

# Educators' Vision

Published By the Social Equity Educators (SEE)

October 2018

## Stop Kavanaugh: We Need to be Ungovernable!

By Lauren Ware Stark, English Language Development and Humanities teacher at Cleveland High School

On Thursday, September 28th, 2018, I joined the over 20 million Americans witnessing the testimonies of Dr. Christine Blasey Ford and Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh. Like many women and other survivors of abuse or assault, I've struggled with a range of emotions in the wake of their testimonies: admiration for Dr. Ford's eloquence and composure, disdain for Kavanaugh's entitlement and white male resentment, and empathy with the all-too-familiar details of Dr. Ford's assault. Kavanaugh's confirmation is moving forward despite several credible accusations, and I find myself wondering: how can we - as women, as survivors, as educators - respond? How can we possibly challenge a system that excludes and degrades us?

This weekend, I've been repeatedly invited to join one possible response: a "female blackout" on social media to "show what the world might be like without women." In considering whether to join this action, I am torn. I want to stand in solidarity with the women taking this action, which serves as a visible manifestation of the attacks on women in our nation's highest offices as well as our collective grief and anger. I want to support the idea that it is important to imagine what our world would be like if women disappeared. But, I'm not sure that this particular action is the way I want to respond.

We don't need to change our profile pictures for men to imagine what it would be like if we all disappeared. We are all already surrounded by narratives of abused, missing, or murdered women. Violence against white women is fetishized in news stories, true crime documentaries, and thrillers, while violence against women of color is normalized in these same media. As Trump's response to the murder of Mollie Tibbets demonstrates, violence against women provokes outrage only insofar as this outrage supports existing race, class, and gender hierarchies. If a woman is white, middle-class, "innocent," and compliant, white male elites can use her assault or murder to justify the reification of the social structures that benefit them. If not, her race, class, relationships, or speech will be used to justify the violence against her - if this violence is acknowledged at all.

While I stand in solidarity with women who find the "blackout" to be a meaningful form of protest, I won't be changing my profile picture. For me, the blank profile mirrors the messages we already receive throughout our culture: that women are silenced, violated, or stripped of their power every day, and that - for many men - this is exactly how things should be.

This brings me back to my original question: how do we - as women, as survivors, as teachers - respond? What can we do? The best answer I've found is that we need to keep doing everything we can to build our collective power and work toward a more just social order. We need to celebrate and learn from the infinite ways other women - women of color in particular - have built power and transformed their communities. And we need to use every tool we have at our disposal to challenge the existing social order and work in solidarity to build an alternative one.

So, how can we build our power? We don't need to look far for ideas. In Seattle, Tracy Gill reminds us of the power of using ethnic studies to support our students' abilities to critically examine and reimagine the world around them, as well as the power of advocating for this curricula at the union and district levels. Rosa Powers reminds us of the power of working to transform our union from the ground up, whether it be refusing to accept that we should be paid "wife's wages" in the

third-most expensive housing market in the country or refusing to accept the displacement of our colleagues even when our own job is safe.

Marquita Prinzing reminds us of the power of working democratically with educators to collectively envision and work toward a more racially just union and school system. Nikkita Oliver reminds us of the power of linking the struggles for Black and Native lives, as well as the power of building a grassroots political party. Kshama Sawant and Pramila Jayapal remind us of the power of working for equity from within positions of power. Ijeoma Oluwa and Lindy West remind us of the power of using biting wit and journalism to take down what bell hooks calls the white supremacist capitalist patriarchy. Northwest Detention Center Resistance, the Seattle Clinic Defense, and Black Lives Matter - Seattle remind us of the power of collective action to challenge and disrupt systems of oppression.

As a radical woman, teacher, survivor, and unionist, I am tired of men telling me how I should or shouldn't work toward change. I've had men tell me that civil disobedience and protests won't make a difference. (I teach history. They do.) I've had men tell me that agitating within the system won't make a difference, either. (It can.) Women fall into this binary way of thinking, too, and, in many ways, they are right: protest isn't enough, advocacy isn't enough, representation isn't enough. But, I don't believe that this means these strategies are wrong, just as I don't believe that changing your profile picture to protest assault is in itself wrong. They're just insufficient on their own.

Not everyone can or should use every strategy or tactic, but we need to collectively use every tool at our disposal. We need to support our students' abilities to critically examine and reimagine the world around them. We need to show up to support struggles that are linked to - but distinct from - our own. We need to work together to fight for equity in our schools, unions, and communities. We need to flood all three branches of government with women and people of color who will fight for a more just system for all of us. And, when our government oppresses us or our brothers and sisters in struggle, we need to be ungovernable.

