

The Housing Crisis in Our Schools

by Robert McKay, Substitute Parapro

(Editor's note: This is the first in a series of articles about the housing crisis as it impacts our youth and families in SPS. We'll be collecting stories that put a human face on the crisis as we build toward bold, transformative solutions that treat housing as a human right. Have a story to share from your school? Contact the author on Twitter @fin4sopo or by email at rjmckayiv@gmail.com. For more information, go to: HousingForAllSeattle.org)

Seattle's deepening crisis of affordable housing and homelessness doesn't stop at the doors of our schools. Since the Great Recession, the speculative bubble in urban real estate has brought financial profits roaring back, while families have struggled to keep an affordable roof over their heads. In Seattle these trends have pushed homelessness up on the rising tide of rents.

While supply is starting to catch up and slow the explosive rent growth, the market isn't going to make the city affordable again. Nor is it going to get our 3,500 homeless pre-K to 12 students the immediate help they need. The impact of the crisis is starkly visible to front-line education workers: students making long commutes from shelters, missing their much-needed school breakfast, struggling in class, acting out as the time approaches to go home—to homelessness. The number of students facing this situation has tripled since 2008. The decade since the last financial crisis has seen around 35,000 units of affordable housing vanish from King County.

Kids & Families Impacted

It can be hard to see the true scale of the problem if you don't have a bird's-eye view. And while subs like me get to see more of the district than most, we don't get to look very long or very deeply. But by going out and talking with other front-line workers, a clearer picture begins to emerge.

Gerald Donaldson's Family Support office at Leschi Elementary is piled with boxes of donated food and supplies, sourced from an elaborate patchwork of local nonprofits and some government entities. Gerald's door is always open, and his generous spirit is materially evident in the room. In the hour a comrade from the Transit Riders' Union and I spent there on a Tuesday morning, Gerald rattled off his impressive array of community partnerships. "If you hustle, you can do it," he said. That is, you can fill the weekend and vacation gaps between the school meals poor students rely on. "It's almost like an identity crisis, not wanting to admit there are 3500 homeless students," Gerald said. He counts 63 documented homeless students at his school.

Talk turned to what the district and our union could do to mitigate the problem. At the district level, Gerald sees the potential for efficiencies in bulk purchasing and the institutionalization of supplemental nutrition programs, which are currently ad hoc and therefore paid for at retail prices, and are hampered by lack of storage, centralized purchasing, and funds. We also discussed the need for more professional development focused on the impacts of homelessness and poverty, something SEA members can advocate and help develop.

Organizing Gets the Goods

But since economic injustice doesn't stop at the school doors, our responses can't either. We need the voices of educators, parents and students inside big, fearless social movements. Organizing gets the goods, as these movements have shown with preliminary victories like the City Council's **Progressive Revenue Task Force** and its March 1 recommendation for a \$75 million big business tax to fund deeply affordable housing and services.

There's much more work to be done, as corporate and NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) opposition swings into action. Amazon paid **no federal income tax** last year, and they won't pitch in willingly to offset the gentrification they've helped cause. So let's raise our voices with the students who want a future Seattle they can live in.

(Read the full article here: <http://socialequityeducators.org/2018/03/08/the-housing-crisis-in-our-schools/>)

Arizona Educators * continued from previous page

Association] I think that's one of the most interesting and powerful things about this movement: It's been led 100 percent by rank-and-file educators. Educators run Arizona Educators United. There's a team of about nine of us, with three or four core members, and then we have people who pick up odd jobs to help organize and move us forward.

As far as the union relationship goes, the union put out a video the other day of the president fully endorsing this movement and encouraging people to get involved.

They've been very interested in helping us whenever we want, so if we need a resource or need insight on something, they're there to help with that. But they've for the most part been hands off and really committed to their idea that this should be led by rank-and-file educators. They're letting us do our thing and just helping us keep the wheels turning....

[Regarding the effect of the West Virginia strike] It really set off a powder keg across the nation.

We've been treated incredibly poorly here for years. Ever since the recession hit, school funding has been continually cut, and we haven't seen that funding returned. So there was all this discontent bubbling, and then West Virginia happened.

We saw what can happen when teachers unite. And unite anywhere—even if you're in a conservative, "right-to-work" state with a Republican governor. It also showed teachers that you don't have to be a martyr—you don't have to make it on \$28,000 a year. You can stand up and get something done, no matter where you are.

That was a huge empowerment to everybody. They had really incredible participation across the state, and we've been able to study up on what their infrastructure looks like to sustain that--what some of the key roles were that people had to play.

West Virginia gave us an idea of what it looks like to organize that kind of statewide action, so we've been learning a lot. It's the same thing with Oklahoma now.... It's been a real gift for us to have both of those states.

