

# Educators' Vision

Published By the Social Equality Educators (SEE)

Volume 4, Issue 6, March 2014

By Ian Golash

The Seattle school district is planning budget cuts to building budgets totaling at least four million dollars for the upcoming year. This will mean the loss of at least 50 certificated staff in the district among other cuts that will be decided at the building level. This comes as a result of a recalculation of the Weighted Staffing Standard. To use one high school as an example, this may mean the cutting of 2.5 FTE of administrative staff (attendance, secretary, etc.) just to start; compared to the current 6.0 FTE (a 40% reduction!). The district seems to think that buildings will use discretionary funds to buy these positions back "if they really matter to the school". Not really all that discretionary are they then? "How can one run a high school without a full time attendance specialist?" you might ask... great question!

The SEA has released data showing that the district's projected surplus has been regularly understated for at least the past four years with this year being no different. The actual surplus has regularly been about fifty million dollars which would easily cover the four million dollars the district is proposing be cut from the budget. There is some question as to whether this money is actually carryover funds that the buildings have already been allocated and will get back. However, even if all buildings in the district had \$100,000 (far more than most buildings actually have) in carryover funds that would only equal \$10 million. There is plenty of money left over.

The SEA has released this information in the hopes that Building Leadership Teams will take it into account in developing budgets. Building staff have been told that Principals have been pushing back on the District without much success. The SEA has also asked building representatives to explain this information to their staff in the hopes that staff will vote to reject the budget proposal. If a number of buildings reject their budget proposals, it would create a backlog of required mediations for the district and this might be the only way to effectively put pressure on the district to withdraw its mandated cuts. It won't happen if just a few schools take a stand. A single building with a vocal enough community of well-connected parents behind it might win some dollars back but that won't create equity across the District. Concerted, collective action would have more power and more equitable impact.

This action on the part of the SEA is a welcomed resistance to cuts that have become a regular part of the ecosystem of Seattle Public Schools. Buildings are regularly asked to do more with less. Buildings are regularly asked to decide whether they would like a social worker to help students get into a place where they can learn or a truancy specialist to work with students and their families to get them to school in the first place. They are regularly asked to decide if they would like to be able to maintain an art elective or a classroom skills support program. These are "Sophie's choices" that no school building should be asked to make. Schools that need extra supports due to issues of poverty that students face outside of school are left to turn to outside organizations for grants that come and go like the tides. This insecure source of funding is maddening for everyone involved and makes organizing and maintaining programs that really work for students nearly impossible. Just pushing back on this particular budget cut is not enough.

Even if this budget cut were to be rescinded, many buildings will still not receive the funding needed to do the job they have been tasked with. Buildings need to get funding proportional to their needs. If a school has a higher proportion of students who require wrap-around services such as social workers, mental health counselors and truancy specialists, they ought to get all of them. If a building has a population that requires extra support services to ensure that their ninth graders make it to tenth grade and on to graduate for instance, they should get that. Furthermore, all buildings ought to have rich elective pro-

## The District has the money, no cuts. Support the SEA's position on voting NO on building budget cuts

grams including music, drama, art and vocational education. This ought to be the baseline, rather than extras allowed for some buildings and not others.

The focus of these cuts on classified staff is an effort to keep the cuts away from the classroom where they will get the most resistance. It could work to develop divisions between classified and certificated staff. This is unacceptable. Classified staff are just as essential to the running of a school and students' education as teachers and other certificated staff are. We should not allow ourselves to be divided by this tactic and stand with our brothers and sisters working in classified positions. As one teacher pointed out in a budget meeting this week, "I don't think it should be us and them. Classified staff are essential to running the building. Because of our attendance specialist, I am a more effective teacher. Because of our fiscal specialist, I am a more effective teacher."

This struggle begins in the buildings. Take a stand against this current budget cut by rejecting the budget proposal that your BLT brings on the principle that none of us are getting what we need. To respond to this pending catastrophe in a more ground swelling manner, teachers and staff might consider penning a letter to the school board signed by as many staff as possible, letting them know how you feel about the cuts being made in your building. You might consider calling a press conference where you lay out the real, on the ground cuts at your particular building and what they mean to your school. Call a meeting or send messages out to parents describing what the cuts will mean at your building. Maybe you could have a photo opportunity with your staff, an ax and some emblem of student success... you're creative!!

