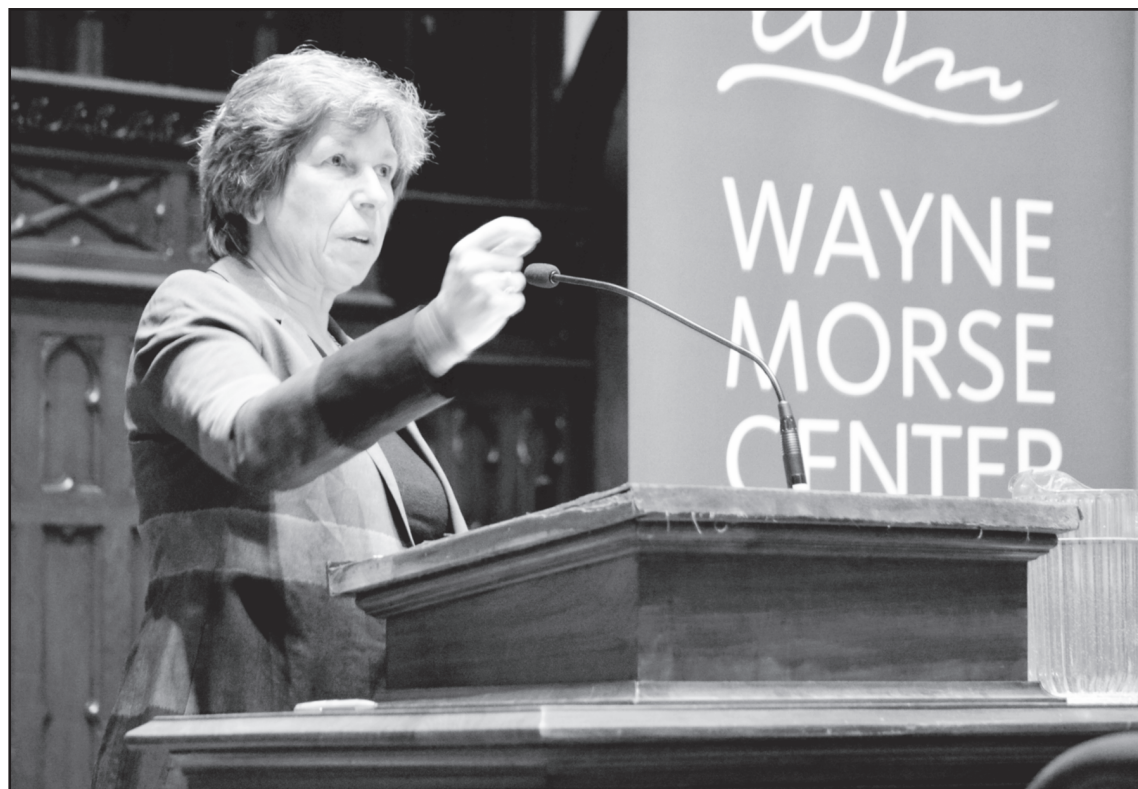


# Public education is under attack, but the public is coming to its defense

American Federation of Teachers president Randi Weingarten was in Portland April 25 to deliver the inaugural "Margaret Hallock lecture," a new series sponsored by the University of Oregon Wayne Morse Center for Law and Politics, named for retired longtime labor educator Margaret Hallock. Below is an excerpt from her speech, on "The Future of Public Education."



American Federation of Teachers president Randi Weingarten says Education Secretary Betsy DeVos is a serious threat to public education. DeVos supports a proposal to cut her own agency's budget 14 percent (\$9 billion).

“As the head of the teachers union, I sit at the nexus of two institutions ... our system of public education and the labor movement. Public education and labor unions are the gateways to the middle class. They are the foundation of a just society and vibrant democracy. And they provide paths to counter the lack of economic security and opportunity that is tearing at the fabric of our society.

Unions don't just benefit union members and their families. We advocate for policies that benefit all working people—like increases to the minimum wage, expanding access to healthcare, and adequate support for public schools and public services.

AFT and our affiliates use collective bargaining to secure fair pay, benefits and working conditions. We always will. But we are also using collective bar-

gaining to pursue a quality agenda to move ever closer to our goal of an excellent, equitable system of public schools.

I don't need to tell you that we're not there yet. One reason is that self-described reformers have successfully promoted failed approaches that have not worked here or abroad—top-down, test-based accountability; privatization; school closures; competition; and firing rather than developing teachers. Another is that America has a

shamefully high child poverty rate. Half of the children who attend public schools live in poverty, and the achievement gap mirrors this economic gap.

But American public schools are not the failures that anti-public education ideologues portray them to be. A number of indicators—like drop out rates and high school graduation rates—are moving in the right direction. And the wealthiest students in our public schools do as well as the highest scoring students in

the world. But we won't be satisfied until we do what we do in our best schools in all our schools—for all children.

Until now, the conversation has been about how to do that—to improve public schools. People might disagree about how to do it, but not whether it was the right goal.

Today, however, with Donald Trump in the White House and Betsy DeVos as his secretary of education, their focus is on abandoning public education as

a civic institution and value. It's not overblown to say they pose an existential threat to the public schools that 90 percent of American children attend and depend on. DeVos has spent decades in her home state of Michigan working to defund, destabilize and dismantle public schools. And President Trump has given her a platform to try to do the same to the nation's public schools. They really believe privatization is the be-all and end-all ... that education is a commodity to be governed by the market as opposed to valuing public education as a public good.

Secretary DeVos has called public schools a "dead end" and said that she wasn't "sure how they could get a lot worse." I call her a "public school denier"—there's really no evidence that can change her mind. I saw that up close and personal in a school visit we did together last week in Van Wert, Ohio... a very Republican area that voted for Trump but love, love, love their public schools.

That's why we invited her to this rock ribbed Republican area—to show that support for public school transcends politics.

In the county's elementary school, 60 percent of the students live below the poverty line. But Van Wert's youngest learners get a strong start through the district's strong early childhood education programs and literacy specialists to help struggling readers become successful readers (paid for by federal Title I funds which the Trump administration wants to use instead for vouchers and privatization). We saw a community school that helps the kids most at risk of dropping out stay on a path to graduation. We saw great examples of project-based learning, like Van Wert High School's robotics team, which won the state robotics championship this year. Or Mr. Hoverman's 5th grade class studying about kids their age in the Depression. Or the high school students using the same We The People curriculum (newer edition of course) I used with my students at Clara Barton High School in Brooklyn.

Van Wert's public schools clearly are not a dead end. They have a 96 percent graduation and attendance rate. Seventy-five percent of graduates go on to a 2- or 4-year college, the teaching force is deeply dedicated, and people move to Van Wert be-

## Portland School Board, Zone 5

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# SCOTT BAILEY



*Life-long Portlander, long-time public school activist  
Member of AFSCME Council 28 (State of Washington)*

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- Portland Association of Teachers
- Portland Federation of School Professionals
- Columbia Pacific Building Trades Council
- Iron Workers Local 29 • Roofers Local 49

## Northwest Oregon Labor Council, AFL-CIO Recommends:

# KORI BASQUEZ



for  
**PARKROSE  
SCHOOL BOARD  
District 3  
Position 4**



*"As future leaders of our communities, our children deserve quality education to promote their continued success. I would appreciate your vote to continue these efforts."*

**Also endorsed by:** Parkrose Faculty Association;  
Erick Flores, Educator, Parkrose School Board Director Position 5.