(Read the full article here: <https://socialistworker.org/2018/03/23/we-see-whats-possible-when-teachers-unite>)

Educators' Vision

Published By the Social Equity Educators (SEE)

April 2018

Racial Equity Demands for SEA Contract Negotiation

By Bruce Jackson, educator at Aki Kurose Middle School

(Editor's note: The Seattle Education Association, which represents over 5,000 educators in the around 100 schools in Seattle, will begin contract negotiations soon with the Seattle Public Schools district. Below are 5 key demands that arose from organizing our Black Lives Matter at School Week this past February 5-9th that SEE believes must be raised in the negotiations.)

Ethnic Studies

The key themes in Ethnic Studies are: Who are you? What has been done to you? What have you done to fight back? What can you do to change things? To Eliminate the Opportunity Gap, our students need to answer those questions and use those answers to build a society that is at peace with itself. We can no longer traumatize our students with cruelties of our past. We must empower them with the hope hidden in that same past. We must empower them with the hope of our future. **SEE is asking for Ethnic Studies to be a requirement of Graduation for all SPS students.**

Racial Equity Teams

The Racial Equity Teams are a highly energized part of the previous few years that we won in our contract out of the 2015 strike. We need to better direct that energy. We need to believe that something can be done and is being done. **SEE is calling for District enforced, mandatory viewing of the EOG Toolkit, make them part of the weekly, 75-minute, early release time to be dedicated to Racial Equity, and for all Racial Equity Teams to be centrally organized through representatives from the Race and Equity Institute and the district.** We need coordinated action for these teams to make a change.

Increasing the Percentage of Black Educators

Seattle Public Schools is a multi-lingual, multi-racial, multi-cultural district. Each year we continue to grow in our diversity, but each year we fall further behind in the diversity of our staff. Our children need to see themselves in the staff who educate them. They need to see their culture reflected by those who live it each day. They need to connect in an educational environment that is fair and reflects that fairness in its diversity. We have yet to reach that point. Diversity of staff is a critical part in ending the opportunity gap. **We are asking for a 200% increase in the hiring of educators of color. We, at SEE, are asking for a strategic plan that recruits, retains and supports those educators. We are also asking for a Student to Teacher program that trains our diverse student population to become future educators.**



Reducing Counselor Ratios and Increasing Social Worker Presence to Address Gun Violence

More guns in school is not the solution to Gun Violence. Militarizing our schools is not the solution to Gun Violence. The latest school shooting was in Maryland. A school resource officer shot and killed the armed assailant but not before he shot two of his classmates. Three students were shot in this best-case scenario. **SEE believes that Restorative Practices, earlier and more convenient counselor intervention and a stronger Social Worker presence in every school could have saved three young lives, so SEE is asking for a restructure of the way we count students. At-risk students, English Language Learners, and Special Education students at 1.5 instead of 1. This will increase the number of Counselors and Social Workers where the need is greatest.**

Restorative Justice

We, as a public-school district, are responsible for the community we live in. It is our duty as educators to make our community as strong as we are capable of making it. Through Restorative Practices, we teach our students how to make their community strong. We teach our students how to repair damaged relationships through bringing out a sense of remorse and teaching our students to take action that might bring about forgiveness. Teachers must be trained to bring about such interaction. So, **SEE is asking for quarterly, leveled, professional development training for all building educators as well as restorative justice counselors and practices in all schools.**

Upcoming Social Equity Educator (SEE) meetings

All Seattle Education Association (SEA) members who believe in bringing social justice ideas into our classrooms and union are welcome and encouraged to attend. Our next two meeting are:

When: Sunday, May 20; 10:00 am-12:00 pm

Where: Rainier Beach Community Center (8825 Rainier Ave S, Seattle, WA 98118)

When: Sunday, April 29; 10:00 am-12:00 pm

Where: Savery Hall, room 136 at the UW. [washington.edu/classroom/SAV](http://www.washington.edu/classroom/SAV)

For more information check out:

**[facebook.com/socialequityeducators/](https://www.facebook.com/socialequityeducators/)
socialequityeducators.org
or text: 206-550-1609**



Educators' Vision

Published By the Social Equity Educators (SEE)

SEE steering committee

Tracy Castro-Gill, Lauren Stark, Donte Felder, Jesse Hagopian, Ian Golash, Justin Vinson, and Darrin Hoop

Educators' Vision is a monthly newsletter of the Social Equity Educators socialequityeducators.org info@seattlesee.org

Mission

Social Equity Educators is a rank and file caucus of Seattle Education Association educators that focuses on democratic, anti-racist, and anti-oppression policies and practices in our classrooms, schools, and communities. SEE engages in local, national, and international social movements for liberation and radical change by building alliances and addressing the roots of institutional racism and other forms of injustice.

