

THE DETROIT teacher

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Jan/Feb 2011

New DFT Officers Take Oath

AFT Michigan President David Hecker gave the oath of office Jan. 20 to the newly elected DFT president, officers, executive board, and trustees. All were from the United for Teacher Rights (UTR) slate.

The oath came at the beginning of a contentious DFT general membership meeting. President Keith Johnson won by 41 votes. The other five officers won by margins of 330 to 530 votes.

Presidential challenger Steve Conn demanded a recount of the runoff election immediately after the votes were tabulated Jan. 15. Before leaving the DFT hall that night, the Election Committee agreed to the request and presented Conn and his attorneys with written procedures for the recount. The procedures clearly stated that the votes would be recounted using the Scantron machines.

Four days later, on the day of the scheduled recount, Conn demanded a “hand” recount of the ballots. The next day at the membership meeting, Conn and several candidates from his slate asked for an entirely new election.

The Election Committee considered the requests and voted against them.

“Keith Johnson has won this election three times—in November, December and the January recount,” O’Keefe said. The recount showed Johnson winning by 40 votes, instead of 41, and the Election Committee certified the recount.

All work locations and all ballots were accounted for. Some 365 ballots were spoiled by voting for two people for the same office. Seventy-six other ballots did not vote for a president. 275 other ballots were unopened and uncounted because of “agency shop” status, failure to pay dues, or failure to submit a membership application as required in the DFT bylaws.



Wrestling as a Life Lesson at Academy of the Americas

Three days a week, 60 students at the Academy of the Americas flood the gym after school and wrestle.

While wrestling seems natural to kids, this formal sport is not widespread in Detroit schools. Not one Detroit public high school has a team.

The Academy of Americas’ co-ed team includes kindergarteners through eighth-graders. Even the three-year-old son of the coach tumbles on the mat. The coach excludes no one.

“They can’t wear diapers or be crybabies, that’s about it,” says coach Jose Ramirez, the 36-year-old physical education teacher who introduced wrestling to the school.

What does wrestling teach kids? “Patriotism,” Ramirez says. “Most of my kids, like myself,

like their parents, are immigrants. But they believe that if you work hard in school, you can go far. These guys still have the American dream.”

Ambition. Confidence. Kindness. These are the virtues, Ramirez says, kids learn from wrestling.

Ramirez said wrestling – in high school in Florida and at Eastern Michigan University – built his confidence.

“Wrestling for me was training for life,” he says. “My parents saw their shy ninth-grade son get the courage to walk across the hall and ask a young lady to dance.” It also opened the world to Ramirez, the son of Mexican migrant workers with 11 children. Wrestling got him on a jet for the first time and took him as far as Paris.

“I tell the parents: your kids are



going to develop self confidence for anything they want to accomplish,” he said. “It’s the purest sport. It doesn’t matter if you’re black or white, rich or poor. Once the whistle blows and the match starts, everything is equal.”

Ramirez credits his college coach Mike Rodriguez with filling the gym for a match at the Academy of the Americas this winter.

“One hundred kids were in that gym,” Ramirez said, “as a product of him reaching out to me.”

Emergency Financial Manager's "Plan" Should Incite a Community Revolution

The Last Poets, an activist singing group in the 1960s, once said in a song "The revolution will not be televised." The plan outlined by Robert Bobb to address the deficit-plagued DPS should incite a televised revolution by the citizens of Detroit.

The children of Detroit are not consumed products of a profit-driven

them to an inferior education wrought with inferior buildings, no technology, and insufficient supplies while other children have the opportunity to flourish in sparkling new state-of-the-art buildings with all the amenities available to enhance teaching and learning.

We already know which schools would be in the "elite" district; schools such as Cass Tech, Renaissance, Luddington, the new Mumford, the new Martin Luther King, the new Finney, the new Brightmoor, the new Clark Park, the new Western International, Bates Academy etc.

Are these children and their parents more deserving than the special needs students at Keidan Center, or Durfee, Mae C. Jemison and others?

