitable style.

“I say, ‘Well, get on varsity then.’”

THE DETROIT
teacher

(ISSN 0011-9695)

The Detroit Teacher is the official publication of the Detroit Federation of Teachers, American Federation of Teachers Local 231, AFL-CIO. Member of the Union Teacher Press Association, International Labor Press Association and Michigan Labor Press.

The Detroit Teacher is published monthly, except for July and August, for \$4 per year by The Detroit Federation of Teachers, 2875 W. Grand Blvd., Detroit, MI 48202. Periodical Postage Paid at Detroit, MI. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Detroit Teacher, 2875 W. Grand Blvd., Detroit, MI 48202.

Editor — Margaret Weertz
mweertz@dft231.com
313-875-6776

Updates...

Are You a Member?

If you didn't get your bright yellow DFT membership card recently, you may not be a member. If you didn't get a membership card, you can double check with dues clerk Barbara Downey to make sure you have signed your application to be a member. You only need to sign once but a signed application must be on file at the DFT Office. To reach the dues clerk, call 313-875-3500 ext. 772.

DFT Collecting Home E-Mail Addresses

The DFT is asking members to submit their home e-mail addresses so we have the ability to alert them on short notice about critical issues. Please DO NOT give us your DPS e-mail address (ex: XXX@detroitk12.org) because we are not authorized to conduct union business through your district e-mail. To submit: e-mail us, with your name, file number, and home e-mail address at surveys@dft231.com.

Legendary Detroit Teacher Honored

By Carol Manciel
Beckham School

In honor of Black History month, four generations of distinguished ladies paid tribute to Sophia Holley Ellis, a dedicated educator who devoted 56 years of her life educating Detroit's brightest students.

Ellis began teaching in Detroit Public Schools in 1950 and was one of the first African-American women in Detroit to teach science. In 1985, Ellis began a remarkable journey at Martin Luther King High School teaching biology and German. Ellis made lasting impressions on her students and sparked their interest in science.

Ellis, a University of Michigan graduate in German literature and the sciences, contributed to several German-American partnership programs over the years. She spent 10 summers in work-study programs for students in Germany. In addition, she produced teaching material for German instruction for diversity students and has been widely honored for her work in this field.

Ellis had a passion for teaching. As a token of her love for the art of teaching, she established a scholarship at the University of Michigan for \$25,000 in the College of Literature, Science and Arts to support Detroit Public School students in financial need.

Sophia Holley Ellis is a true pioneer for educating our youth. Her friends wanted her to know that she is a legend in every sense of the word.



Detroit teachers honor Sophia Holley Ellis (seated). They were brought together by a teacher she mentored – Sharon Williams-Dean – standing at left.



THREE-PEAT FOR RENAISSANCE! — The girls basketball team at Renaissance High School were city champs again for the third consecutive year. The championship game against Pershing was a thrilling victory in overtime with a 3-point shot at the buzzer. "It was a great game," said coach Diane Jones, who has coached the team for 10 years. The team's star, Asia Boyd, has signed with the University of Kansas and was named Miss PSL by the Coaches Association. Senior Arrice Bryant signed with Yale and will be studying medicine. Senior Alexis Harris is going to Providence. The players are pictured with assistant coach Davida Boozer, left, Diane Jones, center, and JV coach Roy Davis, right.

Time to Change Course

By Mark O'Keefe
DFT Executive Vice President

The district's deficit stands at \$327 million and will grow next year unless drastic steps are taken. Unfortunately, the district is preparing to take the wrong drastic steps.

We all have read about the tens of millions of dollars the district saved by privatizing transportation, security, janitorial services and engineers. Yet somehow, the district is still in a financial crisis.

To resolve the crisis, you need to understand the causes. The district's financial problems are due to unreimbursed special education costs and debt service to finance the deficit. Those two items add up to almost \$100 million per year.

DPS's solution is to turn 41 schools over to charter operators and cut teacher pay and benefits. Converting schools to charters will save little or no money. The reduction in operating costs will be offset by the reduction in state aid due to lower enrollment. The net result would be to saddle a new, smaller DPS with the same high costs for debt service and special ed.

