

DFT Actions are Building Momentum

A soft snowfall and cold temps did not deter hundreds of DFT members from holding walk-ins and a candlelight vigil on the DFT’s Feb. 9 Day of Action.

“We are serious about fighting for public education in Detroit,” said Terrence Martin, DFT executive vice president, at a candlelight vigil at Cass Park. “Our children deserve better.”

The vigil drew hundreds of DFT members, community activists, clergy, and AFT President Randi Weingarten.

“Never have I seen, in the last three decades, what I’ve seen in Detroit Public Schools in terms of the conditions,” Weingarten said.

DFT members drew national attention to the conditions in DPS through sick-outs in January. While people around the world sent alarm and sympathy, state legislators drew up proposals to punish the teachers.

“How dare you stand up for the children,” Weingarten mocked the legislators.

She noted that while Detroit is going through a renaissance, that investment is not happening in its schools.

When the schools were found to have rampant heat problems, rodent infestations, and black mold, finally the country took notice. But only when teachers were united in the message.

“What is the moral constitution of this state?” Weingarten asked. “Is it that all God’s children matter, or just a few?”



On February 9th the DFT held a Day of Action, where walk-ins and a candlelight vigil took place. Hundreds of DFT members, community activists, clergy and AFT President Randi Weingarten participated.

The DFT also held “walk ins” at a dozen schools. The walk ins were part of a successful national campaign and a way to get the community into the schools to take ownership of them.

Ruby Newbold, president of the De-

troit Association of Educational Office Employees, said Detroit schools need critical attention. She called for the unions and the community to stand together in the next months.

“We’ve got to stop this madness.”

We Are So Close to a Breakthrough

It's past time for all of us to come together. We can't be effective fighting to save Detroit Public Schools if we're fighting amongst ourselves.



Interim President

Ivy Bailey

I should not be putting out internal fires. I should not be settling union squabbles. I should not be responding to rumors. My time should be used on supporting you and your everyday issues, on pushing our agenda forward, on fighting others who are trying to destroy us, and on doing what's best for our students.

It's time for everyone to get on

board. In order for DPS to be competitive with districts in the tri-county area – with pay, benefits and working conditions that are standard in suburban districts — we must move as one with long term goals in mind. We must be key players in the push for accountability and to restore DPS to a world class school system.

We are so close to a breakthrough.

Here are some developments after two months of concerted actions:

- Darnell Earley is gone. We filed a lawsuit and, shortly after, Earley announced his resignation.
- Regardless of what you think of Judge Rhodes, the fact is he said he's ready to work with us. Thus far, we have seen evidence of that.
- We asked for someone within our ranks to be the educational leader of this school district. We asked for someone with an education background. We got someone who is a Detroit teacher, lives in Detroit,

graduated from DPS, and understands this system and our concerns. In the newly appointed interim superintendent, Alysia Meriweather, we have someone we trust and respect. We asked for this and we got it.

- We continue to ask for a return to local control and a fully empowered elected school board. Many influential people in the community and media have supported this as well.
- Legislation is close to getting passed that would pay off the \$515 million debt, including monies needed to get through this school year. We need to see this through.

There will be stumbling blocks along the way, but together we are stronger.

This is about you, the students of Detroit Public Schools, and our community. Their learning conditions are our teaching conditions. Now more than ever, we must stand together.

We Must Stay Focused

By Ann Mitchell, DFT Administrator

He might not be your go-to motivational speaker, but LL Cool J got it right when he said, "Stay focused, go after your dreams and keep moving toward your goals."

That's actually the perfect philosophy for what we're trying to accomplish with our school system and the Detroit Federation of Teachers, and it's good advice for handling the work we do every day to make a difference in the lives of kids.

By staying focused on what matters, we're now seeing some movement in the right direction. But we've still got a long way to go. We have to keep fighting for what we believe is right and necessary for our students, our schools, our profession, and our dignity and respect.