What Mr. Bobb should present to the state is a case for forgiving the \$230 million loan that was presented to DPS in 2005, a loan that the state knew DPS was not in a position to repay and, given the declining population, the eroding tax base, and declining enrollment, would NEVER be in a position to repay.

Mr. Bobb's plan should infuriate not only the citizens of Detroit but the lawmakers in Lansing and Gov. Snyder. This is what you'd expect from a bean-counter, not an acade-



PHoto by Ricardo Thomas

HONORING KING – Golightly fifth-grade teacher David Boye organized a march through the school Jan. 14 in honor of Martin Luther King Jr. Day. The students are learning about the civil rights activist and 1964 Nobel Peace Prize winner who would be 82 this year.

President's Report



Keith Johnson

corporation like a car, or computer software. They are human beings. The school district is not a corporation like Ford or GM. You cannot simply cut the models that are not selling in order to gain a profit. Splitting DPS into two separate but unequal districts is tantamount to reversing Brown v. Board of Education circa 1954.

This community cannot sacrifice the educational future of a segment of its children. It cannot sentence

mician.

While it is true you cannot cut your way to prosperity, you also cannot

not demonstrate a willingness to tell a segment of this community and their children that they are "less than" and thus expendable.

The revolution may be televised after all and it will not be must see TV.

DPS worst in nation? Don't Believe It!

By Mark O'Keefe

Last spring, NAEP test results were released and DPS scores were the lowest in the history of the test. Based on these scores, DPS

has been referred to as the worst school district in the country. But there is much more to this story.

Nobody can argue that the NAEP scores are acceptable. The question is: Are they the best indicator of the performance of DPS?

For DPS students, teachers, and administrators, the annual MEAP test has been the holy grail of standardized testing for years. The curriculum is aligned with MEAP, students have

been offered MEAP preparation classes in summer school and after school, and the tests have been used to determine AYP and as criteria for closing schools.

The MEAP is given to all students in grades three through eight in all DPS schools, and in all other public schools in Michigan. The NAEP test was given to fourth- and eighth-grade students in a few select DPS schools and students in 19 other cities throughout the country. No Michigan students outside of DPS took the NAEP test.

Over 50 percent of DPS students take the MEAP test. Just 3 percent of our students took the NAEP.

DPS has a track record with MEAP that is decades long. We have taken the NAEP once.

Which test should be relied on when assessing the performance of DPS schools? If the NAEP shows we are worst in the nation, we must certainly be at the bottom of the state scores. Yet

the MEAP scores show something very different.

Sixty-one percent of our third-through eighth-graders were proficient or advanced on the MEAP math test. Sixty-eight percent scored at those levels in reading. While these scores are below our targets, they are far from the worst in the state, let alone the worst in the nation.

It is insulting and misleading for district officials to say that our NAEP scores could have been achieved through random guessing, when two-thirds of our students scored at advanced or proficient levels on MEAP.

Let's not color this debate with a one-shot test given to a few kids who weren't prepared for it. Let's look at the MEAP test we've used for decades, taken by all of our students, and use that to help the lowest one-third achieve at the same high level as the vast majority of our students.



Mark O'Keefe

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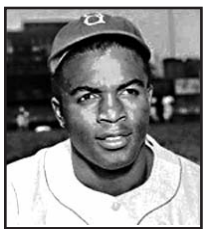
Updates...

Retirements Announced

The following DFT members have retired: George Troia, Ernestine Jones-Belk, Cynthia Patton, Marjie Benson, Karen Simister, Faith Pruitt-Adkins. If you have retired in the last six months and would like it announced, please call the editor at 313-875-6776.

Jackie Robinson Art, Essay and Poetry Contest

Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in his debut with the Brooklyn Dodgers on April 15, 1947, marking a milestone in baseball history. As a way of celebrating this momentous event and keeping the memory of



Jackie Robinson alive, the Detroit Tigers invite Michigan schools to participate in the 15th Annual Jackie Robinson Art, Essay and Poetry

Contest. The contest is open to middle and high school students from the metropolitan Detroit region. Students may enter the contest by submitting an original essay, poem, or work of art in honor of Jackie Robinson. For the entry forms and requirements go to www.tigers.com/education. The deadline is March 4.

