

Buffalo Forum



Local Publication of the
U.S. Marxist-Leninist Organization

Workers of all countries, unite!

IN THIS ISSUE:

- Our Schools, Our Rights, We Decide ...3-4
- January 14 Action (photos)5
- Keep Bennett Public (photos) 6
- Protests Against Cuomo (photos) 7-11
- Philadelphia & Chicago Teachers 12-14
- Albany Protest Jan. 21 (photos) 16

January 23, 2015

Vol. 19 #1

ADVANCE INDEPENDENT ORGANIZING BEYOND SCHOOL BOARD VOTE

Our Schools, Our Rights, We Decide!

Students, parents, teachers, staff, principals and alumni are going all out to mobilize to defend the right to education and keep Buffalo public schools open and public. They are standing against Governor Cuomo's efforts to impose an education dictator ("czar") on Buffalo and eliminate the elected School Board and any public say in education. At

demonstrations on January 1, 12, 14 and 22 they united to demand *Public Control of Public Schools! Full Funding Now! Equal Rights for All!* (see reports and photos p.4-7).

These actions were in addition to planning meetings and the public meetings organized by the four schools scheduled

Our Schools, We Decide • 3

EDUCATION IS A RIGHT

People Demand: Vote Yes for Redesign Plans Created by the Schools Public Control of Public Schools!

On January 14, teachers, students, parents and community organizers stood together to demand that the Buffalo Board of Education *Vote Yes* for redesign plans created by the public schools. Four schools — Bennett, East, Lafayette and MLK — are currently scheduled for

closure and potentially privatization. Participants in the action, including many youth and teachers, said *NO!* to these plans. No to privatization, no to closing public schools. Through signs, chants and speeches, the firm and united stand was

Yes for Redesign Plans • 4

STATE OF STATE ADDRESS

Cuomo to Launch Major Attack on Right to Education

In his State of the State address January 21, Governor Andrew Cuomo confirmed that he is launching another major attack on the right to education this year. While he did not mention a possible education "czar," (dictator) he did indicate he will head in that direction and may yet impose

Cuomo Attacks Education • 9

Needed:

A Democracy of Our Own Making

The current struggle to keep our public schools open and public and raise their quality is bringing to the fore the undemocratic nature of the existing democracy. The voice of the public has little standing while individuals elected with a few thousand votes can make decisions impacting the entire school system.

The existing school board, like all elected bodies at all levels, was elected with a small percentage of eligible voters. The three at-large members most recently elected, for example, were all elected with less than 9,000 votes out of more than 142,000 eligible Buffalo voters. About 13 percent of voters participated. None of the board members have secured majorities (50% + 1 of eligible voters) in their districts, or citywide for the at-large positions, as this is not required. Why not? Why not require the winning of a majority.

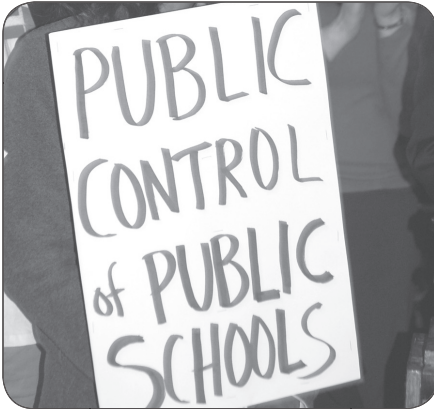
Democracy of Our Making • 2

**KEEP OUR PUBLIC
SCHOOLS OPEN AND
PUBLIC AND RAISE
THEIR QUALITY**

RALLY AND SPEAK OUT

**4:30PM, JANUARY 28
PERFORMING ARTS HS
FERRY AND MASTEN**

**5:30PM PACK THE SCHOOL
BOARD MEETING**



Support the Building of the Communist Press!

Subscribe to VOICE OF REVOLUTION

The national paper of the U.S. Marxist-Leninist Organization. *VOR* works to raise the level of political discussion in society by taking stands that provide a way forward, oppose the chauvinism and racism of the U.S. state, and advance the interests of the working class and people. *VOR* also reports on the organizing work to build the alternative by Creating Politics of Empowerment. Together It Can Be Done! Read, write and distribute *VOR*.

**office@usmlo.org
www.usmlo.org**

Buffalo Forum

The local edition. Send us your views, comments, letters, and reports on activities. *Buffalo Forum* will respond to all serious letters to further develop political discussion with its readers. We want to know what you think!

**716-602-8077
buffaloforum@usmlo.org
usmlo.org/buffaloforum**

***Join in this
Vital Work!
Help Build the
Discussion!***

Subscriptions:

One year: \$65
Sustainer levels start at \$100
(Monthly payment plans available from your distributor.)

**Send check or money
order payable to:
USMLO, P.O. Box 331
Buffalo, NY 14209**

I • DEMOCRACY OF OUR MAKING

Perhaps then the voice of the public would have more place!

While elected officials often blame the voters for low turn out, they, and the electoral system they are a part of, are also responsible for the fact that the large majority of voters do not participate. For a variety of reasons — endless false promises by politicians; repeated government attacks on rights when the public demands instead that rights be respected; the silencing of the public voice as is occurring now; the refusal of politicians to organize and engage the public through meetings and other means; the reality that money talks or really shouts — people are rejecting all these aspects of the existing setup. It is not a valid expression of the public will. Indeed, as the plans to close the public schools despite broad opposition indicate, the public will has no place. This needs to be changed. This disconnect between the public will and what is imposed — the legal will — has to be eliminated. Those with authority are acting contrary to the conditions, conditions demanding a modern democracy of people's empowerment.

Modern democracy requires that the role

of the public be increased in all aspects — choosing candidates, organizing of elections, decision making on education and all matters of social concern, like poverty and police brutality. It is time for a democracy that empowers the people themselves to govern and decide.

The fight for Public Control of Public Schools is an opportunity to move forward in development of a democracy of our own making. Already the schools and other organized forces have acted to hold public meetings, mobilize among parents, teachers and students. Through demonstrations and meetings and organizing for them, working relations are being built, public opinion more broadly is being formed in favor of the calls for *Equal Rights for All! Our Schools, Our Rights, We Decide!* The redesign plans call for innovations in curriculum and the role of the schools as centers for organizing and teaching how to organize. This is a threat to those with power, like Governor Cuomo. His answer is to go backward, to a czar, a King, an education dictator. Ours is to go forward to develop a modern democracy of our making where we decide!

