

Massachusetts teacher denounces cuts to Randolph and Brookline schools

By Nancy Hanover
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Educators, parents, students and community members continue to voice outrage over the layoffs of all arts, music, and physical education (PE) teachers, along with five social workers and six K-8 guidance counselors in Randolph, Massachusetts public schools. In nearby Brookline, the district has announced that as many as 362 teachers and up to 300 paraprofessionals will receive pink slips for the coming school year. Over 36,000 workers and young people have signed a petition to save the threatened programs, and a protest was held on Wednesday.

See the WSWS' earlier coverage of these districts here and here.

The state, reeling from the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, is threatening to cut 10-20 percent from K-12 education for the 2020-21 budget. Boston was the site of the nation's first public school in 1635 and Horace Mann, a founder of the "common school" movement, made the state's school system a national model. The state has long been considered among the finest school systems in the world, but now finds itself imposing existential educational cuts alongside every other US state.

A high school teacher in a nearby Massachusetts school district reached out to the *World Socialist Web Site* to voice his support for the struggle in Randolph and Brookline. The following are all his comments, as he spoke at length on the fight in defense of public education, the mass international protests against police violence and social inequality, and his thoughts on the way forward.

"Like many all over the country, my job is in jeopardy due to drastic cuts in state aid. The union is weak at my school. Basically, the administration and school committee tell the union that we're getting a close haircut, and the union's only role is to help choose which hairs exactly will be lopped off.

"Our union leaders take the view that the whole country is suffering, and we have to bear our share of the burden, or risk alienating the community. They're very proud of this role. At the very least, teachers [in my district] are facing a pay freeze [instead of 2 percent increases], multiple furlough days, and cuts of up to 50 percent for supplies and materials. Most likely, there will be layoffs in addition.

"The district and state are forecasting cuts for fiscal year 2021, using a model of 10 percent. That is substantial. But even members of the school committee agree that that is an underestimation and they don't know what it will be. Right now, they are claiming with furlough days, pay freezes and cutting funding for books and resources, that they could prevent RIF's

[Reductions in Force] this year. I believe—and even they believe—that number is going to be above 10 percent. I hear 10-20 percent. My job could definitely be eliminated.

"It is also almost certain that teachers will get zero reimbursement for furthering their education. Some of these teachers have already signed up for courses over the summer with the expectation that the district would at least partially cover those costs. That's not going to happen this year, and from what I'm hearing, that will be sacrificed for years to come.

"The cuts in Randolph are insane. I've worked in Randolph before. I know the area. It will be devastating for the students who really need those programs and for their families. It is a devastating blow to a community that really can't absorb it. They have already been hard-hit.

"The schools are a source of a lot of services for the community, not just education. Parents and community members rightly see the school as their common ground, something that serves them.

"People see [Wall Street] assets and stocks back above the original [pre-pandemic] level, and yet there's no real significant aid to state and local budgets. Because they've delayed help to this point, districts are forced to issue these RIFs, creating a source of tremendous anxiety. We see that mismatch; it adds to the wound. We see it's not a shared burden around the country. I think people really recognize that.

"I was very inspired by the strikes that began in West Virginia, Oklahoma, Los Angeles and Oakland, California, and more. At that point, it confused me that these were wildcat strikes and not pushed by the official [union] organizations. But now, based on my limited experience at my school, I am starting to understand. The unions see themselves as working with their districts. Since 2008, the unions see economic hard times and don't question that the schools would have to get hit. They don't see that the actual losses are only experienced by a certain segment of society. I don't trust that they have the teachers' interests in mind.

"Now we have the prediction of drastic budget reductions for next year, and there is no effort by the unions to take real action. Even communication has been sparse. They don't really want independent action by the mass of teachers, they want to control it.

"What their motives are exactly, I'm still learning. But one of the problems is that their contacts are too high up in the chain, not connected with what teachers, students and families are experiencing. They are more or less in lockstep, they trust the system. In other words, they trust people I don't trust.

