

Educators' Vision

Published By the Social Equality Educators (SEE) Volume 2, Issue 1, September 2011

Social Equality Educators (SEE) help score victory against TFA!

When the Apple Store announced a new program to promote Teach for America (TFA) in Seattle, the Social Equality Educators (SEE) went into action.

The Apple Store recently entered into a strategic partnership with TFA asking its customers to donate used iPads so that Apple can donate the machines to TFA "core members." The Apple Store in the University Village made an enormous window display advertising the Apple/TFA Partnership, complete with larger than life cut-outs of a diverse array of young, energetic-looking TFA recruits surrounding a stack of giant-scale books topped by a giant-scale iPad. The display says, "Your iPad is even more powerful in the hands of a teacher."

SEE joined with Parents Across America Seattle (PAAS) to organize an action at the University Village to protest the growing influence that corporate America has been exerting over public education. We wanted to raise public awareness about Teach for America, a multi-million dollar organization with the business strategy of giving teachers five weeks of training and sending them into public classrooms that have high concentrations of minority students. In Seattle, parents and teachers have been especially critical of TFA recruits being used in the public schools since there are so many accredited teachers with years of training trying to get teaching positions in the district.

An intrepid group of educators and parents entered into the Apple store and to raise awareness about the growing push by corporations and billionaires to staff our public schools with these ill-prepared TFA teachers.

"I am public school teacher and I am here to collect my iPad." These were the words of one Seattle educator who challenged the manager at the Apple store. The manager replied that the iPads were a special promotion only for TFA. The teacher responded by asking how TFA was chosen and if the TFA got to take the iPad with them when they were finished teaching in two years. The Apple Store manager confessed that he didn't know how the program worked. After the interview, the parents and teachers rallied in front of the store and passed out informational flyers about how TFA was eroding education in the Seattle Public Schools.

This action, coupled with an e-mail and calling campaign, has really paid off: The Apple store has removed the TFA display from its window, canceled its iPad promotion for TFA, and most importantly taught educators and parents a big lesson: if you organize and make your voice heard, you can win!

Stay informed while saving trees: sign up to get Educators' Vision news, articles and announcements in a paperless electronic format — online at www.seattlesee.org.



Get active with other progressive educators in your union!

Come check out these two upcoming Social Equality Educator events:

1. You are invited to the next SEE Meeting!

What: We will be sharing radical lesson plans, planning for the NW Conference on Teaching for Social Justice, and taking everyone's ideas for what issues to work on this year

When: Sat., Sept. 24, 1:00 p.m.

Where: Jesse Hagopian's House— 3223 S. Hanford St. 98144 (right next to Franklin HS)

RSVP: 206.851.4963 or info@seattlesee.org

2. Happy Hour With an Attitude:

A social space for activist teachers

On the last Friday of every month, come unwind from the busy week and meet other educators who want to stand up to the attacks on public education.

Where: Twilight Exit, 2514 E Cherry St., Seattle, WA 98122

Phone: 206.324.7462

When: Starting at 3 p.m.

Next happy hour: Friday, September 30th. SEE you there!



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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.

Tacoma teachers defy injunction to strike

By Dan Troccoli

Teachers in the Tacoma Education Association (TEA) voted September 15 by a 93 percent margin to continue their strike and defy a judge's order to return to work. The strike began after a TEA union meeting September 12, when 87 percent of the approximately 1,900 TEA members voted to strike a week after the start of school.

At the heart of the impasse is the issue of the use of seniority in teacher displacements and transfers.

Nathan Gibbs-Bowling, a teacher at Lincoln High School, says a proposed 10-part formula that the district wants to use in layoffs is subjective and can lead to favoritism. "Given the current status of evaluations in the district--abysmal and sometimes completely fabricated--we find using them as the basis for job assignment untenable," he said. "I recognize seniority is flawed, but it's transparent. Whatever we transition to needs to be equally transparent."

For example, among the district's proposal for criteria on the evaluations is "Contributing to school effectiveness through collaboration with others." TEA members described that as the "not a good building fit" clause.

Other sticking points are pay decreases and class size. Initially, the district sought a two-student increase in class size, though they have since withdrawn that proposal. But district officials refuse to budge on the TEA's demand to lower class size by one student.