Keep Public Schools Open and Public and Raise Their Quality

Public schools belong to the public. These are our schools, our buildings, our public dollars and **WE** together need to decide their future. We parents, teachers, staff and students are the education experts and we need to have more decision-making power, not less. Together, with our united *Can Do!* spirit, we can raise the quality of public schools and develop projects and curriculum that assist the youth and our communities. Education is a right that belongs equally to all and public control is needed to achieve it.

We need *Public Control of Public Schools!* We need *Equal Rights for All!* We don't need more segregation and inequality. Right now Bennett, East, Lafayette and MLK public schools are under fire. But all Buffalo public schools are being targeted for possible closure, privatizing and handing over our public buildings to private charter schools — for free! The

redesign plans by the schools call for improving education, with more project-based, hands-on learning and having the schools serve as community organizing centers.

Governor Cuomo thinks he alone should decide about education and is planning to appoint a "czar," (ruthless dictator) that will take over the entire Buffalo school district and be able to close schools, privatize them, impose more rotten testing, limit curriculum even more, and hire and fire teachers and principals. These are our public schools and we say, "*We Decide!*"

On January 28, the School Board has a chance to stand up to the Governor and say, "NO!" to privatization and closing schools and no to a "czar," a dictator. Join the rally and speak out and demand that the board keep the public schools open and public!

(Based on a leaflet broadly distributed by the Buffalo Parent-Teacher Organization)

**DEMONSTRATE AT THE SCHOOL BOARD MEETING JANUARY 28, 4:30
PERFORMING ARTS HS, FERRY AND MASTEN**

I • OUR SCHOOLS, WE DECIDE

for closure — Bennett, East, Lafayette and MLK. These meetings involved the public and provided space for questions and comments about redesign plans and how to prevent the closing of these schools.

All four schools have developed redesign plans that include having the schools open at night and serving as community organizing centers, for classes, sports, family activities, day care and social justice issues. They represent an effort to innovate and improve the quality of education, an effort that necessarily involves students, teachers, staff, parents, alumni — all concerned — in decision making.

It is the determined and unifying spirit of all these actions that is serving



the public interest and advancing the fight for rights. It is a spirit and stand that says, “*Our Schools, Our Rights, We Decide!*” And it is one that recognizes that however the Board votes January 28, and whatever the state says, this fight is not over. These are *Our Schools and We Decide!*

It is critical to strengthen the independent organizing with continuing meetings, demonstrations and other means to block these efforts to remove the public from governance and wreck our public schools. Now is the time to step up our fight, further build our working relationships and involve more students in organizing for a quality education

that meets the needs of the youth and society. Whatever officials at the local and state level say, it is up to us together to continue to defend our rights, decide the fate of our schools and develop our own alternatives that meet the needs of all. The redesign plans are a start in that direction, let us take these plans and more like them forward ourselves.

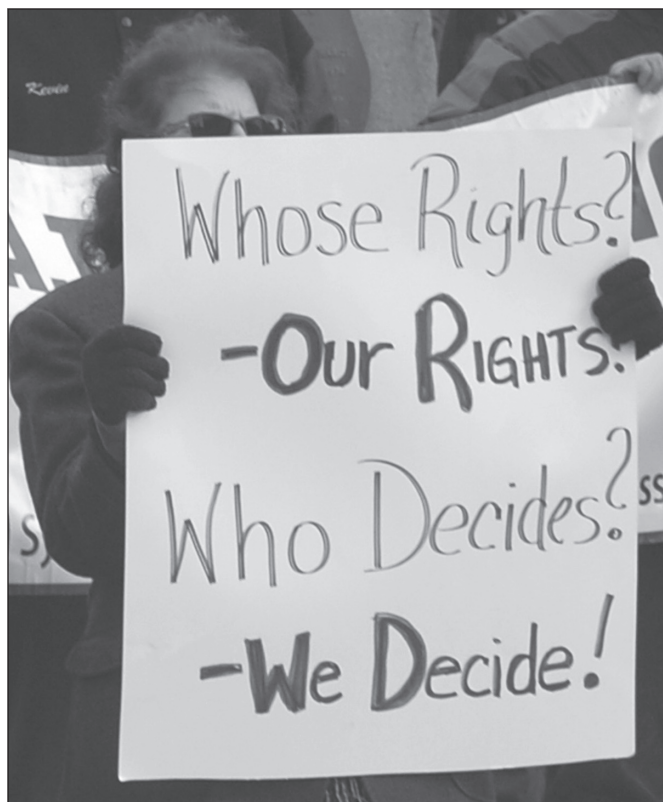
It is also notable that most board members did not attend the meetings and actions and did not make themselves available for questions from the public, even though it is public schools and hundreds of students and their families that

will be impacted. This is an indication of the increasingly undemocratic quality of such elected bodies, which serve more as instruments of dictate rather than as a space for the public to have their say.

An immediate focus for organizing is the January 28 School Board meeting, where a vote will be taken on whether to close and privatize the four schools. These schools, particularly Bennett and MLK, could also be handed over to private charter schools *for free* and possibly involve additional public expenses. The private charters are demanding not only free public space — where none of the existing students will be allowed to stay — but also that the public pay their utility bills and hand over all the equipment, like computers, in the buildings.

These are our public dollars, our public buildings, our schools. We urge all to *Join the Fight!* Come out to the School Board meeting January 28 and join the various organizing efforts that will continue.

All interested in joining the fight can contact Buffalo Forum: 716-602-8077 • buffaloforum@usmlo.org.



STATEMENT AT BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING

Balanced Curriculum, Adequate Staffing and After School Programs for All Children

Lawrence Scott, January 14, 2015



I am a Buffalo Public School parent and Co-Chair of the Buffalo Parent Teacher Organization. I speak tonight as a parent, a parent of a Buffalo Public school student and I am not a political plant.