Our union ought to be in the forefront of this struggle exposing the political nature of these cuts. A union should be a site of struggle for the interests of teachers, parents and students, not of collaboration in a race to the bottom. It should hold the district, the state and the federal government to account for their failures in supporting students. Our union represents teachers and staff who are on the ground everyday dealing with the fallout from flawed budgetary policies made at a district, state and federal level and our voices need to be heard. We need to make it clear that learning conditions for our students are our working conditions and we demand the best. We are tired of the state ignoring its "paramount duty" to educate its citizens as the state constitution commands. We are tired of the buck being passed from the Federal Government to the State, to the District and on to the teachers, to continue addressing all of the deficiencies that begin further up the system.

Our strength is in our unity. Demand that the union organize building by building harnessing the strength of our numbers. Demand that the union take an uncompromising stance with the district when it comes to funding our students' needs. Demand that the union take an uncompromising stance with the state when it comes to funding our students' needs.

The RESPECT slate of the Social Equality Educators is trying to build a union that will do just that. The RESPECT slate has a platform that calls for, and pledges to fight for, full funding of education as required by the state constitution. It is pledging to work to make the SEA a member driven union, dedicated to hearing and fighting for concerns of its members. It is pledging to work with the community, parents and students to develop the schools and, ultimately, the city our students deserve. It is pledging to organize building by building, encouraging the membership to take an active role in the union and in the struggle for a better education for our students. In the end, the protections we seek for funding of building programs will need to be codified in our Collective Bargaining Agreement, and the RESPECT slate is pledging to fight for that strong contract.

### Dear Seattle educators,

Elections for leadership of the Seattle Education Association (SEA) are coming right up and ballots will be cast at the end of April. On behalf of Social Equality Educators (SEE) and many brothers and sisters working with us toward the common goal of strengthening our union, we are writing to ask for your endorsement. We have assembled a remarkable group of educators on the "Respect" ticket –award-winners and National Board Certified Teachers, experienced educators and those newer to the profession – to run for union office. Together, we are confident we can achieve the contract educators deserve, the schools our students deserve, and the city our families deserve.

The SEE Respect slate of candidates believes we need courageous union leaders who will listen to the members, stand up for their rights in the work place, and work hard to achieve the members' vision for public education.

The Respect slate of candidates stands for:

- A union that will **fight for a strong contract**. When we ask for less than what is required to do our jobs well, we cannot serve our students effectively, or be true to the passion that brings us into the classroom.
- A union that will demand **full funding of education**. This will only happen if we insist lawmakers adhere to the law.
- A union that will stand for **fair and sustainable teacher evaluation**. Evaluation should empower us to continually improve our professional practice and care for our students—it should not simply serve as a "gotcha" tool for administrators.
- A union that protects **our right to teach culturally relevant curriculum** and works to replace disproportionate disciplinary procedures with **restorative justice**. Seattle's students deserve a holistic education that fosters critical thinking and civic engagement.
- We need a union that **brings families and community members into the schools** as partners and collaborators.
- A union that **empowers the union membership** to be an active voice.
- A union that **keeps us updated** with accurate information and invites us to take an active role in a truly **member-driven association**.
- A union that will join the growing national movement to fight for **fair and meaningful student assessments**, including opportunities to pilot performance-based alternatives to high-stakes testing.

To endorse or donate to the SEE Respect union campaign, visit our website at [www.socialequalityeducators.org](http://www.socialequalityeducators.org).

### Public Education is in the Crosshairs

Teachers and school staff are feeling the insidious effects of what is known as the "corporate education reform agenda." It has been set by those occupying the highest ranks of power in our country and one of its primary financiers lives in our own backyard. With corporate education reform comes increased class size, privatization of public schools through expansion of charter initiatives, decreased access to wrap-around services, unfair and biased teacher evaluation methods, racist and disproportionate discipline measures, union busting, and the degradation educators' contracts. In Seattle, at the same time that our class sizes are increasing and resources are shrinking, we face pressure to meet standards set by unfair and biased measures of evaluation. Circumstances beyond our control dictate whether or not we may expect to keep our jobs for another year, keeping us in a constant state of anxiety. How does this benefit teachers and students? SEA members are fully aware that unless we want to continue down the path of losing more job protections, we have no choice but to transform our union into one that can turn the tide.

### What Can We Do?

The Social Equality Educators (SEE) seek to strengthen our union to become one that prioritizes the needs of our colleagues, students and families over accommodating the agenda of those who wish to profit from public education and deny us fully funded schools with rich curriculum. In the struggle to "scrap the MAP" test, we on the Respect slate discovered for ourselves that building coalitions with parents, students, and community organizations is the key to successfully defending the integrity of our workplaces and quality of education for our students. We organized, strategized, built alliances, took direct action, and won an important victory of making the MAP test optional at the high school level. We achieved solidarity among families, students, and community members, because ultimately the fight for education justice affects all of us. Our work in the schools can reach its fullest potential if we have a winning strategy for protecting and strengthening the soul of public education. This is the strategy will need if we are going to win the contract that educators deserve.