“I don’t have a ton of confidence in the unions, I think we need rank-and-file committees. Teachers, however they identify politically, want to be involved in the decision-making and planning. For example, the push to open up the economy depends on schools and daycare centers reopening. The guidelines they have would indicate they’ve never met a two- or three-year-old kid. The CDC guidelines are full of ‘if feasible.’ This is insufficient. I’d rather see a committee of teachers at my school give the okay, or not, to any plans for reopening.

“We know about Randolph and Brookline because there is an arbitrary deadline in June to tell teachers in some districts if they’ll have a job. But without that deadline, the news will come later, I’m hearing August. Every other district is in the same boat.

“I went to one of the union meetings about this. I was shocked, thinking, ‘Is this all you can do, just explain the budget process?’ There was no outrage. I was disillusioned. I didn’t expect wonders, but at least some indignation about what is happening more broadly. They said everyone will have to tighten their belts and we’ll try to save personnel if we can. They would not put up any resistance to deep cuts.

“The pride in our educational system is strong in Massachusetts. We have great teachers and therefore our students are strong as well. There is an expectation of high quality education and people don’t want to lose it. When you have a taste of a functioning system that benefits the majority, you know what you’re missing if it starts to deteriorate. There will be outrage.

“Teachers know the history. Public education was a revolutionary idea and teachers take pride in the fact that this region was the cradle of public schools.

“Of course, it’s not perfect, segregation in Boston and suburbs may be worse than in the 1960s. The inner-city schools are struggling and there’s a lot more charter schools in the city. There’s a lot of inequity. Brookline is a METCO district [Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity, a state-run voluntary busing program for minority students]. Black families in Boston try to get these few spots to attend a receiver school [in a better district.] They basically put their children on a wait list when they are born. Most can’t get in, probably less than one percent.

“METCO should be for everyone who is impoverished, not just minorities. One thing the *World Socialist Web Site* gets across is the racialization of the narrative within the media. Poverty, police violence and attacks on workers are being racialized. The discourse is about ‘white privilege’ and ‘white silence.’ They call for more black police officers. This has its impact even among teachers, with self-recrimination among white teachers, rather than seeing all of us as workers. I fear well-intentioned people are getting channeled into a dead-end. The WSWs is very good at highlighting these things, I read the 1619 interviews and they were excellent, summed it all up. I don’t think enough people see through that type of politics.

“I also want to raise a disturbing suppression of speech that seems to be directed from the local police department. This isn’t limited to my district. As you probably know, an African American English teacher in Milton was suspended by the administration for the ‘outlandish’ suggestion that there are racist

police officers in this country.

“With regard to my high school, our principal has been pushing this idea, which obviously comes from the police, that the police are our friends, and that the real threat to society is antifa and anarchists. Our principal sent out a newsletter to families in the district in our name. In my view, its purpose is not only to spread police propaganda, but also to threaten teachers who might have it in their heads to teach historical and present realities about state violence in America.

“I was really troubled about the vague and nefarious reference to antifa. I am fearful about this way of talking about the uprising, which is what it is. They are attempting to smear the movement. It could be dangerous. This is far-right police culture.

“David North said something very interesting [during the online meeting *Revolution and Counterrevolution in America*] about the supposed ‘outside agitators.’ He said, ‘What are they outside of? The planet?’ You can’t be outside of this, it’s affecting everybody. Not just Donald Trump is attacking demonstrators, but also the Democratic leadership. People are coming in from the suburbs [for these demonstrations], that’s good! It means all types of people are starting to understand the problems. They are forced to understand due to the growing crisis on a number of fronts.

“The rhetoric about antifa, anarchism and outside agitators is building a case for violence. It’s already a counterrevolution, a preemptive one. We see that physically in the streets and I see it reflected verbally in the newsletter.

“The stories of teachers will continue to trickle into the consciousness of everybody in the state and across the country, especially with the WSWs on top of it. This type of news is just beginning.”

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Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>