As the FBI finishes its "limited" investigation into Kavanaugh and the Senate likely moves on to confirm a racist, sexist elitist to the nation's highest judicial office, I hope that you will join me in using every tool at your disposal to show that the status quo isn't acceptable. And, whether or not you changed your profile picture to a black box this weekend, I hope that you will build and show your power in the weeks to come. In the words of Audre Lorde, "Each of us must find our work and do it."

## End Standardized Testing: Support the Seattle Moratorium

By Jeff Treistman, Librarian at Denny International Middle School

(Editor's note: At the Seattle Education Association's June Representative Assembly, the representatives voted for a New Business Item calling for a two-year moratorium on all standardized testing at the district, state, and federal levels and to open a public forum along with Seattle Public Schools on the best way to assess our students. Jeff Treistman started an online petition addressed to the School Board, Superintendent and school community in order to help build public support for the moratorium. Please, follow, like, and comment on the Facebook page [Seattle Moratorium on Standardized Testing](https://www.facebook.com/betterthantesting/): <https://www.facebook.com/betterthantesting/>)

Here's the petition language:

"The practice of standardized testing has done more harm than good. We want to cease the practice for two years in order to study the best ways to assess our students' work. We also want to put curriculum control back in community hands."

To sign it online: <https://tinyurl.com/ybcp6ghk>

## Not a Single Job Should Be Cut! Cuts Don't Close Opportunity Gaps!

On September 19, a letter signed by four Seattle Public School district administrators (each "earning" over \$250,000 annually in total compensation) was distributed to principals throughout the district detailing 33 "staffing adjustments." Let's call them what they really are: **JOB CUTS!** 33 Seattle Education Association members' positions will be terminated. Some will be forced to transfer to other schools against their will. Others will be forced to become substitutes against their will.

Social Equity Educators finds it unacceptable that in one of the richest cities in the country 33 positions will be cut, many in South End or alternative schools with our highest-need students and most diverse schools. In fact, a look at the locations of the schools with jobs being cut reveals the following details: 8.5 jobs are in schools north of the ship canal while 24.5 are in schools south of it. The ship canal used to be the de facto "red line" that made it extremely difficult, if not impossible, for families of color to rent or obtain loans to purchase homes to live in the north side of Seattle.

Since the distribution of the letter, at least one job at the Seattle World School has been absorbed by the school and the teacher will remain. However, at Garfield High School, educators were recently notified they will lose two positions instead of one. It is also true that 12 new jobs are being created (5.5 north of the ship canal and 6.5 south of it). These schools no doubt deserve, and need, new positions. However, this doesn't change the reality of the educators, schools, and students affected by the 33 job cuts.

The district claims, "an estimated 775 fewer students are enrolled than were projected. This creates a reduction in revenue of \$7.5 million to our already challenged budget." SEE would like to see more details on the financial numbers used by SPS. If you subtract the 12 new jobs from the 33 job cuts, there's a net loss of 21 positions. According to the new salary schedule in the SEA contract and based off the salaries of certificated teachers that the SEA leadership provided to members during the contract negotiations, the average SEA certificated teacher earns \$120,000 annually in total compensation (wages, health care, and other benefits). Cutting 21 positions "saves" the district roughly \$2.5 million.

The following Seattle Public School officials all "earn" between \$203,000-\$287,000 annually in total compensation: JoLynn Berge, Flip Herndon, Michael Tolley, Clover Codd, Carri Campbell, Wyeth Jessee, Brent Jones, Kyle Kinoshita, Pegi McEvoy, Stephen Nielsen, Mike Starosky, Kim Whitworth, Helen Joung, John Halfaker, and Kelly

Aramaki. In addition, the compensation of two other top officials, Noel Treat and John Krull, isn't listed publicly yet. The Superintendent Denise Juneau's base salary is \$295,000. Details of her total compensation are also not yet publicly available. If you add up these 16 officials salaries, plus assume Noel Treat and John Krull also "earn" over \$200,000 plus in total compensation, the overall total for these 18 officials is around \$4.5 million or \$2 million more than the "savings" from cutting 21 teacher positions.