The sickouts and other actions, and the resulting national and local media coverage, shined a bright spotlight on the unsafe and unhealthy state of our schools.



ANN MITCHELL
DFT Administrator

THE DETROIT
teacher

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Staying Focused

FOCUSED, from Page 2

As you probably know, the DFT filed a lawsuit against DPS over the dangerous school facility conditions. And while we are not withdrawing our suit, DPS and the city of Detroit subsequently reached a consent agreement on fixing safety and health violations in the schools. There have been some short-term repairs as well as an unexpected windfall of money for Spain Elementary-Middle School from “The Ellen DeGeneres Show” and Loew’s home improvement store.

Late last month, a judge denied the district’s outrageous request for a preliminary injunction against several educators and a permanent injunction against Interim President Ivy Bailey and the Detroit Federation of Teachers. This will allow us to continue to speak up, speak out and support our members, who have the courage to fight for what’s right.

It’s early, but we’re seeing positive signs from retired U.S. Bankruptcy Judge Steven Rhodes, who is now the transition leader for the Detroit Public Schools. In his communications with the DFT and the public, Rhodes says he wants to get rid of the emergency manager system, is pushing the state to pay off the school debt, supports a locally controlled school board, is eager to begin contract negotiations, and even is trying to figure out a way to pay teachers back the TIP money they loaned to the state. It’s also gratifying to hear him talk about his desire to help build a school system that can attract and retain high-quality educators. Because Rhodes has no education policy experience, the DFT urged him to appoint an academic expert to work alongside him.

Of course, the DFT is doing everything possible to ensure that the union’s voice is included in all decisions for our schools and our jobs and that there is a successful transition from the disastrous tenure of former Emergency Manager Darnell Earley to a locally elected school board.

We are at an important crossroads. The state Legislature is working on several bills that offer a mixed bag. To pay off the massive school debt (which must happen), Gov. Rick Snyder is willing to use tobacco settlement funds. But proposals differ on when the state could turn over control of the schools to local authorities, and some include punitive measures that are unacceptable to us, like curtailing collective bargaining rights. The DFT is fighting for the debt to be paid off, for the appointment of a locally elected, fully empowered school board as quickly as possible, and for continuation of our collective bargaining rights. Needless to say, the situation in Lansing is fluid, and we’re working with AFT Michigan to make sure lawmakers get it right.

I’ve been the DFT administrator for about four months now, and I can truthfully say that I am overwhelmed and incredibly impressed by the enthusiasm, activism and genuine commitment of DFT members. There’s a lot on our plates, but it is the members who will make the difference in our success. We are on the cusp of making the changes that could begin to turn around Detroit schools slowly but surely. We can’t let up. We need to fight on, be united and stay the course.



Three Trucks of School Supplies for Detroit Teachers

DFT members stocked up on school supplies and hygiene products for their classrooms in late February. WXYZ TV 7 and Leo’s Coney Island restaurants gathered the donations for Detroit teachers after the crisis conditions in many Detroit Public Schools became known. Some three truckloads of paper, notebooks, markers and anti-bacterial wipes were available at a City of Detroit warehouse on Mt. Elliott.

The DFT sends its overwhelming gratitude to WXYZ and Leo’s Coney Island, the City of Detroit, and Jill Kloc, of the Disney Company, for organizing the giveaway.



Donate to the Mildred Ellis Scholarship Fund

Committee members of the Mildred A. Ellis Scholarship Fund are asking DFT members to live according to Mildred Ellis standards: Donate your best to help a DPS high school senior attend college.

This year the committee wants to award five DPS students with \$2,000 scholarships. But they need DFT members’ help.

Detroit school social workers have provided over \$242,000 in scholarships over 26 years to 180 college-bound seniors who have endured some form of hardship.

Mildred Ellis was the first African-American director of DPS school social workers. She was nurturing and kind and took a very special interest in helping needy students. Her mission was to “treat our students as if they were our own.”