Also shaping this struggle is Washington state's decision to cut its funds targeted for teacher pay by 1.9 percent. However, individual school districts retain the ability to choose how to impose that reduction. For its part, Tacoma Public Schools (TPS) has proposed a choice between taking away personal days or cutting the salary schedule to achieve that reduction.

Neighboring districts have agreed with unions to implement furlough days. Some districts even completely covered the deficit of state money with their own reserve funds. But though TPS has the largest reserves in the state--some \$45 million--the district is refusing to use that money to avoid pay cuts for teachers.

As soon as the strike began, TPS was in court seeking an injunction to force teachers back to work. On September 14, Pierce County Superior Court Judge Bryan Chushcoff issued a temporary restraining order forcing the two sides back to the bargaining table. According to Reuters [1], the judge mandated teachers "to report to work and to discharge their assigned employment responsibilities in accordance with the school calendar and individual employment contracts."

While lawyers from their union were busy interpreting the language of the restraining order, TEA members continued to walk the picket line the afternoon of September 15 and the following morning before voting to continue the strike.

As the Associated Press noted [2], while public employee strikes are not protected in Washington, the state legislature has not explicitly banned them. In court, TPS argued that "19 different judges in Washington state have ruled teacher strikes illegal since 1976." The union has countered that the district hasn't bargained in good faith, and that "the court should not inject itself into the bargaining process, while also suggesting the injunction only applies to union leaders."

TEA members on the picket lines were resolute. "If we have to do what we have to do to get what's in the best interests of the kids, I'll do what I have to do," said Deb Sanford, a 6th grade science teacher at First Creek Middle School. "I'll take the consequences whatever they may be. But I'm willing to do that or I wouldn't be here."

Another teacher, preferring to remain anonymous, went further: "They used the injunction as a way to scare the teachers to see if we were going to break. We're not breaking, because right is right and wrong is wrong. Times are too hard. We shouldn't have to teach under those conditions."

For its part, the district has been intransigent from the start, hiring an outside negotiator at the beginning of contract talks. It has also used robo-calls to update teachers and family members on the status of bargaining, but many teachers claim these robo-calls have spread mistruths about the union.

Support from the community, students and parents was evident from honks from passersby and supporters on the picket line. "The parents of the students I work with are able to connect the dots and see how this is an attack," said Gibbs-Bowling, the Lincoln High School teacher. "I had a mother whose son Nick is in my largest class, over thirty students, come walk

4th Annual Conference



NW Teachers for Social Justice

Sat October 1, 2011 • 8 a.m. to 4:30 a.m.

Chief Sealth International High School, Seattle, WA

Keynote: Karen Lewis

President of the Chicago Teachers Union
“Moving Toward Social Justice in These Hostile Times”

Special Guest: Stan Karp

Rethinking Schools editor
Coordinator of ‘Not Waiting for Superman’ project

Samples of Scheduled Workshops:

- Closeted Silence
- Unpacking the Ode
- The Politics of Naming
- Gender and Sexuality 101
- From Real to imagined ELL
- Stories of Subversion: Mathematics in Action
- Do Your Students Know Enough to Go to War?
- Helping Undocumented Students Get to College
- Using Scandal to Create Inquiry-based Discussion
- Nature and Labor: From Disposability to Sustainability
- Honoring Our Ancestors: Bringing Students’ Lives into the Classroom

Register Online Now: www.nwtsj.org

- Lunch included. \$30.00, \$5.00 students
- No one will be turned away for inability to pay. Please let us know in advance if you need assistance.
- Clock hours or one quarter credit available.

Organized by teacher activists from: Puget Sound Rethinking Schools, Portland Area Rethinking Schools, Olympia Educators for Social Justice, Tacoma Coalition X, Rethinking Schools magazine.

For more information, contact info@nwtsj.org



the line with us. There were, throughout the day, dozens of parents and students with us.”

Commenting on the TEA website, WeTeachTacoma.org [3], teachers summed up the importance of the strike. “We cannot be effective teachers if we are in a state of constant anxiety about our job security,” wrote Barbara Vleck.