Just to be clear, SEE isn't suggesting cutting district positions like the new Ethnic Studies Program Manager or Department of Racial Equity Advancement staff. District positions that are doing valuable work to combat the racial inequities in our schools deserve their funding. Still, it's also fair to wonder: why are there so many district officials making double or more what the average teacher makes? And what do these administrators do to support equity and student learning in Seattle schools?

Ultimately, the State Legislature must be forced to fully fund our schools with non-regressive sources of funding like an income or capital gains tax. This will take a coordinated campaign that declares unequivocally: tax the rich to fully fund our schools! In the meantime, the annual process of using beginning of the year student counts to make "staffing adjustments" that normalize job cuts must end once and for all. Likewise, the new process of using five-day counts should be reconsidered in the next contract bargaining process.

The fact that these cuts were announced less than two weeks after SEA members ratified a new one-year contract, negotiated through an "interest based bargaining process" makes the recent agreement ring hollow to many SEA members. In addition, it's puzzling that these cuts come after the Washington State Legislature allocated an additional \$2 billion for educator's salaries to allegedly meet the demands of and settle the McCleary decision.

SEE dedicates this issue of *Educators' Vision* to the educators and students affected by the job cuts and will center their voices in it. We look forward to discussing these issues as well as how to build a united statewide movement with our fellow SEA and WEA members for full funding for our schools. We call on all SEA members, parents, students, and allies in the community to join us in a campaign to stop these cuts. Not even a single displacement is acceptable! An injury to one is an injury to all!

## Upcoming Social Equity Educator (SEE) meeting

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 meeting is:

When: Sunday October 28th – 1:00-3:00 pm

Where: Capitol Hill Library (425 Harvard Ave. E., Seattle, WA 98102)

<https://www.facebook.com/events/303415797152791/>

For more information check out: <http://socialequityeducators.org>

<https://www.facebook.com/socialequityeducators/>

Call or text: 206-550-1609

(Thanks to Connor Lee, Michelle Vecchio, and Brian Black for research on the salaries of SPS administrators and the breakdown of the locations of the job cuts.)





### Educators' Vision

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### 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

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### 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

## We Will Not Let Them Take Our Teachers

By Jack Darling, 18-year old fifth-year senior at Nova High School

My name is Jack Darling. I am 18 years old, and I am a fifth-year senior at Nova High School. For three years before I came here, I was a drop out. I never left the house. Most of my days were spent indoors, sleeping. My future looked extremely bleak. Through a series of brave decisions and jumping insanely far out of my comfort zone, I found Nova. I decided that I was willing to give school a try again, but only if I could attend here. I knew that there was no way I could handle going to a massive, conventional public school.

And so I gave Nova a shot. And just like I'd done every other time I'd tried going to school again, I left. But I came back. And I came back because of the teachers.

Throughout the time I was away from Nova, I missed it. I missed the classes, their unique content, and the vibrant array of teachers I had had. This was the first time *in my life* I had *ever* missed going to school. And I will repeat: I missed it because of the teachers.

This last school year was the first full year of school I have completed all the way through, without leaving, in five years. It would not have been possible *whatsoever* if I had not had the support network of the Nova staff.

My life has changed drastically for the better since I came here. This amazing school, with its amazing students and its amazing staff, has helped me grow in astronomical ways. Now, instead of looking back, at the person I could have been, I look forward, to the person I will become.

To tell us that we need to cut two of our teachers is to cut two wonderful people from that critical support system that has helped myself and many other students who have passed through these doors find their way in life. Not only is the district disrespecting teachers with this decision, it is disrespecting the students. To take teachers from these smaller schools and hurt our collective student bodies in this manner is nothing short of uncaring.

I will stand with my teachers in the same way they stood by me. Through all of my trials, the Nova staff has had my back. And I will stand with every teacher affected by this cut. No one deserves to be treated this way, least of all the people who have worked so hard to make these schools the wonderful places that they are.

To the school board: do not take our teachers. To the students, teachers, and anyone willing:

Join us, in solidarity, to show our teachers that we care for them as much as they care for us.

We will not let them take our teachers.

## The Thing I Love Most is the Teachers

By Mirabai, 16-year old junior at Nova High School, Seattle School District,

My name is Mirabai. I am sixteen years old and a junior at Nova High School in the Central District.

When I first started school I was bullied a lot. I think this was a due to my cultural background, my mental health, and for reasons I don't think I'll ever fully understand. Most of my teachers made me feel really dumb and like my opinions didn't matter. This became fifty times worse when I started middle school. It was around then I started to believe that I was an unintelligent person.