The status quo reforms of the corporate elite — high-stakes testing, Common Core curriculum, charter schools and vouchers, are all unproven and spend millions of our public tax dollars for private entities and individuals to profit. These status quo reforms are destroying public education and are not representative of a true parent agenda, especially not for parents of children of color, who have a disability, and whose primary language is not English. A parent representative who serves a core mission to always put students and family needs

and interests ahead of all considerations, would never frantically support these reforms.

We keep hearing that Charter Schools are public schools, something I once believed. It might be hard for some to accept, but they are not public schools!

Even NY state law declares that they are not:

“A charter school shall be exempt from all other state and local, rules, regulations, or policies governing public and private schools, boards of education and school districts and political subdivisions, including those related to school personnel and students...”

Here are some facts demonstrating that charters are not public:

Balanced Curriculum • 7

I • YES FOR REDESIGN PLANS

for *Public Control of Public Schools*. This resonated repeatedly in the chant, *Whose Schools? Our Schools! Whose Schools? Our Schools!*

The action was timed to take place at the same time as the private executive session of the Board of Education (BOE) at Waterfront School. In taking the stand and giving space to the public to speak and strengthen unity, the action showed that it is the people who are democratic and standing for the equal right to education for all.

Despite the bitter cold, more than 100 gathered outside Waterfront School to speak out, chant and make their views known. Protesters were blocked from entering Waterfront for close to an hour by top Board officials. This was despite the fact that the building was open, is public, and the action would not have disrupted any classes or other school activities. The undemocratic stand of these Board officials was further evident when they refused to allow signs into the public BOE meeting, held at 5:30pm.

Protesters were undeterred. They organized to have t-shirts making clear their demands to *Vote Yes* for Bennett, East, Lafayette, and MLK. Many also spoke at the meeting, turning it into a speak-out as well. A large crowd of more than 250, with many youth and teachers, participated inside. In the public comment section, not a single person called for voting down the redesign plans created by the schools. Students, parents and teachers one after the other supported the plans and keeping their public schools public and open. When one of the speakers, an MLK teacher, asked the crowd if they wanted public control of their public schools, the majority stood to say YES!

Students from different schools, including Bennett and Riverside — scheduled to be closed next year — confidently spoke and supported their teachers, making clear that teachers and youth are not the problem. Together people expressed their readiness to tackle the real problems facing Buffalo schools — such as the need for more innovative curriculum and having the

schools serve as organizing centers for the communities that surround them. The stand of teachers, students and parents together made clear the public is ready to tackle and solve problems with a *Can Do!* spirit.

In various ways people brought to the fore that the main problem is that students, teachers, staff and parents do not decide matters of education and this is unjust and undemocratic. They are the experts and they cannot be shut out, as top Board officials and Governor Cuomo are trying to do.

As one speech put it, this is not the time for czars or Kings or any individual appointed executives that can dictate such public matters as education and closing of schools. Modern democracy and modern education require an increase in the role of the public, not eliminating it.

It was clear from the large crowd and many speakers that the public is ready to govern and decide and that is the fight now being waged. As the crowd loudly told the Board: *Whose Schools? Our Schools! Who Decides? We Decide!*



LETTER FROM TAPESTRY PARENT

Tapestry Parents Did Not Approve Plan to Take Over Bennett

Dear School Board Members,

I am parent at Tapestry Charter School and I am very concerned about the ill-conceived plan for Tapestry to take over part of Bennett High School. First, Tapestry administrators lied to parents on December 15, 2014 and stated that they would not be applying for space at Bennett. They have not sought and do not have parental support for such a move.

Second, the Tapestry high school principal told me last week in no uncertain terms that if Tapestry does get space at Bennett, the school will not accept any current Bennett students for any reason. That is right — not one Bennett student will be allowed to attend Tapestry High School.

Third, Tapestry K-8 test scores and

Business First ranking has plummeted since the previous expansion at Tapestry, with only 12percent of 4th grade students proficient in math. An additional expansion is likely to have a further negative impact on K-8 outcomes, putting the sustainability of Tapestry in jeopardy.

Fourth, Tapestry only had 166 student attendance days in 2013-2014, which is 14 days LESS than BPS. The Charter School Institute issued a remedial order to Tapestry, as they failed to meet the minimum hours of instruction required by law. Tapestry is not providing more school, but rather significantly less. They are currently five days under the requirements for 2014-2015 year and it is likely another formal complaint will be filed regarding an

instructional time violation.

Fifth, world renowned civil rights expert and scholar Gary Orfield has asked the district to wait for his report on desegregating BPS. The district has been sued for civil rights violations and ignoring the recommendations of a world-leading scholar will not bode well for the district, or most importantly, its students.

Turning Bennett over to charter schools will not help the Bennett students and ignoring Orfield's recommendations will not help any underserved student in the district. Please wait for Orfield's recommendations and please do what is best for the Bennett students — accept the Bennett turn-around plan.

Thank you for your time.



RALLY AT BENNETT JAN. 22 DEMANDS PUBLIC CONTROL, DEFENDS RIGHTS OF ALL AND CALLS FOR YES VOTE ON REDESIGN PLAN

4 • BALANCED CURRICULUM

Fact 1

They do not have a publicly elected school board. It is a private board usually made up of a wealthy few, who are privately appointed, often self-appointed. The public has no say on who is appointed.

Fact 2

Charters are often not subject to open records or open meeting laws. The media and public are not permitted to attend Charter School board meetings, like so many are freely exercising tonight.

Fact 3

Charters have even argued in court that they are not public, and therefore, not subject to state audits and laws which public schools are required to comply with, including discipline policies and how they suspend students and expel students. [On average their suspension rates are often twice as high or more than public schools — BF Ed. Note]

Fact 4

Charters can set their own standards on enrollment promoting an exclusion of particular students, especially those in special education, who are English Language Learners (ELL), and those who are a behavior challenge. I know of no charter school that provides specialized classrooms for students with significant cognitive, emotional, and learning disabilities. They are not welcome. In a business mind, these students cannot compete and are costly to educate. They do not yield high returns; they are not a wise investment. Our Special Education Parent Advisory Committee should be outraged!

The only thing that is really public about Charters are the public funds provided for each Charter student. But, as soon as they reach the private board or manager, they are no longer public tax dollars, no longer accountable to the public on how they are used and spent. Yesterday's news showed exactly why this is problematic, with Gateway-Longview, a private education agency for children with disabilities, flagged by a state audit for fraudulently mispending \$2.4 million of our tax dollars, some of it on cars, cellphones, flowers, and food.

