



Local 698

East Detroit Federation of Teachers

Educators and more since 1942



A Union of Professionals

December 2009 Newsletter

Proposal to open contract



The school district entered the year \$3.9 million in debt. Who is to blame is a difficult question that many are working to answer. The answer however, doesn't change Fiscal Director Kate Dankovich's prediction that the debt will likely grow to nearly \$11 million after this year's cuts by the State, dropping enrollment and the need for more cost reductions. We face some very difficult negotiations next year regardless of what we do now. The need to react now however, is still a critical element to our long term success in trying to solve this financial dilemma.

There are two directions from which we can approach the problem. The first is to enhance our revenue stream. The second is to cut our expenses as a district. We have no control over the number of students that enroll, but I have gone on record in support of schools of choice open to Wayne County. This brings with it several potential problems, but I have contended that we are excellent educators and will do our best to teach whomever we can. It seems that the Deficit Reduction Committee may at least recommend Wayne County in K-2, but the Board will ultimately have to act to make this a reality. Even if they were to approve this recommendation it would produce some revenue, but not even close to being enough to recover completely.

That leaves spending as a target. Mid-year reductions in staff would be devastating to the educational process and very disruptive to the district and to our community. We need to take a proactive step to help remedy this situation to the best of our ability now and not wait until the next contract comes around. If we wait, we will be negotiating from a hole that we may never be able to dig ourselves out of. After a great deal of deliberation with our negotiating team and the presidents of the other bargaining groups, we have decided to make an offer from the union employees to the Board of Education. This does not come as a request from administration or the Board; it has been generated by us and would have to be ratified by our membership to become a reality.

The proposal provides that every insured employee contribute \$1000 in cash to the district to be earmarked for their health care benefits. Those employees that opt out of insurance would have their rebate lowered to \$1900, thus making their contribution \$500. Para professionals, who only pay half dues, and make significantly less income, would also be deducted at the \$500 rate. Employees that suffer from the marriage penalty, and have no health care benefit to their contract, would not contribute unless they chose to do so.

The contribution would be deducted over the remaining paychecks expiring at the end of August. This contribution would help to stop the immediate bleeding and hopefully stabilize the financial picture for this school year. In short, you will be contributing \$1000 directly to your own health care benefits. As a whole the unions would contribute approximately \$425,000 to our health care.

In addition, we would propose that some modifications be made to our benefits package. Changes would occur in several areas. First, all office co-pays would escalate to \$20 from the current \$10 charge. Second, Prescriptions, which are now 10/20/40, would become 10/30/40. An emergency room visit would be \$75 instead of no cost. This is waived if one is admitted. Any office visits that are currently at \$0 co-pay would also reflect the \$20 charge. The Chiropractor is an example of this change. This part of the offer would be worth approximately \$575,000, making the entire offer worth over \$1 million for this school year. It's time to step up to the plate and lead. Proactive means being ahead of the game and ahead of the popular views on things. Let's be the leaders we always have been. I will be asking each of you to cast a vote to decide on this issue in January if the Board accepts the proposal. Get informed and vote your conscience!

UNION SHORTS

Negotiations Survey Soon!

The EDFT negotiating team is anticipating the Board of Education will request the initiation of negotiations for our upcoming contract in the very near future. Administration will want to start this process as soon as possible in an effort to settle a contract that can be included into the earliest deficit elimination plans possible.

In preparation for that we will be conducting a negotiations survey in early January to identify your most significant concerns and proposals for the upcoming struggle. Some of these survey items will be in the nature of picking your poison, but will also include modifications we need to make in contract language, especially in the area of staffing and seniority protection. Put your thinking caps on and send me items you wish to have considered by the team and those that may be prudent to include in a survey of the membership. You can send them to the union office at EDFT@aol.com or to me at lstocks@eds.misd.net. The negotiations team will consider everything we receive and we will get the survey out to you after the New Year break.

Solidarity Checks and You

Middle School Vice-President Doug Ulmer is in charge of creating small "solidarity checks" to participate in over the next several months. These events are in no way to make a political statement against anyone or anything. Instead they are a way to help the union leadership gauge our support in the difficult days to come.

We all need to stick together as we approach an assault on our compensation. Some of us will not keep jobs. All of us will have less money to meet our responsibilities. We hope to structure such losses in a manner that will not be as painful as it could be. We will take some hard hits, but we cannot turn against each other and let the pressure we are facing destroy our ability to work together and provide our students with the best we can give them.

When Doug communicates these checks, they will come by e-mail as simple requests to participate in some activity that will discreetly demonstrate your support of our members. No one should talk about it or in any way involve students in the activity. We are not using the students or our classroom as a tool to create political pressure. It is for us and us alone. It's always great to look around and know that you are not alone!

