

THE FACTS ON UNIONIZING CHARTERS; SCHOOL CLOSURES; AND LAYOFFS

By Keith Johnson, DFT President

Let's dispel the rumors regarding DFT's decision to organize charter schools in Detroit. The DFT does not support charter schools and/or the expansion of charter schools! However we can no longer afford to keep our heads buried in the sand hoping to look up one day and find that they have all gone away.

President's Report



Keith Johnson

Charter schools continue to be a drain upon our school district as more and more parents begin to turn to charter schools as an alternative for the education and safety of their children. Of course the result is the loss of much needed revenue for DPS to continue to maintain schools, staff and programs. Since charter schools in Michigan, unlike in most states, are not regulated by statute or collective bargaining agreements, charters are allowed to engage in an educational free for all with each deciding how it will operate and without any parameters to govern them other than the agencies that authorize the charter.

Organizing the charter schools in Detroit will allow the DFT with the assistance of AFT Michigan to negotiate contract language that establishes guidelines for salaries, benefits, working conditions, due process, and of course compel the charters to contribute to the retirement system. In short, it will make the odds more even.

We will take initiatives to compel charters to cease their "creaming" practices; accepting and retaining only those stu-

dents that are not behaviorally or academically challenged, and denying access to students with special needs.

Organizing charters will also allow us to pursue tenure and just cause/due process rights for charter school teachers, hold them to the same standards that traditional public schools like DPS are held to, thus in theory, helping our efforts to reduce class size at all grade levels.

Most important of all, organizing charters will strengthen our power and influence as a union. It is reasonable to believe that as more charters are faced with having to be more like traditional public schools in terms of accountability, wages and benefits, due process, and paying into the retirement system, many of them will dry up because now they will not be as profitable, thus not as appealing to those seeking to authorize them.

After 14 years of existence, it is obvious that charters are not going away, and they have had enough free rein to operate as they please. It is time for them to be regulated and DFT is going to lead the way.

SCHOOL CLOSURES

By May 8, Financial Manager Robert Bobb will announce the final decision on school closures. It is never easy to see a school close; it is difficult for students, staff, and the community the school serves. However, as we demand that DPS exercise fiscal responsibility to restore fiscal solvency, we must embrace the need for schools to close to maximize the use of our valuable and limited revenue.

Consolidating programs and staffs into fewer schools, or "right-sizing" the district, is the right thing to do in the best interest of our students and staff.

However, the savings from the school closures must be funneled into the classroom and not carelessly wasted as in years past. Materials and equipment that are in good condition must be distributed to the receiving schools and other schools where they may be utilized.

Mr. Bobb is also developing a long-term plan of what DPS will look like up to five years down the road, including the



DFT President Keith Johnson visited several schools April 9 on the announcement that they will close. Here he speaks with the Joyce Elementary staff.

closing of additional schools, and the construction of new education campuses to take their place, maximizing the land wealth that Detroit and DPS has at their disposal. This provides an opportunity for new state-of-the-art K-12 educational centers to be built where developments are planned or currently under construction. This will also allow us to attract and retain students and make DPS a "first choice" school district.

LAYOFFS

Layoff notices were sent to 609 DFT members on April 9. While this is certainly alarming and a point of concern, the DFT is confident that the following factors will minimize the direct impact upon our members:

- DPS traditionally issues approximately 150 more layoff notices than it actually will need. This reduces that 609 figure to about 459
- In a typical year an average of 300 DFT members retire at the end of a given

school year. That reduces the 459 figure to about 159

- 50-100 members separate from the district for other reasons, e.g. expired certificates, voluntary resignations, or for cause terminations. That reduces that 159 figure to as low as 59.

If this trend holds true, there is reason to believe that very few members will actually be laid off. This by no means diminishes the importance or the impact of anyone who loses their job, especially in the most depressed economy in the nation. But rest assured that the DFT will work diligently to develop strategies to prevent any member from facing unemployment. It will not be easy, but if there is a way, your union will find it.

Seventy Teachers Face Termination

By Mark O'Keefe
DFT Executive Vice President



Mark O'Keefe

"I can't remember every employee I hired, but I remember all the ones I fired," a former boss once told me. Although the union fights to save jobs for teachers, we are in the unfor-

tunate position of having to notify 70 teachers that they may be terminated for nonpayment of union dues.

Paying union dues, or alternatively agency shop fees, is a condition of your employment. Occasionally, the district makes a mistake and fails to withhold the correct amount of dues. When this happens, we send an invoice to the member for the amount of dues owed.

When members do not fulfill their

responsibility to pay their dues, we are in an unfortunate position. We have to notify the district that employment will be terminated in 35 days if the delinquent dues are not paid.

As much as we may like to "let it slide," the union is owed thousands and thousands of dollars, which we need to pay our bills.

We can't allow some members to pay all their dues while others get a free ride.

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