

BENTE/AFSCME Local 2419
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FORWARD. TOGETHER. NOW!

District's Slogan FORWARD. TOGETHER. NOW. Means Little To Laid Off Workers

Dr. Lesli Myers-Small claims "You have to break a few eggs to make an omelet"

In every presentation, the Superintendent and the CFO keep pushing the slogan: Forward. Together. Now.

In an interview with the City Newspaper, Superintendent Dr. Lesli-Myers-Small said, "you can't make an omelet—or a quiche—without breaking a few eggs." The reference was used to compare her style in managing the RCSD, claiming that a few eggs need to be broken in order to fix it.

Tell that to the 219 support staff and 119 paraprofessionals who were laid off and the 88 members of BENTE who have been stripped of their health insurance in the middle of a pandemic.

There is no denying the District has some financial strain, but none of it was created by the staff that has been treated like a piece of gum on the bottom of her expensive shoe.

Only 89 out of 259 food service workers remain, and nearly all of them were removed from their location, demoted from their title, and had their hours cut.

These were the workers who put their own health at risk and came into work to feed children during the first wave of the pandemic.

They worked side-by-side in the cafeteria at their school, and formed a bond with their co-workers, some working together for over ten years, treating each other like family. Now, that family has been ripped apart, with the administration exhibiting little care for their overall well-being.

The School Safety Officers face similar stories, reporting to work at the feeding sites during the first wave of the pandemic to keep students and staff safe.

The Lead School Safety Officers who remain employed by the District had their stipend taken away, losing \$1.50 an hour, without the courtesy of an explanation or an ounce of regret. They opened their paycheck and it was simply gone.

"You (Lesli Myers-Small) can't act all nice in your weekly video and then rip the heart out of us by cutting off our health care," said one School Safety Officer who wishes to remain anonymous for fear of retaliation. "That's just sick."

"I understand we aren't feeding as many kids," said Bonnie Ferrari, Cook Manager. "But we weren't feeding that many last year either and Terry Dade made the decision to pay everyone."

Compounding the issue is the lack of a stimulus package from the federal government. Unemployed workers can only collect from the state, which is not a lot of money.

Matt Uttaro, a cook at Wilson Commencement and one of the laid off employees in school food services, does not qualify for the Affordable Care Act Insurance and has to pay \$220 per month for health care as opposed to the \$40 he was paying through the RCSD. He receives only \$113 per week on unemployment through the state and \$50 per week from his job at Tops.

Shawn Ovington, Cook Manager, is more concerned about the well-being of the kids. "My parents were both drug addicts, I went without eating, I know what it's like to be one of these kids. I know what they're going through, how hard it is get away from that lifestyle. And yet, all you hear from the Superintendent and the CFO is how well the children are doing with learning at home. They have no idea what these kids are going through. They may know the kids in Brockport, but they don't know our kids."

"The Board of Education really let us down," said

Leonela Malinao, Cook Manager at School 28. "We voted for them, helped them with their campaigns, and they couldn't even provide us with health insurance? All you hear at the national level from democrats is how health care is a human right, but locally, we can't count on our government, a school board that is all democrats, to provide us with health care? This is a health care crisis. Don't they realize that?"

Some local democrats did stand up for BENTE at a press conference held at the Firefighter's Hall.

Assemblyman Harry Bronson, soon to be Assemblyman Demond Meeks, and State Senate candidate Samra Brouk all took the podium to speak out in favor of the District providing health care to laid off BENTE workers.

The District offered a furlough agreement that allowed them the sole authority to decide whether or not to extend the furlough past October.

The workers already receive health insurance through to the end of October. The District rejected the Union's proposal, which would have extended the furlough until members were called back.

Spineless Board Of Education Rips The Heart Out Of Its Own Constituents



Claiming some sort of greater good by saving the District \$95,000 while throwing 88 of their own employees off of the District’s health insurance plan (the same plan that they themselves enjoy as part-time employees of the RCSD), members of the Board of Education voted to layoff 219 employees at a total savings of less than one million dollars, touting their support for furloughs at the Board meeting prior to doing so.

Then, at the last minute, the

Board of Education authorized the Superintendent to pull the furlough, leaving 88 employees without health insurance.

The District then offered an opportunity for those employees to attend sessions that will help navigate the health care exchange to obtain health insurance, as if that’s the problem.

The problem is that the workers can’t afford to pay for it, especially since they have lost their income for an indefinite period of time.

“If the Board of Education can’t even stand up for the people who risked their own health to feed kids and keep them safe during the first wave of the pandemic, then I can’t think of any other scenario when they would stand up in support of our workers.”