### You Deserve Respect

The SEE RESPECT slate and our allies are running for union leadership because we want to cultivate a member-driven union that respects teacher voice and dignity along with the voices and dignity of our students and families. YOU are the union. We need your involvement. We need to hear you and work with you to build the school district Seattle's students deserve. Let's build a struggle to do the work we became

educators to do, and make an education system that empowers us to educate, unfettered by over-testing and unsustainable evaluation systems.

To achieve this vision we need your help: visit [socialequalityeducators.org](http://socialequalityeducators.org) to endorse Respect, donate to the campaign and **pass along this letter to other educators who want to build a stronger SEA.**

Yours in struggle,

The **Respect Ticket**





### Educators' Vision

Published By the Social Equality Educators (SEE)

Volume 4, Issue 6,  
January 2014

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**Educators' Vision** is a monthly newsletter of the Social Equality Educators

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### Mission

Social Equality Educators (SEE) is a new rank-and-file organization of educators inside the Seattle Education Association that seeks to transform education in terms that empower students, teachers, and the communities that our public schools serve. As members of the SEA we understand that the educator's union has a vital role to play in creating an equitable education system. As educators we understand the importance of using culturally relevant and holistic curriculum to empower our students. We have come together to fight against the corporate reform of our schools and to organize for a socially just education system.

Educators' Vision

## Solidarity with Chicago teachers' test boycott

Teachers in Chicago take a stand against standardized testing abuse

The following statement originally appeared on February 25th in Jesse Hagopian's blog at [lamaneducator.com](http://lamaneducator.com)

A BEAUTIFUL thing happened today. Teachers at Maria Saucedo Scholastic Academy voted unanimously to refuse to administer the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT).

Since teachers at Garfield High School--and then several other schools in Seattle--voted to boycott the MAP test last year, there has been an explosion of activism against high-stakes standardized tests. And yet outside of Seattle, there had not yet been another school where the entire staff collectively raised its voice and boycotted a test--that is, until now.

The brave teachers at Saucedo Elementary are taking up the struggle and using the power of collective action to refuse to waste students' valuable class time with another destructive test. As the teachers have pointed out, getting rid of the ISAT would leave the students with still a plethora of standardized tests, including the MAP tests, new Interim Benchmark Tests, REACH Performance Tasks, ACCESS tests, NAEP tests, pilot Common Core tests and more. Already, hundreds of parents at Saucedo have pledged to opt their child out of the ISAT.

With the Parents and teachers united in this struggle, Saucedo is now on the front lines in the battle for authentic assessment. They will need our support. Please take a minute and sign the petition in the defense of the Saucedo educators--then send it on to everyone you know who believes that education should be about critical thinking, imagination, joy and collaboration--not about rote memorization and eliminating wrong answer choices.

*The statement below was made by a charter school teacher who requested to remain anonymous. Dan Troccoli*

"Of all the schools in Chicago, I teach here because of our game-like, systems-thinking, narrative-driven curriculum. However, it has been tough with the lack of stability the past couple years. Since I've been here, I've seen huge turnover, which is a big problem for students, teachers and staff. Our school model needs teachers to stay in the same positions for a couple years to create and improve their curriculum. I believe that a union will help make the school stable and promote teacher and staff retention, which in turn will help our kids' education.

I'd like to share some numbers with you to tell you

From my experience in helping to organize the MAP boycott in Seattle, here is the advice I have for the Saucedo teachers:

Corporate education reformers will use their wealth to publicize the idea that you teachers are selfish and your refuse to give the test will damage students. They will complain that teachers don't want to be held accountable and that high-stakes standardized is the key to improving education. Don't listen to them.

They are pushing these tests because it's a multi-billion-dollar industry and because reducing the intellectual process of teaching and learning to a single score is the centerpiece of their plan to label the public schools as failing and then push their privatizing agenda. Instead, listen to the many thousands of parents, students, and teachers around the nation that are supporting you in this struggle to assert that our children and educators are more than a test score.

The corporate education reformers, and the politicians they have bought, will issue threats of discipline for your audacity in refusing to hand the schools over to testing companies. They threatened us in Seattle when we refused to give the MAP test, but we showed that the power of solidarity can overcome the powerful. Not a single teacher was disciplined and the MAP test was made optional through our struggle.

We scrapped the MAP. You can Ice the ISAT!

what I've felt the past year and a half, since I started at this school.