I wasn't particularly excited for high school. I was looking forward to leaving middle school and to learn a bunch of new things, but I also worried that it would be more of the same thing. I decided to attend Nova High School because a friend's older sister recommended it to me and because I wanted more control over my education. By the end of my first day of freshmen year I was in love with my school. Everyone was so kind and accepting and made me feel like I belonged.

Now, as I start my third year of Nova, I am still just as in love as was when I was a freshman. I'm in so many school-governing committees (at Nova the students have a lot of say in how the school functions), all of which bring me so much joy. I've made a lot of friends (since kindness and strength-of-community are such strong values here), and I've learned so much. All our classes are all slightly unconventional, but teach us critical thinking skills and focus on marginalized and overlooked-people/topics. I've also gotten so many amazing opportunities through Nova, since here you're seen as a person (not a number) so your interests and passions are prioritized.

I love so much about Nova (as you can probably tell), but the thing I love the most is the teachers. I have never been in the company of so many kind, passionate, caring, deeply intelligent people. My coordinator (each Nova student has an assigned teacher or "coordinator" to help them stay on top of everything) has helped me through so many hurdles, both academic and personal. My favorite part of every given day is just talking to one of my teachers about a subject about which we're both interested (ethics, the justice system, poetry, history, etc) and having these long, passionate discussions where I learn so much. There isn't a single Nova teacher who hasn't taught me more than all my middle school teachers combined. There isn't a single Nova teacher who hasn't said or done something to make me feel good and intelligent and valuable.

When I was little I called school "the isle of torture". I thought I was a stupid person and that the bullying would never stop. Now school is a second home to me and I love it with all my heart. I love the building and the classes and the students, and I love the teachers who work so hard to make it all happen and stay a safe, happy place. Nova is not perfect, but we discuss our imperfections openly. The students and staff work together to improve the school. We call Nova "The Nova Project" because it is always changing and growing. The teachers (ALL the teachers) are a huge part of that. It would be insanity and an outrage to enforce a policy that would do so much harm to the ecosystem of our school.

It would be a tragedy to take any of our teachers (who love this school as much as I do) away. Thank you for your time.

## Displacing Teachers in Vulnerable Schools Does Not Support Equity

By Tessa Nesbit, English teacher at Seattle World School

(Editor's Note: Tessa's position originally was slated to be cut. However, as of Educators' Vision going to press, she's been notified that SPS accepted the proposal of her principal to absorb her FTE.)

It is unjust that SPS would displace teachers from schools with the most vulnerable populations: Seattle World School (SWS), Interagency, and Nova. In particular, SWS serves English Language Learners who are 99% students of color and 95% on Free or Reduced Lunch. Such disadvantaged students deserve access to stable, high quality teachers year-round to put them on the path to graduation and success. Displacing teachers in vulnerable schools does not support equity in the school district, nor student success.

## The Fight Continues

By Gabriella Sanchez-Stern, Ethnic Studies and Humanities Teacher at Nova High School

This summer I gathered with about 200 other new-to-district teachers in the cafeteria at Nathan Hale for our first day of the SPS New Teacher Orientation. We spent that day analyzing maps and housing covenants in Seattle that have historically divided our city along racial lines between those who were allowed to buy property north of the ship canal, and those who were contained in neighborhoods south of the ship canal.

We talked about how these housing covenants continue to haunt our segregated school system and linger in discussions of the persistent educational opportunity gaps amongst SPS students. Finally, we discussed a document called the SPS Foundational Beliefs, which includes the following statement: "*Racism in our society exerts a downward force on the experiences and achievements of students of color that must be met with active countermeasures. In order to achieve our goal of educating all students to a high level, we need to become culturally responsive and actively anti-racist practitioners.*" Our mandate seemed clear: we are a district that not only recognizes racialized inequities, but we are expected to be actively creating equity for our students.

Fast-forward three weeks. On Thursday, September 20<sup>th</sup> my principal called an emergency staff meeting before school. From my experience, these are never good. At this meeting, we learned that SPS was planning to displace 33 teaching positions across approximately 30 schools. 10 of these positions would be from high schools. 8 of the 10 would be from high schools south of the ship canal. 5 of the 10 displacements were slated to come from Seattle World School (1), Nova (2) and Interagency (2).