We are repeatedly hearing the catchphrase of "high performing charters" as the ultimate panacea. I tried to find a definition



or criteria for a "high performing charter," but I could not find anything.

We now know that the Charter School for Applied Technologies (CSAT) and Tapestry Charter School are interested in taking over our public school buildings without paying a dime. I wondered, are these the "high performing charters" that the reformers keep talking about. Absent a definition and criteria for "high performing," I thought I would apply the same unreliable and flawed test data, which our state uses to deem our schools, educators, and students failures and to justify drastic and unproven reforms. Here is what I found.

Last year, at Applied Technologies, only 16% of 8th graders were proficient in ELA and only 17% proficient in Math. At Tapestry, only 30% of 8th graders were proficient in ELA, while only 14% were proficient in Math. Is this the "high performance" that you are investing in? And, let us remember they do not have even close to the same number of those costly ELL and special education students. At MLK, by the way, 30% of its students have a disability, 25% with a severe disability — 25% of their student population that no charter will service. Maybe cellphones, cars, and flowers are the answer.

We need education methods proven to work:

1. A balanced curriculum, including the arts, social studies, cultural studies, and regular physical education

2. Adequate staffing, including librarians, nurses, social workers, psychologists, and counselors

3. After-school programming and community access to the school beyond the school day.

4. Standardized testing that serves a diagnostic purpose for the understanding of a child's needs and how to best educate them, not just to judge, punish, and disassemble.

5. Education and programming for ALL students which provides the full continuum of services for refugee students, English Language Learners, and those with disabilities in special education.

6. And, we especially need small class sizes! Kindergarten classes with more than 30 children are unacceptable!

As a parent, this is the agenda that I want for my own children! This should be the agenda for a public education of ALL our children! Keep our schools Public!

Vote yes to community control of public schools by voting yes to the redesign plans created by the schools!

DEMAND PUBLIC CONTROL OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Militant Protest Rejects Cuomo's Attacks on Right to Education

On January 1, more than 120 teachers, students, parents and community organizers came out to oppose Cuomo's attacks on the right to education. They chanted and marched in the bitter cold, calling on Cuomo to stop his vicious attacks on teachers and students. In speeches and signs they demanded *Full Funding Now! Equal Rights for All!*

The demonstrators targeted Cuomo, who came to Buffalo to give his inaugural speech. Cuomo is planning an "aggressive legislative package," designed to eliminate public governance of the schools and give the state the power to: remove school boards and replace them with a state appointed "czar;" hire and fire teachers; hand public school buildings over to private interests; and more. As many put it, the attacks are not about education — they are about the private takeover of public schools and handing over public education funds to Wall Street.

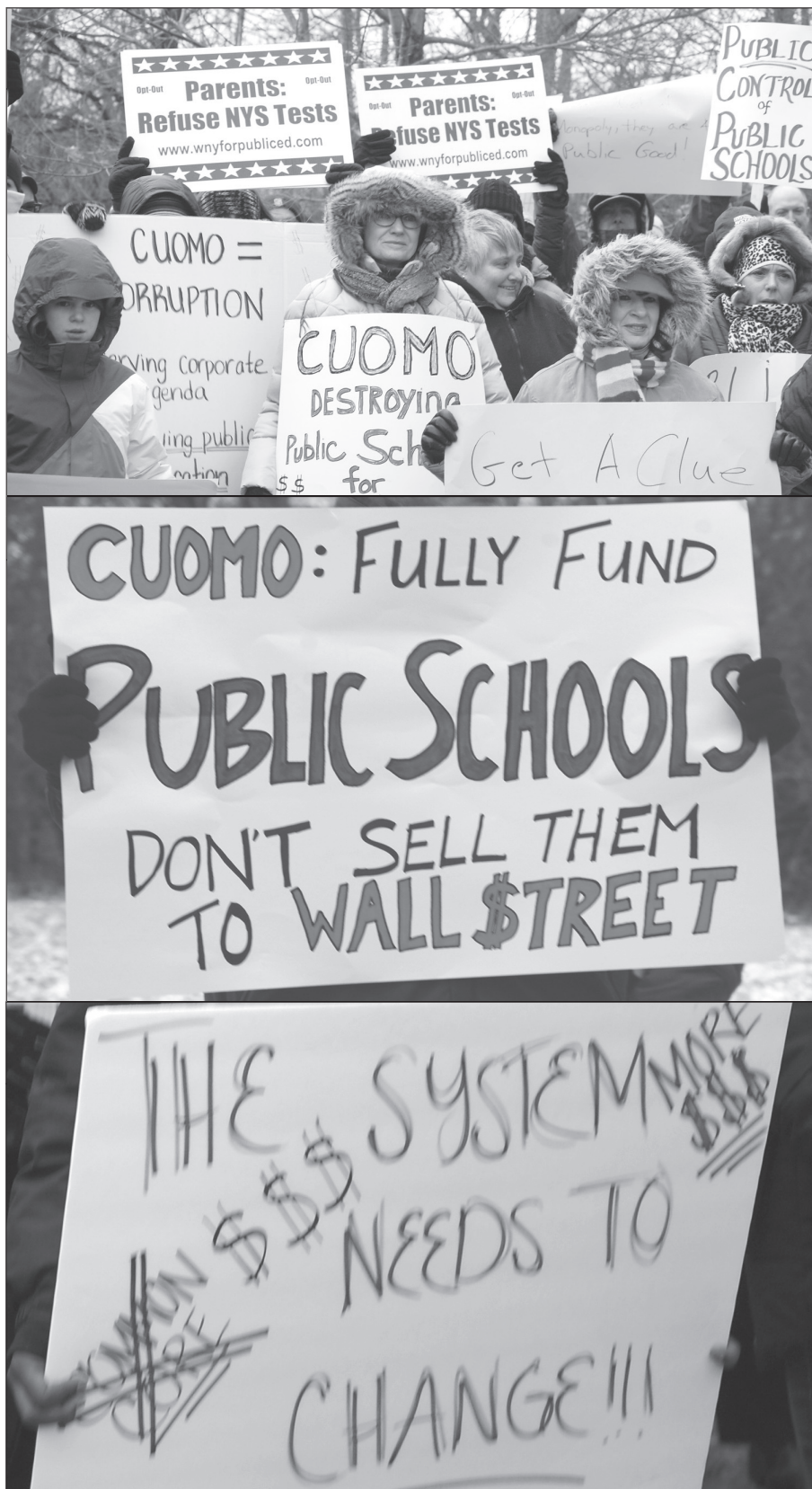
Teachers and students from various Buffalo schools, including Lafayette and MLK, both threatened with closure, School 45, Riverside and Hutch Tech, as well as Kenmore and KenTon, East Aurora, Hamburg, Iroquois, Lancaster, Springville, West Seneca, Wilson, and others spoke out. They opposed the cuts to education that have been taking place and the Common Core testing and teacher evaluation regime.