If you would like to donate, please send your check to: the Mildred Ellis Scholarship Fund, 17067 Bonstelle, Southfield, MI 48075. The Mildred Ellis Scholarship Fund is now a 501(c)3 non-profit organization. Thus all donations to the Mildred Scholarship Fund are tax deductible.

This year’s scholarships will be given on May 18 at Karas House Banquet Hall on Plymouth Road in Detroit.



Chrysler School Donates Water to Flint

Families at Chrysler Elementary School donated 250 cases of water to the families in Flint. They delivered the water on Feb. 9 to the International Academy of Flint. Third-grade teacher Adriane Blair and fifth-grade teacher Chenita Campbell saw the need after Flint families were poisoned with lead in the water. The teachers quickly organized their school community to distribute the water.

Winter Break? DFT Members Take Students Skating

On Feb. 16, over winter break, 20 staff members from the Detroit International Academy for Young Women organized an ice skating outing and extravaganza for their students and their families. Some 60 students skated at Clark Park in Southwest Detroit.



"The beautiful outdoor hockey rink has the look and feel of the Joe Lewis Arena," said Robert Muha, attendance agent at DIA. "The Red Wings have been very helpful in their support of this neighborhood rink. In fact, they even donated a Zamboni machine to groom the ice."

Many of the girls had to be encouraged to go because they had never skated before. Muha organized the trip with the help of counselor Dena Green, ROTC teacher First Sgt. Thomas Roul-

hac, and classroom aide Debra Harrington.

The girls roasted marshmallows and made s'mores, ate pizza and nachos, and drank hot chocolate.

"Imagine roasting marshmallows on a wintery day in February," Muha said. "Holy cow, the girls had a blast." Many of the young women said they wanted to skate again. Parents were delighted the staff planned a fun trip for the kids over the break.

Who said DPS educators don't rock and ice skate too?

Detroit School Counselor Honored at White House

It takes a lot to get an invitation to the White House to meet First Lady Michelle Obama. Teacher Sylvia Sanders has what it takes.



SYLVIA SANDERS

In December, Sanders was named "School Counselor of the Year" for the state of Michigan. She accompanied counselors from the other 49 states to the White House to be honored on Jan. 28.

"I felt very humbled by it," Sanders said. "Such a huge honor that I never thought I would get and I wasn't seeking."

What made the 21-year counselor even more thrilled was being honored at the White House.

"Someone in the White House thinks enough of our profession to shine a light on it because it's important work," she said.

Michelle Obama's "Reach Higher" campaign encourages children to attend college. Sanders said Michelle Obama spoke to the honored counselors.

"She was phenomenal," Sanders said. "She made us cry."



Detroit Teacher Takes Stage to Tell Her Story

By William Bowles
Western International High School

Nina Cook, a science and drama teacher at the Detroit International Academy for Young Women, took the stage of the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History to tell a story of love.

She spoke of her three daughters, her nieces, her sisters and of one special student,



Nina Cook

Jaminique, a foster child whom she mentored through high school and a shaky adolescence to earn the Gates Millennium Scholarship.

"It's not just me," said Cook. "All DPS teachers do this. We love them like we love our own children. We even call them our kids."

Cook is not a celebrity, but one of five "ordinary" people who told a true personal story with the Secret Society of Twisted Storytellers. This monthly event at the Charles H. Wright Museum, was founded by Detroit native Satori Shakoor, whose performing credentials include acting in "Menopause The Musical."

When you take your seat you will "share an intimate connection," says Shakoor, who is also a playwright, actor, singer and comedienne.

Shakoor began telling stories with the storytelling nonprofit, The Moth, and soon received national recognition. It was after telling a story at a Moth event



Nina Cook, left, and Satori Shakoor, above, took the stage at the Charles H. Wright Museum.

in Boston that she had an "aha" moment: "This is what I want to do."

She returned home to found the Secret Society of Twisted Storytellers. (You can view Shakoor's Moth performances on YouTube, and see Secret Society stories at www.twistedtellers.org).