Points of Unity

- ◆ Organizing and bargaining for equity from the bottom up
- ◆ Anti-racist, anti-oppression pedagogy and practices
- ◆ Supporting social movements through community alliances
- ◆ Full and equitable funding for public education
- ◆ Opposing corporate education reform

Educators' Revolt in West Virginia, Oklahoma, Kentucky and Arizona

(Editor's note: As Educators' Vision went to press, tens of thousands of educators and public workers in Oklahoma were on the second week of their strike for higher pay and the restoration of education funding. They are following on the heels of the victorious educator's strike in West Virginia that won 5% pay increases for all educators and public workers. In Kentucky, thousands of educators engaged in sickouts and protests at the capitol in Frankfort against pension cuts. Meanwhile in Arizona, educators in over 1,000 schools recently took part in walk-ins as they increase their level of protests for higher pay, more education funding, and against the privatization of education. In solidarity with these struggles, and in the hopes that Seattle educators may learn from our fellow educator's struggles, Educators' Vision reprints parts of articles detailing the revolt of educators around the U.S.)

The Lessons of West Virginia

By Eric Blanc

The Great West Virginia *Wildcat* is the single most important labor victory in the US since at least the early 1970s. Though the **1997 UPS strike** and the **2012 Chicago teachers' strike** also captured the country's attention, there's something different about West Virginia. This strike was statewide, it was illegal, it went wildcat, and it seems to be spreading.

West Virginia's upsurge *shares* many similarities with the rank-and-file militancy of the late 1960s and early 1970s. But there are some critical differences. Whereas labor struggles four decades ago came in the wake of a postwar economic boom and the inspiring successes of the Civil Rights Movement, this labor upheaval erupted in a period of virtually uninterrupted working-class defeats and economic austerity. The Supreme Court's *impending decision* to throw the *whole public sector* back into the open-shop era gives West Virginia's strike an added degree of momentousness....

Understanding the reasons workers won this strike will be crucial for activists engaged in these upcoming battles — and for all those interested in reviving the US labor movement....

Class struggle gets the goods.

Labor-management "cooperation" has led to concession after concession over the past decades. Nor has the prevailing form of what passes for "*social justice unionism*" been able to reverse organized labor's decline. Instead of building workplace power and strikes, many progressive unions have focused on public relations campaigns, moral appeals to consumers, and lobbying Democratic politicians.

In contrast, the bottom-up militancy and strike action of West Virginia's teachers and school employees has reinvigorated working-class organization and won a whole series of important concessions, not the least of which was a 5 percent raise for all public employees.

From day one, the active participation of rank-and-filers — and their remarkable ability at critical junctures to overcome the inertia or compromises of the top union leadership — has been the central motor driving West Virginia's strike forward. Through the empowering dynamics of mass struggle, many individuals who only two weeks ago were politically inexperienced and unorganized have become respected leaders among their coworkers....

(Read the full article here: <https://jacobinmag.com/2018/03/west-virginia-wildcat-strike-militancy-peia>)

Oklahoma Educators Strike

By Darrin Hoop, educator/long term sub at Rainier Beach High School

(Editor's note: As Educators' Vision went to press, leaders of the Oklahoma Education Association were attempting to end the strike there after two weeks on the picket line without the rank-and-files full demands being met. This article, written before the strike began, details the history that led up to the strike.)

The next phase of the snowballing educators' rebellion in the U.S. looks like it's about to begin in Oklahoma. Following on the heels of **the strike victory of 20,000 educators in West Virginia**, who won a 5 percent pay increase for themselves and all public workers in the state, some 150,000 teachers and public workers in Oklahoma are preparing to strike this coming Monday, April 2....

On March 23, the Oklahoma Education Association (OEA), the biggest educators' union in the state, **presented a plan to raise \$905.7 million in revenue** to fund education and provide teachers with a \$10,000 raise over three years, with \$6,000 coming in year one. Support professionals would receive a \$5,000 pay increase with half of that in the first year.

Other state employees are pressing for a \$7,500 increase over three years, and the OEA proposal earmarks more than \$300 million in revenue to restore funding for core state services, including education.

The adamant demands of these workers are the result of more than a decade of stagnant incomes, underfunding of schools and cuts to public services. Teachers haven't had a raise in 11 years, and it's been 12 years since the last across-the-board pay increase for state workers such as child support specialists, social service workers, bridge inspectors and others....

There's a backdrop to this struggle that should be inspiring to everyone who wants to see a revived labor movement. The latest phase dates back to at least November 2017, when rank-and-file educators organized **the Oklahoma Teachers United (OTU) Facebook group**. The group initiated a series of coordinated teacher sickouts in Tulsa and in some rural schools. The success of these actions led to a growing number of parents, students and teachers looking to the OTU for leadership.