Seattle World School serves an entirely English Language Learner student population, while Interagency Academy operates multiple sites that offer specific alternative learning environments for students who are not being served by comprehensive schools, the majority of whom are students of color and many of whom are impacted by trauma. Nova students are a majority LGBTQ+ identifying (60%) and 25% of the general education population have 504 plans. I was shocked by this news. Not only because I realized that my job was on the line, but also at the blatant inequity of the harm posed by these displacements. How could the district justify the harm of these disruptions falling squarely on the shoulders of our most vulnerable students?

The Superintendent and other representatives from the district have defended this decision saying that "a race and equity lens" was applied as part of this decision. I attended one of the Superintendent's town halls and asked a simple follow-up question: Could she share what race and equity issues were considered as a part of this decision? No further information was given. We should not be satisfied with this response, and need to continue to raise the issue. Students and families in our district deserve better. Our teachers deserve better. We deserve leadership that does more than pay lip-service to issues of racial and social justice.

On Friday, I found out that my last day at Nova will be on Tuesday. Luckily, both Seattle World School and Interagency will be able to keep their teachers, at least for now, and cuts were absorbed elsewhere. I feel sad, frustrated and disappointed that this is the way that I am being introduced into the profession of teaching. I am sad to be saying goodbye to my students, and sad that one of the classes that I was teaching, Mesoamerican Studies, will not be offered after I leave since there will no longer be anyone to teach it, while another class, Intro to Ethnic Studies, will have one of its two sections cut. I leave my Nova colleagues now with figuring out how to absorb these cuts as well as the 50% cut in the math program after the other newly hired teacher leaves.

However, though we may have lost this battle, the fight continues. I have been inspired to see how students at Nova have organized themselves to advocate for what is right not only for themselves but for all students in Seattle. They continue to build solidarity across schools and plan to attend school board meetings to make sure that the story of Nova and its students is not forgotten. They are holding the school district accountable to its stated commitment to undoing racism and oppression. They continue to inspire me and remind me why I chose this profession.

## Teaching for Black Lives: Social Studies and Language Arts Teachers Pick Up Your Copy!

Grammy award winning Seattle-based artist Macklemore and three-time NFL Pro Bowler Michael Bennett have teamed up to purchase and distribute copies of the new critically acclaimed book, [Teaching for Black Lives](#) to every middle and high school Social Studies and Language Arts teacher in the Seattle Public Schools. Michael Bennett said, "This is the book I wish I had coming up in school but it never existed. Now we have the opportunity to educate thousands of youth about the Black history that was too often missing from my schooling—from the building of the White House, to the role of Black youth in social movements, to organizing for restorative justice today."

## Tell SPS School Board: No Cuts! No Displacements!

Join us at the next School Board meeting to tell SPS not a single job should be cut!

When: Wednesday October 17 at 4:15pm

Where: John Stanford Center (2245 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave S, Seattle 98134)

<https://tinyurl.com/y7f6saw9>

## Who are These Bullies?

By Bruce Jackson, Special Education Teacher at Aki Kurose Middle School

Who are these bullies? Who are the ones who make teaching more difficult each year? Who are the ones who work against class size reduction? Who are the ones who work against counseling for all of our children? Who are the ones who work against special education, teacher salaries, health care for substitutes, nurses for all of our schools, recess? Who are these bullies who make us defend ourselves instead of extend ourselves? Who are they?

We see some of their faces each time contract time rolls around. They are the ones driving people away from the field of education. They are the ones posturing, trying for the best negotiating position, trying to seize the power in the room. They are the ones who believe that money is the only power. They are the ones who believe the interests of the school district and the interests of teachers should be different. They are the ones who do not understand what education must be to be of value to all of the people in Seattle.

We are tasked with educating the children of this city. We are tasked with determining the moral direction of this city. We are tasked with making our children good citizens of the world. We do these things by being a living example of that "city on the hill." We do these things by providing enough educators to reach every student in this district. We do these things by creating Ethnic Studies programs so that every student can find pride in history. We do these things by keeping our children safe, educated, and loved. There is no room for bullies in the world we are building.

We need a district that is on our side. We need a district that joins the teachers in the fight for the McCleary promise. We need a district that provides effective lobbyists focused on education. We need a district that is not afraid to advocate for education in the face of legislators who believe differently. We need a district that assures that our schools have enough, not a district that accepts each cut with the timidity of a church mouse and passes that pain down to its students every year.

It is time for educators to take action against the existing district negotiators. The ones who forced us to strike in 2015 and to vote to authorize a strike this last negotiation. The ones who are posturing to do the same next year. Their presence is an affront to public education and it's time for new management.