— Dan DiClemente



Part-time School Board Members Enjoy Full Time Health Care Benefits

Referring to the School Board Members as “health care hypocrites,” BENTE President Dan DiClemente pointed out that the highest paid part-time school board in the state receive lifetime health care and retirement benefits, yet they couldn’t see the necessity to provide full-time support staff with health insurance in the middle of a pandemic.

“Cruel and downright deplorable is the only way to describe it,” he said. “You can’t claim you are fighting for democratic values if providing affordable health care to people who can least afford it is not in your heart. How can people who were elected to represent city residents possibly think it is okay to inflict this kind of pain on their neighbors, the employees who have worked for this District year after year?”



Hiring Freeze Thaws For High Paid Positions

Superintendent Lesli Myers-Small has instituted a district-wide hiring freeze, creating a process that is cumbersome when it comes to filling needed civil service positions. Yet, the following positions have been approved by the Board of Education since July 1, 2020. This list does not include additional high paid positions in the Superintendent’s cabinet that are not subject to approval by the Board:

- Director of Early Childhood Education \$99,316/yr.
- Director of English Language Arts and Reading \$112,527/yr.
- Director of ESSA-Funded Compliance \$82,963/yr.
- Director of Grant Development \$104,282/yr.
- Director of Grants for Academic Programs \$89,250/yr.
- Director of Grants for Support and Enrichment \$125,763/yr.
- Director of Mathematics \$80,750/yr.
- Director of Multilingual Education \$114,896/yr.
- Director of Science and CTE \$109,428/yr.
- SDL Executive Director of Grants and Program Accountability \$100,255/yr.
- Executive Director of School Efficiencies \$85,000/yr.
- Controller \$95,000
- Associate Counsel \$122,004
- Director of Science \$110,000
- Associate Director of Special Ed \$83,941
- Associate Director of Special Ed \$80,364
- Director of Human Resources \$84,000
- Director of Social Studies \$89,000
- Director of Innovation \$96,984
- Director of Financial Management \$108,093
- Executive Director of Accountability \$115,000
- Executive Director of Equity & Social Emotional \$102,000
- Coordinator of Health, PE, Athletics \$74,789
- Director of Alternative Ed Programs \$76,650
- Coordinator of Human Services Systems \$91,212
- Director of Early Childhood Education \$99,316

Source: Board of Education Resolutions

There Is No Denying The District Is Top Heavy



Dr. Jallow Lesli Myers-Small—with approval from the Board of Education—continues to approve directors and executive directors at an alarming rate; especially with the District in an all-remote learning environment.

Even Dr. Jallow—the fiscal monitor appointed by the state—had to remind the Board of Education that the district is top heavy prior to agreeing that a Chief Academic Officer was

Desp*ite* a s*e*l*f*-r*e*p*o*r*t*e*d* \$200 million dollar deficit, Superintendent

needed at an annual salary of \$160,000.

The District pays \$154.27 per hour to Dr. Jallow along with meals, lodging, and travel expenses, including a housing/apartment allowance of \$1200 per month, mileage, airfare and rental car expenses.

The Board of Education is the highest paid school board in New York State, yet they couldn’t find it in their hearts to provide affordable health insurance to the lowest paid workers in the District.

School Board members are eligible for lifetime health and life insurance benefits.



Grievance, Improper Practice Charge Filed Against RCSD for Reduced Hours, R-Centers

An Improper Practice Charge has been filed with the Public Employee Relations Board (PERB) regarding work that is being performed by other bargaining units at the City Recreation Centers.

The charge stems from paraprofessionals serving food at the recreation cen-

ters and performing clerical work for schools as the District leaves BENTE clerical positions vacant.

A grievance has been filed on behalf of Lead Sentries who had their stipend removed while still meeting the requirements in their building (three sentries).

Another grievance was filed on behalf of food service workers who work a 35 or 40 hour schedule and had their hours reduced.

The Grievance Committee voted to take a case to arbitration involving a clerical position that was cut mid-year, then changed to a lower title in July without

the consent of the union. The arbitration has been scheduled to take place in January.

An arbitration involving additional pay for members who reported to work during the pandemic is scheduled for Friday, November 6.

Yes, We Are Not In Contract Negotiations

The presentation provided to the Board of Education at the October Finance Committee meeting falsely reported that ASAR and BENTE are negotiating.

“We have two contracts that are up for negotiations, we have BENTE as well as ASAR,” said Carleen Pierce, Chief Financial Officer. “Those are unknowns at this point as to where those contracts

will settle.”

“Yeah...Uh...We aren’t negotiating with the District right now, so they should pretty much count on that as a fixed expense this year,” President DiClemente said.

ASAR and the RTA are currently operating without a contract, while RAP and BENTE’s contracts are set to expire on July 1, 2021.