Many are organizing to refuse the New York State tests in the spring and urged parents to join the organizing efforts. People stood up for Public Control of Public Schools and also spoke to the need to change the content of education, so that it serves the interests of the youth and society.

As signs put it, *Teachers Say: Educate to Change the World!* and *Let Teachers Teach and Youth Will Lead the Way.*

It is clear that while Cuomo seems to think he can defeat resistance in Buffalo, teachers, students and parents together are saying **NO!**

Our schools and children are not for sale! Public Control of Public Schools!



I • CUOMO LAUNCHES MORE ATTACKS ON EDUCATION

one. His plans to concentrate power in fewer, often private hands includes increasing use of mayoral control of schools and greatly expanding the takeover of public institutions by private interests. This includes at the university and community college level and through private charter schools for Pre K-12.

Cuomo continued his brutal attack on teachers and dismissed the broad demand for *Full Funding Now! Equal Rights for All*. In claiming funding is not a problem, Cuomo referred this time to an “education industry.” He has previously referred to unionized teachers as a “public monopoly” and targeted what he calls the “education bureaucracy.” This time he said, “The education industry’s cry that more money will solve the problem is false. Money without reform only grows the bureaucracy.”

It is notable here that Cuomo is not referring to what Rupert Murdoch, the Waltons and Bill Gates — owners of real monopolies — call the \$500 billion education “market.” They and their “reforms,” like Common Core and its testing and teacher assessment regime, are mechanisms to hand over billions in public funds to these and similar private monopolies. That is one reason Gates has pumped \$1 billion into imposing the Common Core “reforms” — really *de-forms* of education — nationwide. Another reason, also echoed by Cuomo, is to remove the public from governance.

Effort to Eliminate Public Governance

School boards, teachers’ unions, parent groups and what Cuomo calls “ancillary organizations,” are all means of public involvement in education. They are now seen as obstacles to private control of public institutions. To eliminate them Cuomo wants the state to control teacher hiring, firing, tenure and pay. “We propose tenure only be granted when a teacher achieves five consecutive years of effective ratings.” But it is some appointed executive that will decide whether a teacher is and is not effective, as Cuomo also insists that a teacher “must” pass both the state scored portion and that done in-class by peers.

He also wants to impose merit pay, offering \$20,000 to teachers the *state*

decides — not fellow teachers, parents and students but a state appointed official — are “highly effective.” And he wants to remove a teacher after two “ineffective” ratings. All are means to take issues of hiring, firing and tenure out of the hands of those actually involved in teaching and education and put them into the hands of a state executive of some kind. All are arbitrary means to foster divisions, favoritism and repress dissent. They are proposals that show it is Cuomo that considers education a business, where competition is put in first place and bribery, blackmail and fear used to achieve submission.

Teachers and schools across the state already have experience with how arbitrary, unjust and unfair the testing schemes imposed are. They are harmful to the students, to education more broadly and a false means to label teachers, schools and whole districts as “failing.” They serve this undemocratic direction of having appointed officials decide vital matters, while excluding those who are the education experts — teachers, students, parents and staff. Cuomo again named Buffalo, saying it has been a “failing district for many years,” meaning the entire district is up for takeover.

Education requires a spirit of cooperation and mutual respect and participation by all concerned — teachers, parents, students, staff, principals, volunteers, all involved. The redesign plans by Buffalo’s schools, the involvement of all concerned at the schools and the public more generally in producing and organizing support for them is an example of such a spirit. They also show that those fighting for public education are also fighting to raise its quality and develop content that meets the needs of students, their communities and society.



It is exactly this spirit and the quality of education it embraces that Cuomo and Gates and Murdoch want to kill. The organizing work represents seeds of the new coming forward from among the people themselves and these forces of the old want to crush the new at all costs.

Private Control of Public Institutions

Cuomo also proposes that the cap on charter schools be raised from 460 to 560 and to “eliminate any artificial limits on where charter schools can open.” This basically means eliminating local caps. The large majority of charters have been shown to perform the same or worse than public schools. This is true even though they have far fewer impoverished students, English language learners or those with disabilities.

While Cuomo claims he is against segregation of the schools and his “reforms” will address this, private charters have been shown to increase segregation. Years of research by the UCLA Civil Rights Project concluded, “The charter school movement has been a major political success, but it has been a civil rights failure. As the country continues moving steadily toward greater segregation and inequality of education for students of color in schools with lower

Cuomo Attacks Education • 11

Equal Rights for All! Full Funding Now!

Buffalo sent three busloads of people to Albany on January 12, joining more than 1,000 people from all over the state to defend the right to education and demand *Full Funding Now!* One busload was parents, students and teachers mainly from MST, as well as Burgard, Bennett and Hamlin Park (74), who stood together for rights. Another was mainly youth, including a youth drill team, working with Stop the Violence Coalition and a third was filled by Citizen Action, a main organizer of the event. A large delegation from Make the Road New York, which also defends immigrant rights, was present

in Albany, enlivening the action with their chants in English and Spanish. All demanded that the state take action now to keep public schools public and raise the quality of public education for all. The action was also part of launching MoralMondays in New York, with the Reverend Barber of North Carolina a keynote speaker.

New York State, by court order, still owes the public schools about \$6 billion in funds as part of providing *Equal Rights for All*. Cuomo and the legislature are ignoring this, meaning their actions are illegal but going unpunished. As well, the difference between

funding for wealthier school districts and poorer school districts — like Buffalo — has increased, meaning inequality and segregation are intensifying.