2011 Retiree Chapter New Board Members

The DFT Retiree Chapter is going strong with a new board. DFT retirees are encouraged to come. Meetings are the third Tuesday of the month. The next meeting is Feb. 15 at 11:30 a.m. at the DFT hall. Pictured below from left are: Richard Berlin, recording secretary; Arthur Divers, vice chair; Ricardo Thomas, program chair; Jewel Gines, chair; and Virginia Stauch.



Success! DFT Wins Two Major Grievances

The DFT announces the win of two major grievances. This month 45 special education transition team workers who attended a workshop in March 2008 were finally paid for that workshop. The district had not paid the teachers for the Specialized Student

Services Workshop they attended.

"I'm really proud and I'm very happy," said Mershira Oliver, the DFT Labor Relations Administrator who filed the grievances and saw them through.

Oliver also successfully won a grievance for 36 Cody High School teachers not paid for 20 hours of work to organize and prepare for the new high school program at Cody. Each of those teachers will be paid \$470.

"Cody principal Johnathon Matthews agreed with and supported the teachers," Oliver said, "in their quest to be compensated for the fine job and hard work they did to set up the program."



Mershira Oliver



Auto Show Brings International Media

Detroit teachers were interviewed by the international media as it descended on Detroit in mid January to cover the North American International Auto Show. Pictured above is Sten Sjorstrom, a correspondent with Swedish Radio, the public radio station of Sweden. Several teachers from the Peer Assistance and Review program were interviewed including those pictured above (from left): Lisa Brigel, Ivy Bailey, Curtis Dunlap and Mary Mavarak. The teachers said there is more collaboration with the district and they are excited about the innovative initiatives in the new contract, including the PAR program.

Let's Take Back Control of DFT Meetings

By Steven Portnoy

Lately there has been something missing from the DFT general membership meetings. Some people might say it is civility, others may say manners, still others could say respect. What I miss from the meetings are the children and their parents who used to attend on a regular basis.

You may recall that the kids would typically sit quietly and color or do their homework. The children had been with their regular teacher during the day and were able to continue learning from teachers in the evening. What did they learn, you might ask? Until recently they learned democratic principles, comradery, organization and unity.

One might ask, "So, where did the children go?" The simple answer is that the children have been frightened away. But what could possibly frighten small children at a membership meeting? Adults acting like children.

A small but vocal segment of the union appears to have decided the rules don't apply to them. They exhibit excessive, self-centered, and immature behavior. These few people lack consideration for other people, display recurrent temper tantrums, have an inability to delay gratification and constantly demand their own

way.

Obstruction and manipulation appears to be their prime motivation. And furthermore, they believe they represent the other 99 percent of the membership.

I propose we return to the way things were before the Dec. 10, 2009 membership meeting. This was the first of four that erupted into free-for-all, video taped meetings that were broadcast all over the Internet.

We can take back control of our meetings. The meetings are designed to involve all members in the democratic process, to inform us of important issues and to help us bond as brothers and sisters.

The way we take back control is for you to attend the monthly membership meetings and to hold those who would embarrass us responsible for their actions.

The membership meetings are where important union business takes place. Don't let a small group of misguided people make important decisions for you. See you on the second Thursday of the month.



Steven Portnoy



EXTRAVAGANZA AT GOMPERS

Johna Treadwell, above, music teacher at Gompers Elementary School, delivered her usual holiday extravaganza on Dec. 16. This year the theme was the song "This Christmas" by Donny Hathaway. Students from preschool to fifth-grade dressed to the nines to sing, dance and play music in the spirit of the holidays. The whole school, parents included, ended the affair singing "This Christmas."

Dossin Tech Team Goes to Lansing

One thing that's as certain as Thanksgiving every year. Dossin Elementary School will be invited to the Michigan Student Technology Showcase at the Capital in Lansing.

Dossin was among 50 Michigan schools Nov. 10 to showcase their students' projects using iMovie, PowerPoint, Microsoft Publishing, Blackboard or Garage Band (to name a few).