RCSD Finances Can’t Be Fixed All At Once

The lack of a federal stimulus package that would help struggling school districts like the RCSD is troubling, but patience should be the virtue until after the election.

There is no need for the school district to make hasty decisions out of panic until it is known exactly what kind of COVID-19 relief Congress will provide to state and local govern-

ments, and urban school districts.

There is no doubt the District faces a structural deficit, but some if it can be accomplished by paying back debts over a period of years, not days.

The remaining deficit isn’t caused by support staff. The BENTE union has already been hampered by layoffs, attrition, and the lack of filling vacancies.

Special Education Investigation Launched

The Democrat & Chronicle reported this month that the district is cooperating with a wide-ranging state investigation into its special education department.

Special Education Chief, Kisha Morgan, has been on medical leave since September 2, while Dan Fontanez, a director beneath Morgan, has resigned. The other director, Amy Tata, is also now on administrative leave alongside

Morgan.

Investigators seemed particularly interested in whether some students’ records were altered improperly to match up with Medicaid billing cycles.

Former Occupational and Physical Therapy Coordinator, Andrea Gerhardt, tried to warn against issues occurring in the department that she felt were not right, but it fell on deaf ears and corrupt managers.

Union Asking Members To Donate Wegmans Card

As in years past, the Union has purchased \$10 Wegmans cards for all of its members to be used during the holiday season.

In lieu of the recent layoffs of over 200 members in school food services and school security, along with the reduction in hours and demotions that have been imposed on the remaining 89 employees in food services, the union leadership is asking for members who

can afford it to donate their Wegmans gift card.

The donated cards will be given to members who have been adversely affected and are hurting during the holiday season.

In order to donate your card, you can call the office at 585-458-8670 or send an e-mail to dan@bentelocal2419.org with “Donating Wegmans Gift Card” in the subject line.

Unit Elections To Take Place In Transportation, Security

Nominations for unit offices took place on October 20 at BENTE and all offices were uncontended, with the exception of the unit steward in Security and Transportation. Rickey Hepburn, Ron Chandler, and Jonathan Robinson were all nominated for Security Unit Steward, while Albert Williams, Steve Shannon, and Athanasios Psofios were nominated for Transportation Unit Steward. Election information is on Page 7.

ATTENDANCE

Unit Chair Kenneth Davis
Vice Chair Leslie Hunter
Unit Secretary Jeanette Gonzalez
Unit Steward Sertzai Weld

CENTRAL OFFICE

Unit Chair Louise Landry
Vice Chair Bob Kwiecien
Unit Secretary Ana Burgos
Unit Steward Ange Palmerini

CUSTODIAL

Unit Chair Karl Hardy
Vice Chair Ivan Caraballo
Unit Secretary Curtis Skinner
Unit Steward Chris Capone
 Vic Wilson

ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

Unit Chair Noelia Garcia
Vice Chair Abigail Fuentes
Unit Secretary Laura Stam

OT-PT

Unit Chair Carol Bedenik-Carmel
Vice Chair Anna Yager
Unit Secretary Vacant

FOOD SERVICES

Unit Chair Leonela Malinao
Vice Chair Debra Bowen
Unit Secretary Traci Darrisaw
Unit Steward Sonia Alvarado

SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Unit Chair Jill Harold
Vice Chair Michelle Maxwell
Unit Secretary Kim Montana

PLANT MAINTENANCE

Unit Chair Patrick Soto
Vice Chair Miguel Gonzalez
Unit Secretary David Breeding
Unit Steward No Nominations.

TRANSPORTATION

Unit Chair April Coons
Vice Chair Robin Fogle
Unit Secretary No nomination
Unit Steward *Election

SECURITY

Unit Chair Roosevelt Murray
Vice Chair Vacant
Unit Secretary Sandra Beasley
Unit Steward *Election

CLERICAL UNIT STEWARD

Laura Kuhn

CHAIR OFFICERS

Dan DiClemente President
Larry Profetta Vice President
Barb Zarpentine Sec/Treasurer
Bonnie Ferrari Rec. Secretary
Wayne Collom Sgt.-at-Arms
Wilbert Navedo Sgt.-at-Arms

EXECUTIVE BOARD

Kenneth Davis Attendance
Weezy Landry Central Office
Karl Hardy Custodial
Noelia Garcia Elementary
Leonela Malinao Food Service
Patrick Soto Maintenance
Carol Bedenik-Carmel OT/PT's
Jill Harold Secondary
Roosevelt Murray Security
April Coons Transportation

TRUSTEES

Zelder Bice
Pete DiBenedetto
Jessica Rinebold

STEWARDS

Sertzai Weld Attendance
Laura Kuhn Clerical
Vic Wilson Custodial
Sonia Alvarado Food Service
Chris Capone Custodial
Rickey Hepburn Sentries
Vacant Transportation

CHIEF STEWARD

Ange Palmerini

EDUCATIONAL COORDINATOR, EAP & STEWARD COORDINATOR

Weezy Landry

ORIENTATION COORDINATOR

Veldra Simmons

WEBSITE COORDINATOR

Laura Kuhn

DiClemente Elected President For Three-Year Term

Current BENTE President Dan DiClemente was elected to a three-year term, defeating his opponent, Embola Ekiller, by a margin of 311 to 16.

