

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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## Joint Statement of AFT Detroit

### Detroit Schools Budget Fails the Test

When Emergency Manager Roy Roberts presents his first budget for Detroit Public Schools (DPS) tonight, the real bottom line must be improving student learning. We believe that begins by making sure when Detroit's children enter schools this fall that they have certified, quality teachers in classrooms, adequately staffed buildings, and up-to-date textbooks and supplies on Day One.

Everyone knows—from teachers to parents to our governor—that smaller class sizes matter when it comes to educating students. That's why the Detroit Federation of Teachers successfully bargained for lower class sizes and we applaud Mr. Roberts for honoring this agreement in his proposed budget. We also agree with his proposals to significantly reduce consultant contracts and administrative staff so in tight budget times the priority is putting the most resources into classrooms not offices.

Unfortunately, the budget—providing quality schools and education for our children—fails the test when it comes to the real bottom line of student achievement and investing in the people who we count on the most to provide the tools, the environment and the dedication needed to achieve excellence. This proposed budget also fails to deal with two issues that will continually undercut our children's education if not addressed—the lack of funding for special education children and our crippling debt service.

The people who will be opening the doors to our schools next fall and unlocking the potential of our children—our teachers, school secretaries, paraprofessionals—aren't just line items in a budget. They are people who must provide for their own families. Outside of parents, they are the people we count on the most when it comes to the educational success of our kids.

What does it say about our seriousness in achieving an educational turnaround in Detroit Public Schools if we are drastically cutting the wages and benefits of the people who are on the frontlines of education? Why would we devalue those whose dedication to our kids we count on every single day? What does it say for the future of Detroit Public Schools if we fail to keep our best and brightest teachers and staff?

For Velma, a secretary at a DPS middle school, the proposed 10% wage cut and the requirement that she pays 20% of her health care premium will, in effect, result in her hourly wage being cut from \$18.82 to \$ 13.56/hr. She has a 10<sup>th</sup> grader and a 12<sup>th</sup> grader in DPS. How will she be able to provide for their well being?

For the same reasons, Catherine, a paraprofessional with three children attending DPS will see her hourly wage effectively reduced from \$9.48 to \$6.93/hr. How will she be able to provide for her children's well being?

Teachers in 96% of metropolitan Detroit districts were already receiving better salaries than DPS even before the proposed wage and benefit reductions in this budget. Should we be surprised if many of our most dedicated and skilled teachers consider taking their talents elsewhere so they can better support their families?

While Mr. Roberts is new to today's Detroit Public Schools, he must consider the fact that DPS teachers and staff have taken concessions for years. Office employees have not had a raise since 2002. These workers already pay up to 40% of their health care premiums.

The argument will be that these cuts, as bad as they are, are necessary. But the facts tell a different story.

DPS is projected to receive over \$1 billion in revenue for approximately 66,000 students next year. That computes to over \$15,000 per child, more money than 90% of metro Detroit districts. When DPS receives more money than other districts and already pays employees less than other districts, why do we need to drastically reduce compensation?

Part of the answer is that DPS educates nearly 12,000 special education children, but receives funds for only 5,800. While DPS educates the same number of children as charter schools in Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties, our special education population is nine times larger. DPS is penalized for serving so many of our special needs children. This is wrong and must change. Funding DPS for the education of ALL of our special education children would add \$44 million in revenue.

Moreover, while we believe that moving \$200 million of the DPS debt to long term is a first step in reducing costs, a strategy must be developed to not just refinance the debt but eliminate it. Refinancing the debt saves \$13 million. Implementing a strategy to eliminate it would reduce costs by \$54 million.

Over the years, we have offered numerous ideas to increase revenue and cut expenses in ways that do not negatively impact our students. We look forward to sitting down with Mr. Roberts to again discuss our ideas. All we want is what is good for students and fair to teachers and staff.

*AFT Detroit includes the Detroit Federation of Teachers, the Detroit Federation of Paraprofessionals and the Detroit Association of Educational Office Employees, three locals of the American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO, representing approximately 8,000 DPS employees.*