The event, sponsored by the Michigan Association for Computer Users in Learning (MACUL), shows how students use technology to integrate other subject

areas and deepen their understanding of both technology and academics.



Their teacher, Angelita Davis, left, and her colleagues at Dossin are trying to make Dossin one of the premier elementary tech schools in Michigan. Dossin is often the only Detroit school invited to various MACUL conferences.

This year students in her seventh- and eighth-grade library tech team are Skyping students in classrooms around the country.

"My dream," the energetic Davis says, "is to Skype a classroom in every one of the 50 states."

Let's Re-educate Ourselves About Martin Luther King Jr.



Willie Dechavez

Detroit teacher Willie Dechavez exhorted the people to "re-educate ourselves about Martin Luther King Jr. to understand what he believed in and worked for."

Dechavez urged this in a speech at the MLK Holiday Celebration of Macomb County on Jan. 17 at the Royalty House in Warren.

Dechavez, chair of the Michigan chapter of the National Federation of Filipino American Associations, spoke at the celebration as chair of

this year's MLK Day event attended by 1,300 people.

"Tonight we honor the life and legacy of a great man who brought hope and healing to our nation," he said. The values King advocated and practiced, he said, are courage, justice, humility and service.

"Dr. King inspired us to help build a community — a community that

embraces different faiths, ethnicities and races, and a community that embraces people from different walks of life," said Dechavez, who is a teacher at DPS's Blackwell Institute.

"We have to teach others, especially today's youth and the next generations, more about his life and nonviolent struggle for justice and peace," he said.

The MLK Holiday Celebration of Macomb County is an annual event of the Interfaith Center for Racial Justice headed by the Rev. Michail Curro.

In Lansing, 12-year-olds Tyrone Bean and GeQuan French showed off

a song they produced. They wrote the lyrics to "Saying no to junk food," created the beat and burned it to a CD — all on their MacBooks.

Finney Teacher Puts Art in Graffiti's Way

Finney art teacher Patrick Burton is known for motivating students on a grand scale. His students painted a huge mural on a wall at the old Finney High School that depicted historical African-American figures from slavery to President Barack Obama.

"No one touched that mural," Burton said. "It was a source of pride."

When Finney closed and moved into the old McNair school, Burton noticed graffiti creeping up on the building. There were gang-related symbols, profanity and negativity.

Burton, a 26-year Detroit teacher, asked principal Jared Davis if he could attack the problem with his paint brushes.

Now an eclectic mural is appearing in the boys and girls bathrooms, sectioned for each art student to contribute.



"They could do whatever they wanted," Burton said, "but it had to have a positive message."

A student is painting a quotation by Malcolm X: "The future belongs to those who prepare for it today." Others are painting flowers, peace signs and Harlem Renaissance themes.

Burton, a graduate of Cass Technical High School and the prestigious School of the Art Institute of Chicago, is delighted with the positive symbols springing up. And Davis is delighted by Burton's "can do" attitude. Finney had 19 entrees last year in the Detroit Institute of Arts Student Art Exhibit. A school can only submit 25.

"When you think about the best art students, you wouldn't think Finney," Burton said. But each year Burton's students have a large showing at the exhibit.

"He makes every kid draw," Davis says. "Somehow he makes artists out of these kids."

Vetal School Hosts Judicial Day

Judge Terry Clark did something intriguing when he visited Vetal School Jan. 19. He let 13-year-old Joshua Dotson wear his black robe and hold his gavel.

"Even though I was one of 10 kids," Clark said, "Even though I grew up in the projects of Saginaw, I knew what I wanted was achievable."

Clark, the first African American judge in Saginaw's 70th District Court, said by ninth grade, he knew he wanted to be a lawyer.

"You've got to start thinking about your purpose," he said to the middle school boys in the Vetal cafeteria.

Down the hall in the auditorium, 36th District Court Judge Donna Robinson Milhouse, echoed those sentiments to Vetal's pre-teen girls.

"Everyone has a hidden talent," Milhouse said. "You should be trying to see what that purpose is."