The election was held at the BENTE union office and observed social distancing guidelines, as well as

members wearing the proper PPE.

“It was a remarkable turnout considering the fact that people had to physically show up to vote,” said Election Committee Chairperson Ange Palmerini.

“It was great to see everyone come out and exercise

their right to vote for who they want to see lead their union through these turbulent times,” added Laura Kuhn, a member of the Election Committee.

“I can’t thank the members of the Election Committee enough for running a safe and fair election,” said Dan

DiClemente. “For people to come out and vote despite being remote, some driving half an hour to get there, says a lot about how important this election was to them. I can’t thank them enough and it is a privilege to be able to continue fighting for everyone in BENTE.”

TRANSPORTATION UNIT ELECTION

An election for the position of Unit Steward will be conducted from 6:00a.m. to 10:00a.m. on Thursday, November 12, 2020 in the Day Room at Transportation.

All social distancing requirements will be in full force. You must be a dues paying BENTE member to vote.

The candidates are: Albert Williams, Steve Shannon, and Athanasios Psofios.

SECURITY UNIT ELECTION

An election for the position of Unit Steward will be conducted from 3:00p.m. to 6:00 p.m. on Tuesday, November 17, 2020 at the BENTE Union Office (1600 Lyell Avenue).

All social distancing requirements will be in full force. You must be a dues paying BENTE member to vote.

The candidates are: Rickey Hepburn, Ron Chandler, and Jonathan Robinson.





The District's new Acting CFO Carleen Pierce has painted a gloomy picture of the district's finances, which are bad enough without the need for embellishment.

RCSD Deficit To Reach A Bazillion Dollars Before Year's End

"The deficit at the RCSD could reach in upwards of a bazillion dollars by years' end," Secretary-Treasurer Barbara Zarpentine quipped after watching the latest RCSD Finance Committee meeting held via zoom on October 20th.

At that meeting, Acting CFO Carleen Pierce, painted a picture that was even gloomier than the one in September, when she stated

that the District was facing a \$130 million deficit if Governor Cuomo followed through with a threat to withhold 20 percent from the state.

Now, the district is claiming it could very well be in a \$199 million deficit PRIOR to any cut in revenue from the state.

"The presentation conveniently changes to fit the nar-

rative that the district needs to cut more staff," said Weezy Landry, Steward Coordinator. "We know the district has some financial issues, but you lose all credibility when you embellish the deficit to fit whatever preconceived conclusion you want to reach."

How the District is planning to handle this purported deficit still remains a mystery.

And How Are The Children?

For Students of Color, Remote Learning Environments Pose Multiple Challenges



At the end of every RCSD Finance Committee meeting, the picture above is included on the last slide of a presentation given by the CFO, with the heading: "And How Are The Children?"

It is usually at the end of a presentation that illustrates a deficit large enough to try and justify the need to cut services to children.

While students in every other school inside Monroe County offer some in-

person instruction, the Rochester City School District offers none, and it is becoming increasingly clear that the decision is a financial one, and not one that is in the best interest of children.

Recreation Centers are a poor excuse for a school, with few families taking advantage of the chance to send their children to a building that by its very design is utilized for "recreation."

There is no question that

New York State needs to do more for urban education, but to blame the decision to remain closed on the state, or to blame it on an infection rate that was six tenths of one percent when the decision was made to go all-remote, is a cop out.

Students of color, students living in poverty, students dealing with language barriers and internet issues, are having a much harder time with all-remote learning.

Students in need of specialized services require critical supports that are impossible to obtain from a computer.

A lack of parental supervision for learning (if both parents are essential

workers), increased stress (because of health concerns or if parents lose their jobs), and difficulty understanding technology used for remote instruction are also concerns.

Surveys and focus groups are not going to capture this demographic.

The BENTE union recommended utilizing laid off food service workers and school safety officers—city residents—to provide support in these areas, and submitted a detailed seventeen page plan to the superintendent that was rejected.

The children who are in need of in-person instruction the most are suffering without it.

So how *are* the children?