Governor Cuomo is planning to make the situation even worse by appointing an education “czar” or King, to rule over school districts statewide, including eliminating elected school boards. The action in Albany, like those locally, served notice that the people say NO! *Full Funding Now!* And they are increasingly taking the stand that what is needed is *Public Control of Public Schools!*

ALBANY MORALMONDAYS DEMONSTRATION

An Empowering Protest Demanding Our Rights

Niasha Hamilton, Senior at Math, Science, and Technology Preparatory School

Before January 12th I was not aware of the start of #MoralMondays until it recently hit New York State (NYS). I was not aware of the hard work people all across the country, like North Carolina and Georgia, were putting into making a significant change. On January 12th I saw first-hand what coming together as not only a community but as a state can do.

This was my first experience with #MoralMondays and it was nothing but interesting, impressive and mostly empowering. As a senior in high school, I began to be less optimistic with the school system

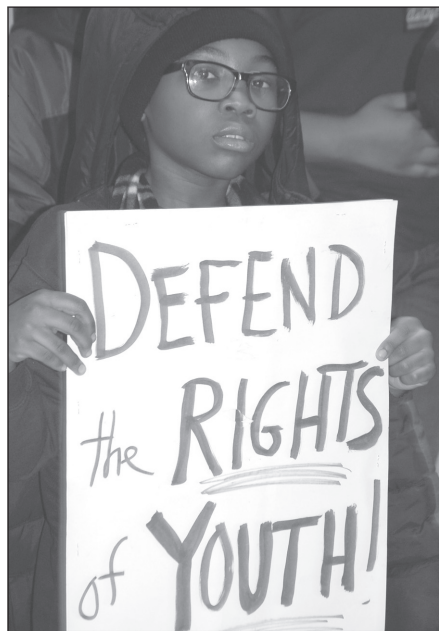
and community because I believed no one truly cared, no one was fighting for it and on top of that, we did not have a loud enough voice. On January 12th, the optimistic feeling that I had that was nearly extinct, was revived by the amazing reassuring protest that brought all of NYS together.

The voice I used to believe was not loud enough, now shook the floors of the State Capital as we protested on the Million Dollar Staircase for all to hear. Chants were yelled, speeches were given, and poems were read to demand our rights, money to fund schools and a better education. As I looked around the staircase the hope and faith in the school system and community started to build up inside of me. I have never in all my years of living seen not only adults but students of all races, genders and religions come together and peacefully fight for a better education.

“Ain’t no power like the power of the people because the power of the people don’t stop!” This is the chant that echoed throughout the building on our way out, reminding the State Senate, Assembly and Governor Cuomo that if there is not a change, if our schools are not properly funded and if our education is not a priority, we will not stop until it is. January 12th was the day I learned that there is always someone fighting and someone who truly cares whether it is just one person or one thousand people, which is why I will keep my hope and faith



Niasha Hamilton, MST Senior



for eternity.

The power of the people is a strong, encouraging tool that cannot and will not be silenced. Even when you think that there is no one that truly cares and no one is fighting for a change, remember that the power of the people does not stop. Even when it seems like the protesting has faded and the newspapers change the subject, remember that the power of the people does not stop. Even when you believe that our voice is not loud enough to make a difference, remember that the voice of the people is loudest whether it is just one person or one thousand people, because the power of the people does not stop.



9 • CUOMO ATTACKS EDUCATION

achievement and graduation rates, the rapid growth of charter schools has been expanding a sector that is even more segregated than the public schools.”

To ensure charter expansion and that public buildings are made available to the private charters Cuomo wants to use the unproven and unreliable testing and scoring by the federal government that renders schools failing: “When a school fails for three years, a not-for-profit, another school district or a turn-around expert must take over the school and they must create a plan to dramatically overhaul and improve the entire school...The takeover entity will overhaul the curriculum, override agreements, will terminate underperforming staff, provide salary incentives...”

Whole districts, like Buffalo, can be smashed in this manner, as can union contracts — and rapidly so. Private “turn-

around experts” are given a free hand to take over public buildings and put whatever and whoever they decide in place. It is a means to eliminate even the concept that the government has the social responsibility to provide the equal right to education for all and replace it with “takeover entities” doing whatever best serves private interests.

This is further evident in the plans for community colleges. They are not to be developed as modern centers for enlightenment and organizing of youth and students in solving society’s problems — which is what is required today. Instead they are to be even more narrowed and turned into “a training program, or almost an apprentice program for a specific industry.” That is, the monopolies get trained individuals for free while society gets youth who have not been broadly educated and enlightened to fully participate in and help change

society. Similarly the State University (SUNY) system is to be even more directly tied to and controlled by private interests. As Cuomo put is, “We are in the process of taking our SUNY and CUNY (City University) systems and turning them into commercialization and job generators.” No longer even a hint that public universities are to serve the public and its interests for enlightenment and highly educated and engaged students looking to make a bright future for all.

Modern society demands modern education, which means enlightenment, broad-mindedness, investigation, inquiry, conscious participation in finding out — education to change the world. This is the new coming forward in the struggle in Buffalo and elsewhere, a new that has no choice but to reject Cuomo and stand up for public right!

REJECTING FAILURE OF STATE TAKEOVER

Philadelphia Teachers, Students and Parents Organizing for Public Control of Schools

The Philadelphia School District was taken over by the state in 2001, in a manner much like Governor Cuomo is proposing for Buffalo and school districts statewide. In place of a local public board, the state created the School Reform Commission (SRC), a five-member *appointed* board. Cuomo is planning something even more like a dictator, appointing just a single “czar” or executive.

The SRC has a 13-year record of failure when it comes to the public schools, imposing cuts and closings while handing over public schools to private interests. Imposing it was in part justified based on finances — yet it has not fully funded the schools while continuing to have large deficits. Its aim was much more to eliminate public governance and wreck the teacher’s union while attacking the right to education and the quality of schools open to all.

This was evident recently when the SRC last fall simply eliminated the existing contract with the Philadelphia Federation of Teacher’s (PFT). Refusing to negotiate, the SRC said the contract was not valid and took unilateral action, including cutting health care. Resistance by teachers and students, including walk-outs, has blocked the SRC efforts. In a court case brought by the PFT, the Pennsylvania Commonwealth Court ruled January 22 that the SRC actions were illegal and that negotiations must now take place.