Next, students started organizing walkouts, with the support of parents and educators. These spread to almost 30 schools and counting. Then, **as the West Virginia strike raged on in early March**, OTU members began making plans for their own statewide walkout....

(Read the full article here: <https://socialistworker.org/2018/03/30/is-oklahoma-the-next-stop-for-a-teacher-revolt>)

Kentucky Educators: "This Is a Struggle of Regular Working People"

By Nema Brewer

(Editor's note: The following is an interview from April 2 with Kentucky educator Nema Brewer by Eric Blanc from Jacobin.org. Nema gives the background details to the ongoing fight there to stop cuts to educator's pensions and education funding as well as stopping regressive taxes the government is trying to implement.)

Kentucky currently has a Republican supermajority. Since 2016, they've controlled the House, the Senate, and the Governor's office — and they've made it incredibly difficult for working people in the state. They came in and passed right to work, they got rid of the prevailing wage, and they approved charter schools. Those were the three things that really started the discontent.

There is a blatant offensive to destroy public education in Kentucky. They say that the way to save the schools is to privatize them. And this is clearly part of a national agenda. We see cuts and privatization happening across the country. It's not a conspiracy theory, we know whose hands are behind this.

But nobody realized exactly what was going to hit us next. Last year in August, Governor Bevin started talking about pension reform. He got a company to commission a study, **called the PFM report**. Bevin made a big to-do about it; he declared he was going to keep his promise to public employees. But when we read the report, it was hideous, beyond awful. That really started the hornets swarming....

First of all, what they're really trying to do is screw over new hires by getting rid of an inviolable contract for pensions. So if this proposal passes, the legislature can change the contract for these teachers at a whim. Any group of whack-job politicians can then do whatever they want to cut benefits. New hires would move completely out of the current pension system, they'd be put into a hybrid system. Legislators say that this will work out great, but we can't trust these politicians. The trust is gone and I don't know if they'll ever get it back.

The report also proposes getting rid of our right to use sick days to improve our pensions. We don't get Social Security in Kentucky, so workers here plan on accumulating sick days over the years and rolling these into their pensions. People who've been working twenty years have been depending on these sick days to determine when they'd be able to retire. But now they're trying to take that away from them.

The PFM report also proposed raising the retirement age to sixty-five for the majority of workers. And another one of its recommendations was to eliminate the cost-of-living benefit adjustments that were added to state and local worker pensions between 1996 and 2012. This measure would cut the benefits of a lot of retirees by 25 percent or more.

If these measures pass, people who are just now getting into this profession might feel that it's not worth it to continue. But if they leave, what will happen to our schools and to the services that we provide? People need to understand that right now we're not fighting for anything new — we just want to hold on to what we have. And it's not just about teachers, it's about all state employees....

(Read the full article here: <https://jacobinmag.com/2018/04/kentucky-teachers-public-workers-strike-pensions-budget>)



Arizona Educators: "We see what's possible when teachers unite"

By Noah Karvelis

(Editor's note: The following is an interview by Darrin Hoop from March 23 with Arizona educator Noah Karvelis, a leader of Arizona Educators United (AEU). Noah gives the background to the ongoing struggle for Arizona educators who are demanding higher pay, increased school funding, and to stop the privatization of public schools. As Educators' Vision went to press, the Arizona Governor presented a plan to raise teacher's pay, but not pay for other educators. In addition, Arizona Educators United are calling for the struggle to continue because it doesn't raise overall education funding enough and there aren't specific details for where the funding will come from.)

There are several [main issues]. The biggest really is our pay. Pay is pretty abysmal, and depending on the metric, we're always near or at the bottom among the states.

What most people use as the most accurate measure is the Morrison Institute for Public Policy numbers, which put us at 50th overall when the cost of living is adjusted for. That's last place--and it's last place by a long shot. We would need an 11 percent raise just to go from dead last to second to last. That really puts it in perspective just how far behind we are in Arizona....

So our total compensation is pretty miserable, and teachers just can't continue doing this. We have teachers fleeing the state because they can't afford to teach and live in Arizona. At the end of the last school year, we had over 2,000 classroom [teaching positions] still vacant. At the start of each year, we typically have about 5,000 to 7,000 empty, and a lot of them don't get filled.

This is essentially a continuing crisis. Those kids don't disappear, they just don't have a teacher--so they go into another classroom, and you see class sizes of 35 to 40 kids in some districts. I've had classes before where I don't have enough chairs, and kids have to sit on the floor.

Those are some of the big issues. It all revolves around how teachers are compensated and treated here. That's what we're really fighting for--to make sure that we're compensated fairly, and that we have not just a functioning, but a vibrant and sustainable infrastructure for public education....

[Regarding the relationship between the AEU and the Arizona Education

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