Lions Game Tailgates

Everyone that purchased Lions tickets have received them as of December 5. As was noted last month, we are very spread out inside the stadium. Those of you with large groups are placed as close together as we could get you. The way the Lions are playing I might guess we could all move the 50 yard line by game day and not be pushed out of our seats. There are, however several people that are going as small groups or a couple. If anyone is planning a tailgate that might be open to some drop-ins, let the EDFT office know so that we can facilitate getting some serious game preparation plans together for our less experienced participants. E-mail me, or the office, with details I can share.

EDFT “American Values” campaign 2010

The EDFT leadership is proud to announce the kickoff of a campaign to promote some American Values that seem to have been lost by our society in recent years. This campaign will begin in January and proceed through the end of 2010. Hopefully the message will echo throughout our community and will become an inspiration for our members and those we know in years to come.

The focus of the campaign will be to promote key Democratic Values of the American Ideal. President Obama has called on America to “Change,” but change to what? If that change neglects our fundamental goals and purpose as a people, then the change is wrong. Change must reflect the progression of the pursuit of our American dreams and aspirations.

This will not be a forum on the wisdom of National Health Care or the morality of abortion rights; instead we will focus on the things that affect our profession, our community, our membership and our families. We will invite guest writers to share their ideas with us on how to stand up for the rights of students, teachers and public education.

In determining what issues to promote during this campaign we will take inspiration from the Declaration of Independence. The third of the unalienable rights Jefferson articulates is the, “pursuit of happiness.” Just exactly what that means for us today is very important.

For many of us, these difficult economic times have been cause for great unhappiness and stress. Helping to define and then focus on achieving this right is the primary function of the campaign. The pursuit of Happiness is recognized as a RIGHT in America, and we need help to get there. Although recent clothes and food drives were not generated through this campaign, they are exactly what we are looking for!

We begin by creating a manifesto of sorts that can immediately address some tangible standards of this goal from a union perspective. By no means should this be considered exclusive, but more of a beginning point for our campaign. Modification and growth may take us in a meandering course, but it should invariably move us toward happiness.

1. We each have the right to pursue a job and a career that we love unrestricted by arbitrary encumbrances.

2. People have a right to be compensated fairly for their work; which will allow them to provide sustenance and care for their families.

3. We have a right to a safe and healthy environment to educate our children and participate in a lifelong learning process.

4. We all have a right to have our voices heard and to stand united as a force to promote an atmosphere of trust, respect and overall well being for ourselves, our students and our community.

5. We have a responsibility to rise and become advocates for fairness to all, tolerance of different views and equal opportunities for all to be successful.

6. We have a responsibility to be eternally vigilant of all levels of government to make certain our leaders and legislators act with honor and integrity and promote the welfare of all segments of our society.

At its core, this campaign is a call to action to each of us in this union. It is a call to become active in your own welfare and the welfare of our community.

Finally, it is a call to rouse you from the comfort and complacency we have all allowed ourselves to be enveloped by.

As Thomas Paine said, *“These are the times that try men's souls: The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. ... We have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph. What we obtain too cheap, we esteem too lightly: it is dearness only that gives every thing its value.”*

We have selected a symbolic emblem to help us remember the challenge we will

Board orders investigation

After a closed meeting with their lawyers, the Board of Education approved an investigation into any recent potential wrongdoing in the district's management of money. The Board did not indicate any individuals to be the focus of the probe.

Board President Gruenberg said he expects a report back from the attorneys hired to conduct the investigation by the end of the month. set before you this year. It is an American

emblem. It is a symbol of revolution and firmness in these principles. It is a flag that was used in the American Revolution that inspired people more than 225 years ago to correct the world they were living in.

The EDFT has ordered, and will send each of you this flag to place wherever you see fit to help you remain focused on our rights and responsibilities to pursue happiness at home and in our workplace.

We would love to hear your initial feelings on this campaign and how you think it should manifest itself over the next several months.

You can contact the office at EDFT@aol.com or Lincoln at lstocks@eds.misd.net. Gadsden.info



Deficit Elimination Plan

The Board of Education called together a Deficit Elimination Committee to put together a plan to eliminate the deficit the district faces within two years. The State of Michigan requires this to happen within 30 days of a district going into a deficit situation.

As many EDFT members remember the district had to deal with a similar process just nine years ago to deal with the scandal that nearly destroyed the district. When that committee formed it comprised administrators and labor leaders who worked out a deal they then presented to the Board for approval. That system worked well and the district met its obligations with the State.

This committee was a joint group of Board members, administration, community members and labor leaders. In practice the group was very limited as it could not negotiate contractual matters and had difficulty remaining focused on items that actually cut the deficit. When presented to the Board of Education as a whole, the recommendations were virtually shredded. Nobody is quite sure what the final DEP will look like, but be sure it will ask for more concessions.