One teacher from Wisconsin commented on the website about the importance of the strike:

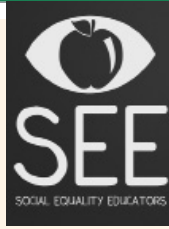
As you know, you’re not fighting for only yourselves, but also the kids in your classrooms. Your working conditions are their classroom conditions, and if these sorts of school board policies and tactics are carried out, the face of education is going to change quickly from one of diverse experience and skills to one that’s young, inexperienced and quickly burned-out. That’s not what I want my son to experience in his school, and it’s not what I want any of you to have to see. Keep on fighting! This is important, and we’re all in it together!

The strike took place after the opening of the school year because of a TEA union bylaw that requires an astronomical 80 percent vote of favor of strike--under this year, the initial strike vote failed by 28 votes. Consequently, Tacoma teachers began the school year without a contract.

The district apparently believed that more teachers would be reluctant to strike. However, teachers recognized the importance of defending seniority, and many feel that the additional time taken to achieve the 80 percent margin was worth it, as it gave them additional solidarity.

TEA members will need to maintain that solidarity to continue to pressure the district and defend their seniority. They deserve the support of students, other teachers, union members and activists everywhere.

Social Equality Educators New Member Form



Today's Date ____/____/____

Membership dues for SEE are \$35 for SPS teachers, \$20 for paraprofessionals and retired teachers. Associate (non-voting) members, who are not part of SPS, pay \$20. Make checks out to "Social Equality Educators".

Name: _____

Position (teacher, paraprofessional, etc.): _____

School Name: _____

Area: _____ SEA Rep? yes no

Cell Phone: _____

Email (Non-SPS preferred): _____

Home Address (include city & zip): _____

Home Phone: _____

Please fill out the following:

1. **How do you feel about working with SEE in the next few months?**

- I'll do what I can Not sure Can't right now

2. **Which of your skills/interests would you like to put to use for SEE?**

- Planning events and/or finding/donating goods/services (like copying, food, etc.)
 Making phone/e-mail/in-person contacts with teachers/parents/students
 Being on an action phone or e-mail tree to mobilize members
 Organizing within your community/school to increase awareness and SEE event participation
 Data entry
 Research/Writing/Media
 Blog monitoring and posting
 Photography/Videography/Graphic design/visual arts
 Other (please specify): _____

3. **How did you first hear about SEE?**

- Word of mouth/friend/personal contact website
 Other News Sources Union
 Other (where?): _____

Please visit www.SeattleSEE.org or call 206.962.1685 for more information.

What We Stand For

A Strong Contract We believe that a strong contract provides competitive compensation, adequate learning environments and basic job protections to the membership. A strong contract also promotes proven educational methods. A strong contract can only be won by mobilizing, educating and using feedback from the membership. The contract should always be ratified using the most democratic of methods that allows ample time for debate, discussion, and reflection by the membership.

A member-driven union We believe that a member driven union is one that is constantly encouraging the participation of more educators, and that fosters transparency and accountability of the elected leadership.

Oppose the Corporate Education Reform Agenda We oppose the major initiatives embodied in the Race to the Top (RTTT) program that relies on market-based approaches for our schools. Therefore, we oppose privatizing influence of charter schools that drain desperately needed funds from public schools. We oppose merit pay and other initiatives that seek to define teaching and learning through curriculum narrowing/culturally biased standardized tests.

Full Funding/Funding Equity Washington State has been ruled in court to be in violation of the Basic Education Funding Act. We demand that the state fully fund the schools, using a method that creates funding equity across school districts.

Culturally relevant curriculum/ holistic education We believe in curriculum that reflects the needs and desires of the community that the school serves. For too long, the dominant pedagogy has not adequately represented working-class children and children of color. All students should have the opportunity to learn about their culture. As well, our schools should not only equip students with the basic knowledge of the core subjects, but also help them develop skills such as civic courage, leadership, teamwork and social responsibility, to help them better understand their world and their collective self-interest.

Building alliances The Social Equality Educators see natural allies in parents, students, progressive education community advocates, and other unions in labor movement. We seek to strengthen these alliances through a sincere dialogue about how to improve education and by building common struggles to defend each other's interests.