Vetal behavior specialist Kathy

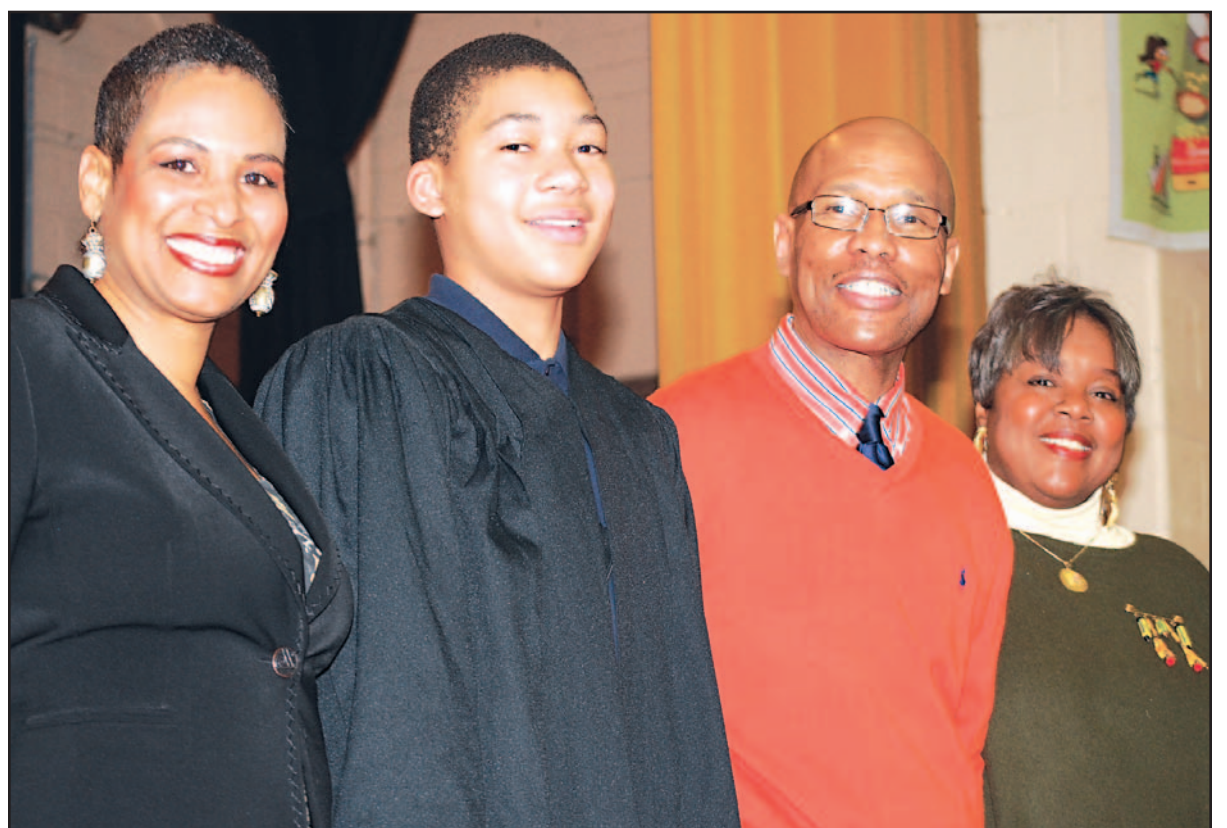
Hemingway and her colleagues realized it was important for the students to see what black judges look like and hear what obstacles these professionals had to overcome to get where they are.

"These judges had to go through the same things you have to," Hemingway said. "You can do what you want in life, but you have to be very, very determined."

Vetal's "Judicial Day" was a resounding success, judging by the students' interest and attention. The day was organized by Hemingway and

her colleagues: Principal Philip Van Hooks, Walter Smith, John Becker, James Porter, Renee Williams, Erica

Davis, Mshindari Cook, Lynn Maye, Philip Owens, Nesha Dougal, and Dr. Joan Rivers.