The mission of Secret Society is to "connect us to our collective humanity," she said. "Everybody has a story but everybody doesn't know how to tell it."

Shakoor works with storytellers to hone their message. The story sometimes reveals something they were not aware of and this "opens something up" in the teller and members of the audience. Something certainly opened up for a few of Shakoor's storytellers when their psychotherapists heard "secrets" told to the audience that they had yet to hear in their individual therapy sessions.

For audience members, the experience is no less powerful.

"We're developing listeners," said Shakoor, who says people are tired of hearing "inauthentic messages of our humanity. We've allowed corporate stories to be the one's we've cared about." The power of storytelling "helps us put down lies of who we aren't," Shakoor says.

Don Wellman, Secret Society videog-

rapher and board member of the Society for the Re-institutionalization of Storytelling, has observed the storytelling phenomenon for over a decade.

"I believe in some ways this is a reaction to our digital society – an expression of our need to connect as human beings," Wellman said.

Nina Cook learned of Secret Society when Shakoor visited her school with InsideOut Literary Arts Project.

After her students shared their stories, Cook noticed a change.

"They began to treat each other differently in class," Cook said. Her students treated each other with more sensitivity and respect. Students realized that they were not alone in their struggles, she said.

At the Wright Museum, Cook concluded her story about teaching in Detroit: "I know I'm not done loving them. I know I'm not done giving to them. I know I haven't finished helping them reach their destiny and their purpose."

The next storytelling event is on the theme of Betrayal & Trust, at 7:30 p.m., March 18 at the Charles H. Wright Museum. To watch Nina Cook's story, go to www.twistedtellers.org and click on videos.

Timeline for Retirement

By Patrick Falcusan
DFT Retirement Counselor

This is the time of the year when many DFT members begin giving serious thought to retirement. Following is a timeline to help members through the retirement process. The timeline below assumes no changes at DPS prior to July 1, 2016.

1. In order to retire July 1 or Aug. 1, you must meet certain criteria (see box).



Patrick Falcusan

would be).

3. In early April, submit your retirement application to the State (www.michigan.gov/orsschools). If you are 65, or older, you need to apply for Medicare parts A and B if you have not already done so (see box).

4. In early April (if you have not already done so), turn in your irrevocable Separation from Service (SFS) form to the District. Go to HR (10th floor Fisher Building) ask for two SFS forms, fill them both out (putting June 30, 2016 or July 31, 2016 as your last day of service), check the box that says "retiring," get both SFS forms date-stamped, and take one SFS form with you for your records. (In order to be paid for your sick days, you must turn in your SFS form by May 1 and retire either July 1 or Aug. 1, 2016).

5. In early April, if you have a TDP (buying time through payroll deduction) and wish to apply any of your lump sum payout money from the District (TIP, sick days, last four pays [if on 26 pays] etc.) toward your TDP, call me at 313-875-6783.

6. In early May, contact your TSA agent if you wish to shelter any of your lump sum payout money from the District (TIP, sick days, last four pays, [if on 26 pays] etc.).

7. If you retire July 1 and follow the instructions above, you should expect to get:

- Your new insurance card from the state in June.
- One last pay from DPS in late June or early July.
- Your first pension payment on July 25.
- Your lump sum payout money (TIP, sick days, last four pays [if on 26 pays] etc.) in August.

Who is Eligible to Retire?

- If you have Basic and are under age 60, you must be at least 55 and have 30 years of service in order to get an unreduced pension.

- If you have MIP and are under age 60, you must be at least 46 and have at least 30 years of service in order to get an unreduced pension.

- If you are at least 55 but less than 60, you are eligible for an early reduced pension if you have 15 years but less than 30 years of service and have worked at least 17 days during each of the previous five school years.

- If you are over 60, you are eligible for a pension if you have 10 years or more of service (Basic) or 5 years or more of service (MIP).

