

TFA Serves Privatization and Undermines Teaching as a Profession

Buffalo Superintendent Cash has been given authority to hire more Teach for America recruits. Other districts may do the same.

At the last Buffalo school board meeting a resolution was passed giving the superintendent authority to negotiate a new 3-year contract with TFA, to fill what are called “hard to fill” positions. The district will pay up to \$5,000 per recruit, per year to TFA, in addition to their salaries. They will become BTF members. No restriction was given on the number to be hired. Dr. Cash specifically said he wanted to use TFA to replace permanent and other substitutes, especially in receivership schools and for ESL and Special Education positions. Supposedly, TFA will assist with “diversity,” with half supposed to be minorities, but nothing in the resolution required this.

TFA recruits are college graduates without teaching experience or the standard certification. TFA is largely funded by monopolies like Walmart (\$20 million in 2013; \$100 million since 1993) and Monsanto, charter school backers and here, M&T Bank. The Walton foundation specifically states they fund TFA because of its “proven ability to create a pipeline of outstanding education reform leaders.” These include Michelle Rhee, known for wrecking the DC public school system and KIPP charter school founders Mike Feinberg and Dave Levin. KIPP is notorious for its horrendous disciplinary practices and use of humiliation against mainly minority students.

New Orleans is an example where by 2007, after Katrina in 2005, nearly half of the city’s teachers were in their first three years of teaching, with one in three students having a TFA teacher. There are now no public schools in the city.

No one should not be silent on this matter as TFA, especially connected with receivership, serves privatization and the undermining of teaching as a profession. It is important to call on unions, school board members and all concerned to address the following questions:

1) Will the school board and union guarantee that all certified teachers, including students graduating from area education schools, will be hired before any TFA

recruits are used? There are known ESL teachers and others looking for work in Buffalo and there needs to be a guarantee they will be hired first.

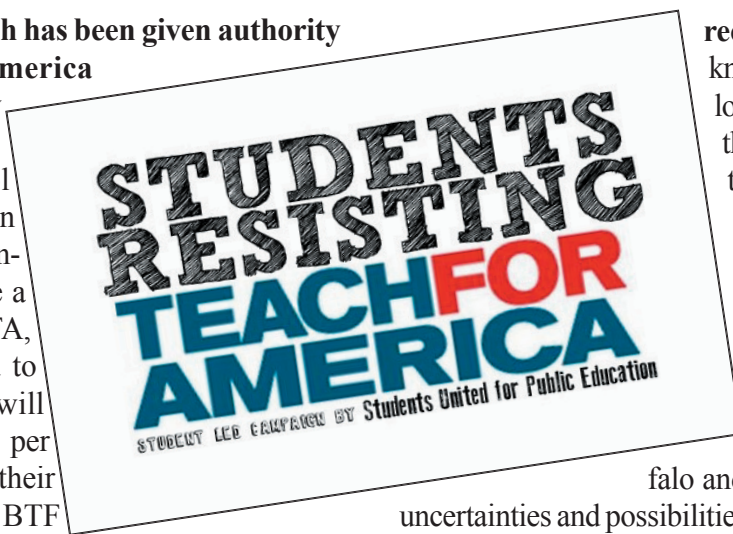
2) TFA serves to make it possible for receivership to better function, as there is a relationship between reluctance by qualified teachers to come to Buffalo and receivership — with all its

uncertainties and possibilities of involuntary transfers and firings. TFA is designed to fill this gap. Instead receivership must be eliminated. There should be no TFA recruits permitted in receivership schools as these are also schools and students in need of the most qualified teachers.

3) Superintendent Cash also said he wanted to use TFA recruits for English as a Second Language (ESL) and Special Education. These are also the students most in need of qualified, experienced teachers. Instead of funding TFA, fund a new contract to attract new, certified teachers.

4) TFA serves as a mechanism to undermine teaching as a profession and to strengthen efforts to privatize public schools, using charters. The New Orleans example shows this: there are currently no public schools and one in three students have a TFA teacher. When combined with receivership, which also contributes to privatization, including the many schools eligible for an independent receiver next year, bringing more TFA recruits to Buffalo only worsens receivership. What will the school board and unions do to prevent this?

5) Even though TFA recruits become members of the union, they commonly are not active in the union. And they create a very difficult situation in the buildings. The TFA recruits generally have no commitment to Buffalo, to the schools where they are placed, often to teaching in general. Yet, in the interest of the students, time and effort is to be spent assisting and training them, only to see them leave. It creates a two-tier system within the schools that is not favorable for anyone. How does the school board and union suggest dealing with this?



West Hertel and Futures Threatened with Independent Receiver

West Hertel and Futures Elementary schools could be given to an independent receiver and completely removed from any control by the School Board. This includes the school buildings. The two schools were given one year to improve and that year ends June 30. NY State Education Commissioner Elia likely will not announce her decision until July, when teachers and students are no longer in the buildings. At present no other Buffalo schools fit the criteria to be given to an independent receiver (three years on priority list) but all 15 of the schools currently on the receivership list will meet that criteria next year. Continuing the fight against receivership and for public control *now* is important, as the overall direction for Buffalo and elsewhere is to eliminate the district as a unionized, public school district and remove the public from any control.

An independent receiver can be: “a non-profit entity or an individual with a proven track record of improving school performance or another school district in good standing appointed by a school district and approved by the commissioner,” (Commissioners Regulations 100.19, p.3, June 23, 2015). Such independent receiver “Shall not be an existing officer or employee of the school district at the time of the appointment,” p.3. “The Commissioner shall contract with the independent receiver,” p.18, meaning the receiver is accountable to the Commissioner, not the public and there is not public recourse for their removal.

Let all concerned raise the following questions to the school board, union, and any other organization active in fighting for the right to education:

1) West Hertel and Futures, two schools that remained on the persistently struggling list, face the possibility of the Commissioner taking them completely out of the control of the school board and public and turning them over to an independent receiver. This is



true even though they are to become community schools. An independent receiver is approved by and contracted with the Commissioner. While the school board appoints them, it is from a list provided by the Commissioner. The independent receiver has the same powers as receiver Cash, but is not accountable to the public or district, but to the Commissioner. While the unions, teachers, students and

activists continue to fight receivership in the courts and through demonstrations and other actions, the unions and all concerned should join in issuing a public statement alerting people to the possibility of an independent receiver and opposing the appointment of an independent receiver for these two schools. They, like all schools, should be removed from receivership.

2) The unions should lead in urging the Commissioner and District to provide public information concerning the potential for an independent receiver and whether it is, or is not likely, that the Commissioner plans instead to keep the schools under Dr. Cash for another year. Elia can do so if she decides a school “has made demonstrable improvement.” She is also required to do so “in consultation and collaboration with the school district,” Regulations, p.15. As well, by June 30 there is to be “written notification to parents” and students at all receivership schools concerning the reasons the schools remain on the list. We urge the union and all concerned to call on the Commissioner and District to conduct public meetings for this purpose as well as written notification, including in the many languages needed.

3) The union, school board and all concerned should call for a moratorium on receivership, and state testing and testing related activities, consistent with the state’s decision to have a moratorium. If the tests are invalid, so is receivership and all schools should be removed from the list. Such a call can be forwarded to local and state representatives, along with demanding repeal of the law.