Another part of the struggle saw the PFT join other organizations to petition the City Council for a referendum on public, local control of the public schools. The demand was widely supported, with more than 40,000 signatures gathered. The City Council, reflecting an undemocratic and anti-public stand refused to vote in favor.

The PFT and others are not accepting this and are continuing to fight for public control and rejecting the elimination of the SRC. This was also recently evident in actions by the Philadelphia Student Union, which has blocked votes by the SRC and organized actions outside their schools in support of their teachers.

Further strengthening the organized student resistance, in unity with teachers, in Philadelphia, Buffalo, Chicago and elsewhere is on the agenda.

We reprint below the statement to the Philadelphia City Council by PFT President Jerry Jordan.

* * *

When the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers (PFT) joined Pennsylvania Working Families and other community and labor organizations in January to collect petition signatures to put local control on November’s ballot, we were amazed and thrilled with the response we got from residents.

The PFT alone collected over 17,000 of the 26,000 signatures required to place the referendum before City Council. In all, over 40,000 signatures were collected, far more than what was required.

City Council has been a champion for full funding for our schools and a consistent voice for more transparency and oversight of school district finances.

Given your past advocacy for our schoolchildren, last week’s failure to vote to put local control on the ballot in November was a shocking disappointment.

The issue of local control of our public schools is clearly something Philadelphians care about. The people of this city want the power to determine what happens in their children’s schools.

That power was taken away from us in 2001, when the state foisted the School Reform Commission onto Philadelphia. Since then, our school district has experienced triple-digit budget deficits, the closure of neighborhood schools, and an unthinkable loss of programs and services for our children.

This year, schools opened with conditions that can, at best, be called deplorable.

- Schools district-wide have cut back on



maintenance and security;

- Austin Meehan, where 26 percent of the students have special needs, has lost 3 teachers and 4 support service assistants;

- Most of our schools still do not have certified school librarians and are sharing counselors and nurses with other buildings.

- Central High School, like many schools throughout the city, has oversized classrooms

I could go on, but you have all heard these stories and more.

All of this and more has taken place under the watchful eye of the SRC. This experiment in state control has a 13-year record of failure when it comes to managing the school district budget.

Now is the time for this experiment to end.

Tabling the vote did not just let down the hundreds of men and women who went into our communities to talk to voters. It was a letdown to the 40,000 voters who want their voices to be heard.

We have not given up on the idea of securing local control of our schools. We will continue to advocate for local control through this election season and beyond.

On behalf of the members of the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers, I hope Council will do the right thing when this matter comes before you again in the Spring.

Thank you.

Chicago Teachers Call for Refusing Common Core Tests

Chicago Teachers Union, January 14, 2015

Resolution Against the PARCC Assessment, passed January 14, 2015

WHEREAS, the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessment is pedagogically detrimental to student learning and emotional well-being and the teaching profession because it:

- a. Is an invalid and unreliable test that student learning time is lost to pilot
- b. Diverts billions of dollars towards private interests in a time that vital resources are being taken away from students' basic educational and emotional needs
- c. Runs counter to research and practiced principles of strong teaching and learning
- d. Is used for many destructive practices that label students, teachers, schools and communities as "failing"
- e. Has disparate negative impact on students of highest need along race, class and ableist lines; and

WHEREAS, the Chicago Teacher Union already unanimously voted during the 2013-2014 school year to oppose the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and the aligned tests as a framework for

teaching and learning; and

WHEREAS, the Chicago Public School CEO Barbara Byrd-Bennett asked the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) in June/July 2014 to receive a waiver for this year's PARCC testing with one reason being that "our schools are simply not ready for full-scale implementation," which confirms our schools do not have the necessary technological resources to fully implement such testing; and

WHEREAS, in order for a standardized test to give meaningful information, it must first be administered to a nationally normed sample group and proven to have reliability and validity; and in 2014-2015 the PARCC is being piloted as a field test, which means reliability and validity of scores have not yet been established, and yet Illinois is planning to use the results as a baseline in their state accountability systems; and

WHEREAS, of the 23 states that originally adopted the Common Core State Standards and PARCC assessment, 20 more than half have withdrawn and only 12 states remain in the group that plans to administer the PARCC; and

WHEREAS, the American Statistical Association released a statement in April

of 2014 stating that teachers account for about 1% to 14% of the variability in test scores, that the majority of opportunities for quality improvement are found in the system-level conditions and that ranking teachers by their Value Added Measure (VAM) scores can have unintended consequences that reduce [teacher] quality; and

WHEREAS, this norming process is laying the groundwork for the unscientific, unreliable and inequitable practice of using PARCC as a basis for VAM evaluations of Illinois educators; and

WHEREAS, in previous pilot administrations, educators involved in the grading process have come forward to describe how PARCC was intentionally and arbitrarily normed to fail most students due to the misguided belief that students perform better in school when motivated through fear of their own inadequacy; and in previous pilot administrations in New York, the vast majority of students have failed especially highest need students and students of color; and

WHEREAS, CPS has reinstituted the destructive practice of test based retention and has indicated that PARCC may be

Chicago Teachers Reject PARCC Tests • 14

Colorado's Refuse the Tests Movement Expands Billboards

The *Refuse the Tests* movement in Colorado has expanded its billboards calling on parents to exercise their rights to refuse PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers) tests and reject the fraud of high stakes standardized tests. Their slogan is that PARCC is a "Waste of Mind, Money and Time." The campaign resulted in contributions from all parts of the country, indicating the broad resistance to PARCC, an appointed body that is not accountable to the public and is not made up of educators, teachers, students and staff, the real experts in education. Based on the additional contributions, the *Refuse the Tests* movement in Colorado added two more billboards. There are now two on the



western slope in Grand Junction and two on the eastern slope, in South Denver and Greeley. The photo is the refuse billboard

currently over Route 85 in Colorado. (For more information contact The Coalition for Better Education, www.thecebe.org)

13 • CHICAGO TEACHERS REJECT PARCC TESTS

used in the future for such purpose; and such retention has been tried in the past and every comprehensive study of the results has shown that it has been damaging to students; and