- If you are over 55 but under 60 with more than 15 years but less than 30 years of service credit, you may decide to retire by July 1 to preserve your right to health care along with your early reduced pension.

- If you are over 55 with 10 actual years worked, you might be able to buy five years to get you to the 15-year threshold.

- If you are under age 55 and have more than 10 years of service, you are vested with the state retirement system and would be eligible for a pension at age 60 even if you never returned to teaching in a public school that was part of the pension system. The pension would be based on your years worked.

- If you leave DPS and you have less than 10 years of service and are not vested, you could get a refund of your MIP contributions or leave your MIP contributions with the state in case you took employment with another public school in Michigan that was part of the retirement system. Your years in Detroit would then count toward the 10 years you needed in order to get vested.

After You Retire

Several questions always pop up when folks retire: What happens to my health care? When does the payment for TIP come? When does my pension start, etc.? Below are many of the answers.

Q: What happens to my health care?

A: Your District insurance will stop the last day of the month

you retire (June 30 for those retiring July 1). Your new retirement insurance will start the first day of the month you retire (July 1 for those retiring July 1).

Q: I have 26 pays and retired July 1. What happens to the four checks that normally come in the summer?

A: Those four checks will come along with other monies owed you in one big final check.

Q: When will I get my final payment for TIP monies, sick days, last four checks, etc.?

A: In most cases, the final payment will come in mid to late August for folks retiring July 1. If you are sheltering or buying time with any of this money, you must have notified the district ahead of time. (This payout might be put on an ADP Aline card.)

Q: When will my pension begin?

A: For most folks retiring July 1 the first pension payment will come July 25.

Q: Can I work after I retire?

A: You cannot work for a school district that is part of the retirement system for one month after you retire.

Q: If I get a job after I retire, will I have a limit on how much I can earn?

A: New rules about working after retirement became effective Sept. 1, 2015.

1. If you work for a school district that is part of the state retirement system and you become an employee of that school district and are paid directly by that school district, you will have an earnings cap of one-third of your final salary average — \$20,000-\$24,000 for most folks.

2. If you work for a school district that participates in the retirement system but that district uses a third party to pay your wages, your pension and health care will stop as long as you are receiving wages from the third party (unless that district pays a fee to the retirement system).

3. If you become a consultant for a school district that participates in the retirement system and are paid as a consultant and not an employee, your pension and health care will stop as long as you are receiving wages from that district.

4. If you work somewhere that is not a participating employer or a private school, in private industry or a public school in another state beside Michigan, you can earn as much as you want.

Q: Will collecting Social Security impact how much I can earn?

A: Yes, between 62 and 66 (or your full Social Security age) there is a Social Security annual limit of approximately \$15,700 on how much can be earned without impacting your Social Security. After 66 (or your full Social Security age), Social Security does not have an earnings cap. The pension system's earnings cap will remain in place the rest of your life.

Applying for Medicare

If you or your spouse are over 65 when you retire and want health care through the retirement system, you will need Medicare parts A and B. Almost all members over 65 already have Medicare part A but not part B. Here is what you need to do to have part B in place by the time you retire.

- On your retirement insurance form, put the date from your Medicare card when Medicare part A started. Put your retirement date for the date Medicare part B started. (If you don't yet have part A, also put your retirement date for when part A started).

- Three months before you retire, go to Social Security and notify them of your retirement date and tell them you want your Medicare part B to be effective the same day as your retirement date (and part A if you don't already have part A).

- If Social Security gives you a Medicare form to be filled out by your employer (they almost always do), take that form to the 10th floor of the Fisher Building (Human Resources). (Make an extra copy of the form in case the first copy gets lost and you have to repeat this process).

- Submit the form from Social Security to the District along with a copy of your Separation from Service form. If this is the first time you have submitted your Separation from Service form, submit two copies, get them date-stamped and take one copy with you for your records.

- The District will fill out your form from Social Security and return it to you. (Usually you will have to leave the form and come back later to pick it up).