- Right now, there are 13 teachers who worked here last year, and 16 teachers who are new this year.
- Since I started I have lost 5 administrators, 11 teachers, and 2 support staff.
- Only 3 classroom teachers (out of 18) are teaching the exact same content and grade level as last year.

Some teachers teach part of an old course but also a course in another grade level. Last year we received a letter in our mailbox the last week of school confirming what content and grade level we were teaching, and some teachers were notified one week before they had to report back to school that they were teaching an extra course in a different grade level. My first year here, I spent about 13 hours a week outside of school creating and planning my curriculum. Informing

Volume 4, Issue 4, January 2014

## The best way to avoid a strike is to prepare for one

Teachers in Portland and St. Paul win fair contracts and improved learning conditions for students

The full length article appeared on Feb. 25th and can be read at <http://www.labornotes.org/2014/02/portland-teachers-nearly-strike-win-150-new-jobs>

After coming to the brink of what would have been the first strike in their union's history, Portland, Oregon, teachers are instead voting this week on a contract that reduces workload significantly.

Up till the end, administrators had refused to budge on workload, the teachers' top priority. But the district agreed to hire 150 teachers for next school year, potentially reducing class sizes by more than 5 percent.

Teachers in St. Paul, Minnesota, reached a settlement the same week, averting their own strike vote over similar issues.

The Portland walkout was set for February 20. With two school days left to go, teachers had cleared out their classrooms. Books, supplies, and decorations were boxed up and put in storage. The district called for a shortened school day February 19, to give administrators time to collect teachers' computers, keys, and badges.

Over the previous weekend teachers and community members had gathered at locations around the city to make signs, preparing for picketing at every school.

It all worked. In a 23-hour bargaining session, administrators finally agreed to address teacher working conditions. In addition to adding 150 teachers, the deal includes more planning time for elementary and special education teachers. Teachers

teachers that they are going to take this on for a second or third year is not a decision that should be made without teacher input or advanced notice.

As this is evidence of an unstable school experience, moving forward our union wants to work together, with CICS and Civitas charter school leadership, parents, and students to right the ship. With all hands on deck we can not only work hard, but work smart to improve our school. With our union, teachers will have a voice in important decisions, teachers and staff will feel less overwhelmed when roles are clarified, more confident in taking risks and pushing their teaching, and ultimately students will benefit from less teacher and staff turnover and more consistency."

Educators' Vision

will get a cost-of-living increase in pay, but agreed to phase out eligibility for early retirement benefits (a stipend and insurance for up to five years).

All along, the union sought to use the contract to improve teaching and learning conditions.

Modeled after the work done by Chicago teachers, "The Schools Portland Students Deserve" was presented as a preamble to PAT's initial contract proposal. It called for equity of funding and programs across schools; lower class sizes and caseloads; wrap-around services such as counseling and social work; a whole-child curriculum including the arts and physical education; and an end to the misuse of standardized testing.

But the district refused to talk about any of these issues, including class size. It argued that these were "permissive" subjects, meaning that by state law the district was not required to discuss them.

The district's initial proposal included 75 significant take-backs. It would have dramatically increased managerial rights, reduced workers' compensation and rights, and increased workload.

In September, school board member Matt Morton voiced the board's intention to get "aggressive" with teachers. After the district proposed to gut the contract, nobody with the authority to negotiate participated in a single face-to-face bargaining session with teachers until after the district declared impasse on November 20. As a result, virtually no progress was made during the first six months of official bargaining.

Superintendent Carole Smith finally began to participate in December, resulting in some movement, but not on issues most important to teachers, including workload.

More than 2,800 PAT members—virtually the whole membership—packed a concert hall February 5 for the stand-up strike vote, which passed with an estimated 98 percent. Arriving teachers were cheered on by hundreds of community members rallying outside in the freezing cold, with signs that read "We've Got Your Back" and "Support Our Teachers."

Social Equality Educators SEE

Charter school teachers in Chicago boldly move to unionize

## All teachers need a union

Over mid-winter break I went to Chicago to spend time and learn from teacher activists in the Chicago Teachers Union.

One of the union's myriad organizing efforts is the Association of Charter Teachers and Staff (ACTS) wing that is trying to

organize charter schools. While I was in town, ACTS had an action speaking out at a board meeting of the Chicago International Charter Schools (CICS).

These brave teachers are not yet recognized union members, though about 10% of Charters in Chicago are unionized.

The working conditions and turnover they described made my jaw drop. This is what we can expect to come in WA.

Volume 4, Issue 4, January 2014