WHEREAS, according to the Pioneer Institute for Public Research, Pearson will profit over \$15 billion over a 7-year period from the implementation of the Common Core Standards, the PARCC test and test-prep materials; and

WHEREAS, the Obama Administration awarded PARCC and Smart Balance Assessment Consortium (SBAC) a combined \$360 million to develop the new standardized tests aligned to the CCSS instead of dedicating said funds to provide the much needed support for our most disadvantaged students in the form of more social workers, 40 counselors, support staff, funding school libraries and providing robust extracurricular programs; and

WHEREAS, the State of Illinois, has consistently underfunded public education, is spending over \$57 million on PARCC implementation this year for a test administration that will be neither valid nor reliable, and is an expensive experiment to norm PARCC on students without their or their families' consent; and

WHEREAS, in 2014, the CPS schools with large percentages of students who opted out of the Illinois Standard Achievement Test (ISAT), and/or teachers boycotting the ISAT, were threatened with loss of accreditation, the decertification of teachers, funding cuts, lowering of schools performance ratings; yet, none of this occurred; and

WHEREAS, for the 2014-2015 school year, PARCC is a low stakes test; therefore, it has no effect for the 2014-2015 school year on the School's Quality Rating Policy (SQRP), teacher evaluation, student promotion or school funding; therefore be it

RESOLVED, that the CTU encourage and support its members and parents to hold parent informational sessions around the PARCC and the option of opting out; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the CTU will encourage its members to speak and petition Local School Councils, Bilingual 53 Advisory Committees and/or Parent Advisory Coun-



cils about the excessive amount of time that our students are being tested and prepared for tests, and the harmful impact on teaching and learning; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the CTU will distribute a sample petition supporting a curriculum shift away from test-prep and towards a well rounded curriculum described in The Schools Chicago Students Deserve and a testing calendar to each school's delegate; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the CTU support the "Opt-out" bill sponsored by State Representative Will Guzzardi and Senator William Delgado and legislation that delays the PARCC; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the CTU, either independently or in cooperation with CPS develop and conduct a complete audit of the time and resources expended on high stakes testing and preparation for such tests by June 2016; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the CTU encourage Barbara Byrd-Bennett, all members on the Board of Education and all 64 principals to take the PARCC test and publicly release their results; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the CTU encourages teachers to hold "PARCC parent/teacher practice sessions" where the 66 parents and teachers take the practice PARCC and reflect on their experiences; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the CTU encourage the Board of Education to stop using standardized test scores for making decisions on student promotion, teacher evaluations, school ratings and the decision to close or turnaround schools; and be it further

RESOLVED, that a copy of this resolution be sent to the Illinois State Board of Education, the Chicago Board of Education, the Governor of Illinois, and all members of the Illinois legislative branch; the Mayor and City Council of Chicago; and be it finally

RESOLVED, that should this resolution be passed by the CTU House of Delegates, an appropriate version will be submitted to the Illinois Federation of Teachers and the American Federation of Teachers. (<http://www.ctunet.com/blog/text/Resolution-Against-the-PARCC-Assessment-2014.pdf>)

Reject Common Core and the PARCC Test

Chicago Education Activist

(The views below were presented to the Chicago Board of Education and have been edited for publication by Buffalo Forum. Like Buffalo, where speakers get only three minutes, in Chicago they get only two. And like here and elsewhere, the Board is not obligated to answer the public)

I want to address the issue of Common Core. This is a set of standards that is to be reflected in high stakes standardized tests and that will narrow the curriculum and education that our students get. Common Core is an attack on public education by corporations. You, like [Illinois] Governor Quinn, who signed onto it, did not take up your responsibility to organize the necessary debate and discussion before imposing it without the knowledge or permission of parents, teachers, and other concerned people in the city.

People have the right to decide what kind of education our children receive. You repeatedly violate that right:

You have made devastating decisions, against strong community opposition, to recently close 49 more neighborhood schools, to install a military academy to replace a popular community school in Logan Square, and to increase the number of privately run charter schools—which are taking money away from our neighborhood public schools.

Now you have a chance to deal with the problem of Common Core and its unscientific and oppressive standardized test known as PARCC, to be administered in the spring. [PARCC, the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, is an un-elected body, not accountable to the public, made up of several states including New York, Illinois, Ohio, Massachusetts, Maryland, Colorado and others. It is being used to remove the public from governance and to impose the testing—known to be unreliable and unjust and used as a means to brand schools as failing so as to close them or privatize them—BF Ed. Note]

Common Core is a program initiated and funded by the biggest corporations in the U.S. Some 25 years ago one of their main organizations, the National Business Roundtable, made clear that they need



students who will help them make more profits. They then worked hard to impose programs such as No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top, and now Common Core. The corporations want students trained to be obedient employees with a narrow outlook and set of skills, or soldiers who follow orders for the wars launched for the corporations' greater profits and power.

But these corporate goals are not what most parents or teachers want for their children. Those running Common Core have actually warned parents that up to 70 percent of children will fail Common Core tests such as the PARCC test. This is a barbarity. Failure can only discourage and humiliate children—especially poor and minority children. Teachers are forced to teach to these tests, and are terrorized because they and their schools will be evaluated based on invalid student scores.

Why are the federal and state governments so insistent on implementation of these Common Core tests—which are designed and sold to school systems like ours by monopoly corporations such as Pearson?

The Chicago Teachers Union is on record

against Common Core, with a unanimous vote of their House of Delegates. Many parents and other teachers have organized against Common Core here and in many other states, as have some school boards and school administrators. Here in Chicago people are organizing to oppose and refuse this year's PARCC test.

A school board representing the people would support discussion by those bringing out the damage Common Core is doing.

This damage of Common Core includes removing the public from governance on issues of education. It includes the narrow standards that exclude truly critical thinking and consideration of history and social justice issues, that exclude creativity and art. Common Core ignores the developmental realities of children. The program violates the needs of special education students and English language learners. The Common Core program is providing sensitive private data on children and their parents to all sorts of vendors and others. It is completely removing the public from governance at a time when democracy demands an increase in the role of and control by the public.

PROTESTS AT CUOMO'S STATE OF THE STATE