36th District Court Judge Donna Robinson Milhouse, Vetal eighth-grader Joshua Dotson, 70th District Court Judge Terry Clark, and Vetal Behavior Specialist Kathy Hemingway.

Soldier Visits O.W. Holmes School

After Sept. 11, 2001, O.W. Holmes teacher Stacey Apap and her students started sending care packages to the firefighters and police in New York. Soon the country entered war with Iraq and Afghanistan.

It's been 10 years and the packages keep going out of O.W. Holmes. They are filled with notes and cookies and other goodies, now for the troops fighting abroad.



Apap, a third-grade teacher, said the good gesture is more than just a gesture. It's a learning experience for the kids. They think about someone else, someone who is sacrificing for others. In

addition, they learn geography, history and our core democratic values.

Airman Marisa Carter, a Detroit Public School graduate, was touched by the letters and cookies she received. She asked Apap if she could visit the school on a trip to Detroit. "I would love to come and meet the kids," she told Apap. Carter visited the school Jan. 11 to much excitement. Pictured above is from left, Apap, Carter and Lynzi Johnson, hearing impaired teacher.



Photo by Michael R. Porter

Davison Broadcast Crew Goes to Lansing

Davison Elementary School was represented at the Student Technology Showcase at the Capital Building in Lansing in November. Davison's broadcast anchors met with State Sen. Martha Scott (above) and State Rep. Bert Johnson. Thanks to "Good Morning Davison" producers – art teacher Tony Shopinski and kindergarten teacher Judy Robinson – the crew has been broadcasting daily for nearly 11 years at Davison. The TV program presents school news, weather, sports and other information every morning on a closed-circuit system. The crew has been invited to present each year at this event, sponsored by the Michigan Association for Computer Users in Learning (MACUL), along with students from around the state.

THE DETROIT NEWSM

Cuddling at Pasteur Elementary

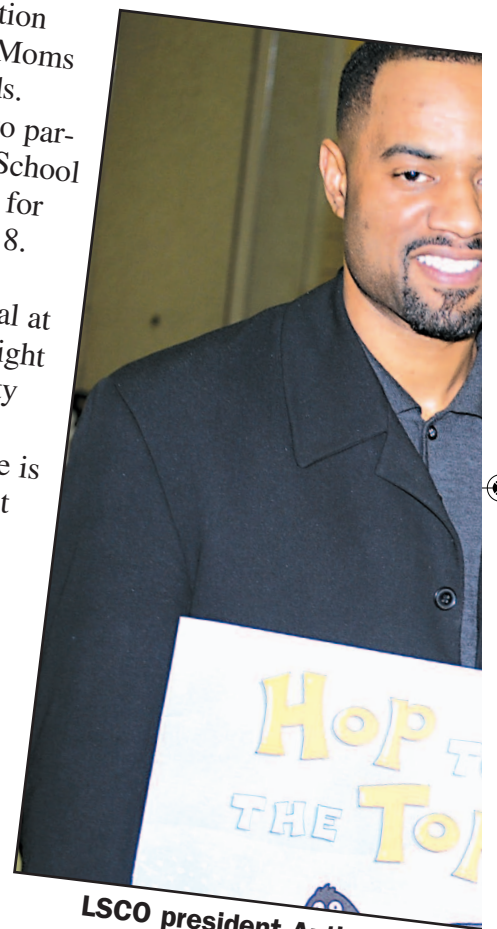
Parents came in construction bibs from their jobs. Moms cuddled with their kids. Parents read to kids and kids to parents. The Pasteur Elementary School gym was wall-to-wall blankets for Family Reading Night on Dec. 8.

Rene Green, a paraprofessional at Pasteur, organized the reading night to bring the close-knit community into the school to build reading skills. The 11-year DPS employee is the go-to person for such events at Pasteur.

"She's extremely creative," said teacher Yvette French.

Green and LSCO president Anthony Muhammad, pictured above, work together to organize this and other events, like a parent leadership training conference, to bridge the community and the school.

"We want parents to take 30 minutes a day to build their child's reading skills," Green said.



LSCO president Anthony Muhammad