Cutting teacher pay and benefits

will make it harder to attract and retain good teachers. The average suburban teacher already makes 20 percent more than a Detroit teacher.



Mark O'Keefe

This means their payroll taxes and pension costs are also 20 percent higher. Health insurance costs for other districts runs 50 to 90 percent higher than DPS costs. Clearly, our pay and benefits are not the cause of the problem.

The DFT has an alternative deficit elimination plan. We are calling for a 3-mil increase to pay off the deficit from prior years. We also ask for flexibility on use of federal and state money to meet the needs of our special ed students. This takes no new state or federal money, addresses the root causes of the problem, and leaves the district intact while new reforms are given a chance to work.

We will continue to work with our attorneys, the governor, state treasurer and state superintendent of schools to outline the case for a responsible solution.

Peer Consulting Program Sees Progress

Since second semester some 40 Detroit teachers have been mentored by teachers in the district. The progressive 2009 contract initiated the program, called Peer Assistance and Review (PAR).

Now the 20 mentors – called PAR consultants – are working with the teachers, or “interns.” Although the interns may be veteran teachers, they are interning in the program to upgrade their teaching skills.

The consultants have an average of two interns but they hope to build their caseloads to 10 or 12 interns per consultant. These are veteran or novice teachers who need help with classroom management, engaging students, or adapting to technology.



PAR consultant Sheila Harris visits a school.

One consultant is mentoring a teacher whose classroom was dysfunctional. The consultant realized the teacher needed to set up centers within the classroom and crates for each subject.

“She didn’t have a daily routine,” the consultant said. “Her students didn’t know what they were supposed to be learning.” Her lessons were scattered and sometimes she even flipped subjects.

With help from PAR, the intern is organizing her classroom and her daily curriculum.

The consultants say many of the interns have never been evaluated. Some have bad habits that have become ingrained because they were never corrected. They believe an orientation program for new teachers is essential for giving them a checklist for materials, a primer on procedures, and the assignment of a mentor teacher.

“With the district in chaos, a lot of teachers are working out of their areas and their comfort zones,” one consultant said. “Because there hasn’t been an evaluation process, they’ve been left to flounder or develop bad habits they think is the norm.”

The PAR consultants are bringing their best practices to the front line. And it’s working.

One consultant said mentors honed her skills and made her an effective teacher.

“I’ve had tons of mentors and they’ve all been Detroit teachers,” said Helen Harvin, a PAR consultant. “One of my best mentors was Jennifer Jackson, a kindergarten teacher at Pasteur. This is about us helping each other.”

One intern said the mentoring by a fellow teacher was “a positive experience.”

“When I was first told I would have a mentor, I thought, ‘I can’t believe this,’” said Maxcine Brown, a 30-year teacher. “But I would rather have a teacher come in and observe because she’s been in the classroom just recently. It’s non-threatening.”

Brown said good things came out of the experience with her PAR consultant Sheila Harris. Brown re-engaged in practices she did years ago, upgraded her computer skills, and enjoyed Harris’ calm presence.

“She’s very positive and she doesn’t look down on me,” Brown said. “Now she praises me. Sometimes teachers need that too.”

Build it, They Will Come

By Barbara Yancy-Braceful
West Side Academy

Education today is a long way from the one room school house, or is it?

At that time, students representing a diverse combination of grade and learning levels had one teacher. Today, as many of us look into our classrooms, we see a multi-facet of individuals who are on different levels. But today these classrooms are considered inclusive, mainstreamed or just mismatched due to social promotions. Unfortunately for the student, he or she is often left behind.

In a time when we have vowed “no child left behind,” alternative education is not just a panacea for these individuals, but an answer to their ever-growing needs. Research supports that like students cultivate like results. In our case, success!

