

American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations



815 Sixteenth Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20006
(202) 637-5000
www.aflcio.org

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For Immediate Release

Contact: Eddie Vale evale@aflcio.org

**AFL-CIO EXECUTIVE COUNCIL ISSUES STATEMENT
SUPPORTING THE STUDENTS, TEACHERS, STAFF AND COMMUNITY
OF CENTRAL FALLS HIGH SCHOOL IN RHODE ISLAND**
American Federation of Teachers Launches <http://centralfallskidsdeservebetter.com>
March 2, 2010

(Orlando, FL) – Today, the AFL-CIO Executive Council – made up of leaders of AFL-CIO affiliates - condemned the firings of the entire education staff at Central Falls (R.I.) High School and called on the Obama administration and the local school superintendent to work together with the teachers to create an environment that allows students and teachers to succeed.

In the midst of the worst jobs crisis since the Great Depression, more than 90 dedicated professional educators will be out of a job. On Feb. 23, the Central Falls school trustees fired the entire teaching staff of the high school, which is located in a community of working-class families.

The Executive Council statement said, “The affiliated unions of the AFL-CIO condemn the actions of the Central Falls superintendent in unjustly terminating the employment of the dedicated teaching faculty of Central Falls High School. We stand in support of the Central Falls Teachers Union in its fight to improve the teaching and learning in Central Falls schools.”

The Executive Council called on the school administration to, “return to negotiations with the Central Falls Teachers Union and seek, in good faith, a collaborative path to proven reforms that provide students with the opportunity to succeed.”

The Executive Council continued, “We are appalled at recent comments from President Obama and Education Secretary Duncan condoning the mass firing of the Central Falls High School teachers. These comments are unacceptable, do not reflect the reality on the ground and completely ignore the teachers’ significant commitment to working with others to transform this school. The comments are particularly disappointing in light of the recent state report, which found that the high school’s reading and writing proficiency have gone up 22 percent and 14 percent respectively over the past two years.”

Finally, the Executive Council laid out the stakes that working families face, “This battle is about more than Central Falls High School. It is about working together to lift all boats, transform society and give children the education they deserve. It should not be about pitting teachers against students or school district against school district. This is a cause that unites working families and the labor movement.”

Full Statement of the AFL-CIO Executive Council:

Students in every high school, no matter its ZIP code, deserve a great education. Obtaining a great education depends upon a number of factors, including having well-prepared and supported teachers; well-trained, dedicated and collaborative administrators; solid curricula and focused instruction; and, for our most disadvantaged students, wraparound services that address the out-of-school factors that should not be allowed to impede teaching and learning.

Central Falls High School is the only high school in Central Falls, R.I., a community of working-class families, many of whom are struggling in the economic downturn facing so many communities. The dedicated and committed teachers and teaching assistants of Central Falls High School are making real progress in improving academic achievement, as noted in a state report issued last April. However, even this progress is not sufficient, and the school’s teachers agreed with the superintendent in January that a transformation model should be employed at the school.

Unfortunately, their attempt to engage through their union with the superintendent on the design and details of that model were rebuffed at only their second meeting. The superintendent then unilaterally decided to impose a turnaround model that called for the entire staff to be fired, disrupting teaching and learning at the school, scapegoating teachers and staff and upsetting the whole community instead of working in partnership to employ proven models of reform.

The approach embraced by the Central Falls superintendent—mass teacher firings—has been demonstrated to be a failed model that will not result in the kinds of changes necessary to continue improving instruction and learning. The superintendent refuses to meet with the leadership of the teachers’ union, has rejected offers from community and elected leaders to meet and discuss what is best for the students of Central Falls and has refused offers to engage in mediation. At the same time, the superintendent refuses to accept personal responsibility or acknowledge the responsibility of any of the school’s administrators for the challenges faced at Central Falls High School.

The students of Central Falls High School, their parents and the surrounding community have demonstrated overwhelming support for the dedicated teachers and staff at their school.

We are appalled at recent comments from President Obama and Education Secretary Duncan condoning the mass firing of the Central Falls High School teachers. These comments are unacceptable, do not reflect the reality on the ground and completely ignore the teachers' significant commitment to working with others to transform this school.

The comments are particularly disappointing in light of the recent state report, which found that the high school's reading and writing proficiency have gone up 22 percent and 14 percent respectively over the past two years. None of these facts is reflected in the comments from the Obama administration.

The affiliated unions of the AFL-CIO condemn the actions of the Central Falls superintendent in unjustly terminating the employment of the dedicated teaching faculty of Central Falls High School. We stand in support of the Central Falls Teachers Union in its fight to improve the teaching and learning in Central Falls schools, preserve the rights of its members and keep the teachers where they belong—in the school, working with the students and making progress on academics.

We call on the Central Falls administration to return to negotiations with the Central Falls Teachers Union and seek, in good faith, a collaborative path to proven reforms that provide students with the opportunity to succeed. We further call on the U.S. Secretary of Education to demonstrate leadership in seeking a resolution to this crisis that supports students and teachers alike and that focuses on creating an environment that allows them to succeed.

This battle is about more than Central Falls High School. It is about working together to lift all boats, transform society and give children the education they deserve. It should not be about pitting teachers against students or school district against school district. This is a cause that unites working families and the labor movement.

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