

Lobby Day 2008



DFT President Virginia Cantrell and Gwen Williams, Detroit City High School teacher, board the bus for Lobby Day in Lansing in April.

DFT officials spent a day in Lansing April 22 lobbying state legislators on several issues important to Detroit teachers. Some 39 DFT members took a bus to attend Lobby Day.

AFT Michigan Lobby Day is an opportunity for educators and politicians to discuss issues that affect the quality of education in Michigan. DFT members represented 20 percent of those in attendance and used the opportunity to address some of their concerns.

- President Virginia Cantrell continued to work on a bill she pushed for introduction in 2003. The bill would mandate that

children in Michigan attend all-day kindergarten by 2011.

- DFT officials met with legislators from Detroit about the possibility of Detroit Public Schools falling below the 100,000-student mark, which would make it unable to meet the criteria for a Class A school district.
- DFT officials discussed making class size limits uniform across Michigan. DFT officials said every district should have to meet the same class size standards. They say class size affects student achievement, especially in the foundation years of pre-K through third grade.

Bullying Public School Teachers

A national campaign is underway to destroy the image of teachers unions. The so-called “Center for Union Facts” is starting an advertising campaign with full-page ads in some of the most expensive media markets in the country.

The campaign promises a billboard in Times Square, a website, and ads in major newspapers and on network TV. The campaign is reported to focus on 20 school districts across the country. The man behind the center is reported to be lobbyist Rick Berman. Berman has a history of working for conservative groups and has attacked Mothers Against Drunk Drivers, the Americans with Disabilities Act, universal health care and minimum wage legislation.

The campaign is full of false information about teachers unions, saying teachers block reform in schools.

“When you attack teachers unions, you attack the many dedicated teachers who have devoted their lives and careers to helping children succeed,” said DFT President Virginia Cantrell.

“School problems are usually symptoms of much larger ills in our society,” she said. “But schools are not the cause and neither are unionized teachers so stop placing blame on the teachers and their unions.”

Detroit Teacher Newsmakers

Martin Luther King Band Going to Beijing China

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auntie sending money.”

The beautiful thing about raising the money is that no corporation came in with a huge donation. The Big Three gave nothing.

The DFT gave \$5,000. Governor Jennifer Granholm gave \$10,000. Three foundations – Skillman, Kresge and Southeast Community Foundation – together gave \$70,000.

Many others, however, gave their empty bottle cans and loose change.

A young man from Farmington walked his street and collected \$386. King students also asked neighbors to put out their empty bottles and cans for a Saturday drive.

And each student was asked to raise \$500. When Miller told her kids about the trip, she told them they each needed \$3,000.

“I wasn’t going to find it,” said senior Scott Williams. The 17-year-old is heading to Jackson State University in Mississippi in the fall. He thought it was either China or college. Not both. Thanks to a donation from his grandmother and other fundraising, Williams will be visiting the Great Wall of China in August.

Miller thinks the students need to be exposed to the world. As band director of Spain Middle School for 27 years, she took students to London, Switzerland, Hawaii, Japan and Africa. In China, the students will visit Tiananmen Square, the Forbidden City, the Summer Palace, the Ming Tombs, and enjoy a Beijing Duck Banquet.

At King, Miller’s 95 students put in extra hours to get to the level of professionalism required to play at the pre-Olympic music festival.

“I should have 400 to 500 students in our band, but some of them say we work too hard,” she said. “We’re an outstanding band because we practice and practice and practice. I have students who believe in themselves. I build people first. We build confidence.”

Miller’s goal for China is to showcase her students.

“We have to make a fantastic impression everywhere we go,” Miller said. “These kids are going to be great musicians and great ambassadors for Detroit.”



The Martin Luther King Jr. Band is a mainstay at many events including Michigan’s Thanksgiving Day Parade.

DFT Pushes All-Day Kindergarten

House Bill 4662 (Virgil Smith, D-Detroit) would require Michigan school districts to provide all-day kindergarten. It would also change the required school attendance age from six to five years.

Current law requires all school districts to maintain a kindergarten program, but this bill would make kindergarten mandatory in 2009 and all-day kindergarten mandatory beginning in 2011.

The House Education Committee held a hearing on House Bill 4662 on Feb. 19 with DFT President Virginia Cantrell providing extensive testimony at the hearing. Cantrell pushed for the bill to be introduced in 2003.

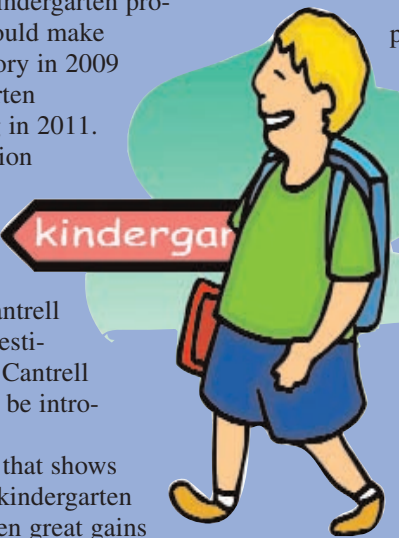
Based on research that shows high quality, all-day kindergarten programs give children great gains in early language, literacy and cognitive skills, Michigan children would have a better chance to succeed academically. Although all-day kindergarten benefits

all children, it would be particularly helpful for disadvantaged students. In Philadelphia, a study of more than 17,000 students found that children attending all-day kindergarten dramatically out-performed those in half-day programs.

Studies show that children perform better in first grade and beyond when they are given additional opportunities to develop skills in letter identification, sight word recognition and socialization.

Although the state funds kindergarten, it does not require attendance by all students. As a result, some parents hold their children out of kindergarten and miss a prime opportunity to develop skills, competencies, and interests.

“I believe our testimony in Lansing edged them closer to making this a reality,” Cantrell said.



King High School band director Victoria Miller with trumpeters