- Take the completed form back to Social Security. (Make a copy for your records).

**We're on
Facebook!
check us out at
www.facebook.com/DFT231**

Stop the Bickering, Join the Fight

By William Weir, Schulze Academy

"If the right-wing billionaires & apostles of corporate power have their way, public schools will become 'dead zones of the imagination' reduced to anti-public spaces that wage an assault on critical thinking, civic literacy, & historical memory."
Henry Giroux, 2013

(This article is for the over 3,000 teachers who stopped coming to union meetings and do not get involved in union activities and politics.)

DPS teachers, our students, and our community have been under an apartheid form of governance since 1999. The decline of urban education and the assault on unions and teachers,



WILLIAM WEIR

however, began some time before that. To totally blame any past or present leadership for our decline is to ignore the current struggles of other urban, predominately African American, school districts across America.

A member posted a very informative article on how the decline in urban education in Michigan began in the late 19th century (great article Joel!). Any argument that totally blames Keith Johnson, Steve Conn, or

current leadership is uninformed.

For DPS to survive this onslaught, we must take charge of this struggle and do so in an intelligent, strategic, unified fashion. Teachers, you have to become involved NOW. Otherwise the end is closer than you think.

First, we must come together as one union in our struggle. This misguided internal bickering has to be cut out like a festering wound. As we heal and solidify our ranks, we can tap into the political and community capital we gained in the past few months.

I know we have internal problems but ask yourself - is it more important who holds what position in AFT/DFT, or is it more important to avoid payless paydays in April?

We must be as cunning, resourceful and political as Snyder and the right-wing groups out to destroy us. We have some brilliant, politically astute members who would gladly help us write letters to representatives, educate members about who the Devoses, GLEPS, and ALECs are, among other things.

A sister who was in Lansing for an AFT workshop said many members don't know these people or groups. We must know who the players are.

One way we can accomplish this is by having a civil, informative union meeting on March 10. Afterward, we can intelligently plan actions and strategies. This is urgent.

Last, we must rid ourselves of fear and strengthen our resolve. Some teachers say they can't afford a strike or that we should let Rhodes control the situation so we will not have payless paydays in April. Look at what other members have lost before you? Not taking action will not save your job.

Our battle with our main enemy, Gov. Snyder, has reaped national attention. His manservant Darnell Earley, who was involved in the Flint water debacle, may serve time. We have over 12 years' worth of irrefutable data that show Emergency Management has failed Detroit children, and poisoned a whole city.

In the DFT's Community Engagement Committee meeting, we discussed how teachers should take charge of our students' education, as we know what's best for them because we see them every day. Moreover, this is our profession, we know what to do. Marzano could take lessons from us!

There are biblical, civil and human rights tales of how unified groups of people, fighting for what's right, have won. How many of you have shown videos to students of the Civil Rights struggle and how they suffered for us? Now is the time for us to show this type of resolve.

We need four thousand in Lansing on a sit down strike, 4,000 boycotting certain businesses, 4,000 practicing civil disobedience for a just cause. Not 15, 30, or even 300, but 4,000!

CALENDAR

All Meetings start at 4:30 p.m.
Dates and times are subject to change.

March

- 8 Retiree Chapter Meeting, Michigan First Credit Union, 37000 Evergreen, Lathrup Village, 11:30 a.m.
- 10 Membership Meeting, TBD, 4:30 p.m.,
- 25-1 Spring break, Schools Closed

April

- 12 Retiree Chapter Meeting, Michigan First Credit Union, 37000 Evergreen, Lathrup Village, 11:30 a.m.
- 14 Membership Meeting, TBD, 4:30 p.m.

May

- 10 Retiree Chapter Meeting, Michigan First Credit Union, 37000 Evergreen, Lathrup Village, 11:30 a.m.
- 12 Membership Meeting, TBD, 4:30 p.m.
- 30 Memorial Day, Schools Closed