West Side Academy, under the leadership of principal Andrea Ford-Ayler, has diligently structured an irrefutable learning environment. Students can graduate in a timely fashion, despite many obstacles. This alternative school has been the vision of Mrs. Ayler for the past eight years. As traditional high schools may expel the student who is overage, had a baby, new to the district, or any other reason to turn them away, West Side has been here to attend to their need: being a high school graduate.

Moving from one building to the next, the staff and students have finally found a beautiful and safe haven. Often when people hear the term alternative, they automatically think it is a student who is the bad seed. To the contrary, alternative students need an environment that welcomes them with open arms, despite their personal trials and tribulations. The staff is here to answer a calling, and is dedicated to the cause.

Because of the structure of the program — online courses, independent studies, extended day, test prep café (held on Fridays), and a four-day work week — staff and students are up for the challenge. This staff has participated in Discovery Education, Learning Village, and Smart Board. We feel it is our obligation to stay abreast of the many recent, researched initiatives.

As the structure of DPS continues to change, let’s not forget why we all became part of this business: the student. It was to follow the three E’s; encourage, excite and educate. The dynamics of the playing field may be altered, but the rules stay the same: “Build it, they will come.”

If the leadership and staff are up for the challenge, and a well thought out program is in place, it doesn’t take the Pied Piper to stride through the streets. It only takes true dedication and a virtuous learning atmosphere, and it is surefire there will be a following.

Teachers in Charge

Continued from Page 1

participate in Digital Story Telling.

A third-grade teacher has an Apple Cart which she uses daily with her children. Netbooks are used for lesson plans, and other electronic programs are built into the curriculum.

We have individualized schedules for all students, making sure they are getting instruction designed to meet their specific needs. In the upper grades, students have access to Spanish, art, music, journalism, computer science, math games and physical education.

The school day at Palmer Park is longer, giving us more time to address specific learning issues. Teachers move students when they feel they are performing at a different level. Learning is fluid, not static.

Our teachers don’t have to wait for approval from the central office downtown to change an instructional plan. Lead teachers fill some administrative functions and have the authority to adjust schedules and curriculum immediately.

Our school’s focus is on the learner. We don’t come to school feeling as if we are in an adversarial relationship with the administration. At this school, we are the administration and we work together to do what is best for children.

Palmer Park Preparatory Academy is exactly what can be done when people are willing to put children, their learning, and their unique needs above all else.

First printed in the Detroit News

Detroit Teacher is Renowned Muralist

Dennis Orlowski has painted a hundred murals across metro Detroit.

There's the "History of Mexico" in Mexican Village Restaurant, the three-story mural on the side of the old Burton International School, and murals at Sweetest Heart of Mary and the Coleman A. Young Municipal Center. There are public works in Hamtramck, Highland Park, Farmington, and the Clinton Township Library.

The archdiocese even sought him out to paint backdrops for Pope John Paul II's visit to Detroit in 1987.

Now working with a group of seniors at Frederick Douglass Academy, the recently retired art teacher is painting a series of murals, including the school's namesake, abolitionist and statesman Frederick Douglass.

The Frederick Douglass principal approached art teacher Brunetta McMillian to do the murals. But McMillian is a portraitist. So she con-



Frederick Douglass seniors Kavon'V Harris, Jonathan Brooks and acclaimed muralist Dennis Orlowski

tacted Orlowski. The idea was to work with the senior art students at the all-boys school.

"I do murals really well," Orlowski says. "When you do something well, you like it." Painting murals is quite complicated but Orlowski loves them because they're public art.

"It reaches people," he says. "You can say so many things."

Orlowski graduated from Cooley High School, attended the Arts Students League in New York City, and has a masters of art degree from Wayne State University. He taught in Detroit at Cooley, Denby and several other

schools for 30 years, until he retired in 2010.

Orlowski and the seniors started the work in November and were putting the finishing touches on in March.

"Public art is rare," he says. "A chance like this is unique – it's not going anywhere."

Southeastern Wins City Championship

It took 55 years for Southeastern to win the city championship. And the taste was sweet.

"One of the main things we talk about is being remembered as city champions," said Brandan Kearney, voted Mr. PSL. "Throughout the season that's what motivated us."

