



Mike Wetzel, Chief Steward
Custodial Maintenance
SEIU Local 73

Carla Burger, President
Decatur Educational Support Personnel Association

Paula Busboom, President
Decatur Federation of Teaching Assistants # 4324

Jim Forrester, President
Decatur Education Association

Press Release:

HEADLINE: Decatur schools' education fund balance causes concern

Decatur – Feb. 22, 2010

Many district employee groups have come together to voice their growing concerns about the dwindling amount of money in the education fund for Decatur's public schools. The education fund is the main source of money that keeps our schools in business.

The education fund balance was almost \$18 million at the end of the fiscal year 2008. The fund's projected balance at the end of fiscal year 2010 is less than \$3 million. How does the Board of Education and the district plan to address this problem?

We feel this community, as taxpayers, needs to be aware of the district's financial status. We, as advocates for the children, are concerned after hearing the board of education and the superintendent discuss layoffs and cuts. Given our experience in 2000, when people and programs were cut to the bone during a financial crisis, we have grave concerns that these potential cuts will strongly impact student achievement by:

- Leading to increased class sizes.
- Forcing the district to reinstitute split classes, or one room split between two grade levels.
- Eliminating programs vital to our students' academic, physical and social health.
- Cutting services currently provided to students within the district who have special needs.

The unions that bargain contracts with the district took great care during the last round of negotiations to work in conjunction with the school board to make sure the district stayed financially sound. It's unclear to us what's happened to the money.

The board will say the state of Illinois is behind in its payments, which is an accurate statement. But the increased spending put the Decatur School District in a financial bind long before the state fell behind.

“Decatur member groups are joining together to share these concerns with our community,” said Jim Forrester, social worker and president of the Decatur Education Association.

Paula Busboom, teacher assistant and president of the Decatur Federation of Teaching Assistants, wants to know what long-term plan the Decatur School Board has for addressing the dwindling education fund balances.

“School Superintendent Gloria Davis and board members have mentioned cuts and layoffs of district employees. How will the needs of all students be met?”

Carla Burger of the Decatur Educational Support Personnel, questions where the money went.

“How did the Board of Education approve the spending down of nearly \$15 million?”

And, Mike Wetzel, chief steward and maintenance employee of the district, is concerned what might happen if the district keeps spending at the levels it has been for the past 18 months.

“Following current trends, we are potentially looking at a \$31 million deficit by 2014.”

Members and representatives of these groups intend to go to the Decatur School Board meeting tonight at 6:30 p.m. at the Keil Administration Building at 101 W. Cerro Gordo St.

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