The Jungaleers won the quarter finals against Romulus. They made it to the finals against Kalamazoo Central but lost 46-42. It would have ended an 85-year quest for the Class A title.

"This championship was really gratifying because it was something we set a goal for," Coach George Ward said. "It was a matter of how hard we were going to work. We have good character and solid citizens."

Ward came to Southeastern two years ago and his team gelled to the point where the state championship was within reach. Ward's players are not only hard working but upstanding students.

Kearney, who has a 3.3 gpa, signed to play for Michigan State University. Percy Gibson, who has a 3.4 gpa, signed with the University of Dayton. Harvard is recruiting Landon Gray, who scored a 24 on the ACT.

"All of them are going to college," Ward said. "And most of them will play at college."



Giving Back to Northwestern

Ishmail Terry graduated from Northwestern High School. He gets to rub shoulders with movers and shakers as chief of staff to State Rep. Fred Durhal.



Ishmail Terry, left, with Northwestern students, Alumni Association president Joe Barber, LSCO vice president Priscilla Tyus, and Northwestern teacher and DFT executive board member Mike Schenk.

He gets to attend Detroit Pistons games. And he wants that for other kids in Detroit. So Terry's non-profit agency "All Four One" worked with others including the Detroit Pistons Foundation to secure 13 tickets to a March Pistons game at the Palace.

"It's my way of giving back not just to my community but to my high school," Terry said. All Four One is an award-winning mentoring and tutoring program that was honored in 2009 by Gov. Jennifer Granholm as an Outstanding Volunteer Mentoring Program. It also received kudos from the Detroit City Council and recently was presented the Spirit of Detroit award.

"We're working to get young ladies and gentlemen to the game," Terry said, "even if they can't afford it."

Lunar Rocks Exhibit at Schulze School

It took 40 years and 252,000 miles to get lunar rocks to Schulze School. But getting them there didn't seem a Herculean task.

The daughter of Schulze special education teacher Donna Johnson was making a bid for an exhibit of the rocks in Detroit.

"The first thing I thought was: can my Schulze students benefit?" Johnson said.

On March 23, Johnson's daughter, Dawnesia Johnson, brought the rocks to the school under lock and key. Dawnesia Johnson is program manager for the NASA Science, Engineering, Mathematics, Aerospace Academy at Wayne State University.

"How many of you have seen the movie 'National Treasure?'" Dawnesia Johnson asked a group of fourth-graders. "Well this is a real national treasure."

Johnson engaged the students with questions about the Moon and meteorites.

"They think they come from asteroids, but that's why they need you guys — they need to keep doing research," she said. "You could borrow these rocks and do actual research." Johnson's goal with SEMAA is to get more kids interested in careers in science, technology, engineering and math.



Dawnesia Johnson



teacher Donna Johnson

THE DETROIT NEWSM



BREITHAUPT CAREER & TECHNICAL CENTER
Detroit Public Schools

Electric Car Places First

Cobo Hall hosted the 2011 Detroit Autorama in February and Breithaupt Career and Technical Center's electric car placed in two categories. The car took first place in the "Experimental" category and third place in "High School Custom" category.

"The car is quite attractive," said Andrew Thomas, Breithaupt special instructor. "Many visitors wanted to purchase it."

The electric car was first built in 1995, at which time it placed ninth out of 37 at the Michigan Ideal Speedway in Springport, Mich. In 1996, a redesigned version placed fifth out of 17 at the same competition. In 2006, the electric car placed in two categories at the Detroit Autorama. In 2007, it placed second in the "Special Interest Motorized" category at the Autorama.

Students in the Auto Service Program, under the guidance of program manager William Locke, updated the car for the 2011 Detroit Autorama display. Today, the car is used strictly for educational purposes, racing, public display and exhibitions.



Left: Keyshaun Banks, Tanzania Phelps, Dijon Jones (BCTC students). Center: Andrew Thomas, Special Instructor (BCTC). Right: Shaquille Sanders, Denzel Ferguson (BCTC students).