



June 16, 2011

Letter to the Editor

It's amazing that Detroit Public Schools feel the added \$5,000 for educating Catherine Ferguson Academy (CFA) students costs too much money. In a budget crisis we look to the short-term, but the crisis will continue if we don't spend money on programs that work.

CFA educates young mothers about agriculture and nutrition, feeding their families, and caring for animals. The teenagers who attend CFA now must attend public school, where childcare isn't provided and less than one third of students graduate.

The struggle of young, impoverished women is global. The Worldwatch Institute's State of the World 2011, Innovations that Nourish the Planet includes success stories of women using agriculture to lift themselves from poverty to building businesses.

Detroit should educate young women to provide for their families and communities for a better Detroit. The young women of CFA proved they could do it. Don't let their opportunity-Detroit's opportunity-be taken away.

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Original Article below



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3 fight arrests at Detroit school for teen mothers

April demonstration against school closing was peaceful, 3 say

Mark Hicks and Tom Greenwood/ The Detroit News

Detroit — A teacher, student and alumna from Catherine Ferguson Academy are fighting trespassing charges stemming from what they say was a peaceful protest of the closing of the city school for pregnant students and teen mothers.

"We were fighting for our education," said Tiffini Baldwin, 19, a college student and 2010 CFA graduate who was arrested over an April 15 sit-in. "We were fighting for other people's futures."

Baldwin and Catherine Buckens, a graduating senior, were arraigned Monday at Detroit's 36th District Court. A not-guilty plea was entered for both. They were released on their own recognizance and given a July 11 pretrial date.

Teacher Nicole Conaway is to be arraigned today.

Roughly 15 supporters were outside the courthouse Monday morning.

"There's no way a Detroit jury will convict them for fighting for one of the best schools in the country," said Joyce Schon, attorney for Baldwin and Buckens.

"CFA is a real community. It's like an Underground Railroad for young women who got pregnant. CFA is irreplaceable."

The trespassing charges carry a maximum penalty of a \$500 fine or 90 days in jail, said their attorney, Shanta Driver.

Opened in 1986, the academy was targeted for closure as Detroit Public Schools announced plans to turn over some schools to charters in a bid to help trim a \$327 million deficit.

According to the district, each CFA student costs \$12,619 to educate, compared with an average of \$7,600 across the district.

DPS offered CFA to charter operators to unload the building's operational cost of \$2.7 million a year.

But plans didn't materialize, and last week officials announced the school would officially close.

About a dozen people were at the library sit-in in April after classes ended, while more than 50 picketed outside, Baldwin said.

Police were called, although classes weren't disturbed and participants acted peacefully, she said.

"We were just holding our ground, and they were treating us as if we were holding someone hostage."

Baldwin and Buckens were arrested and separated from their children, Driver said, noting Conaway also was at school during operating hours.

"To charge someone with trespassing because they were in their own school when it was open is a pretty bogus charge," said Driver, who is also national chair of By Any Means Necessary, a group that defends civil rights.

DPS spokeswoman Jennifer Mrozowski declined to comment on the case Monday. Meanwhile, supporters are trying to save CFA. A rally is planned there Thursday. "It is a high-performing, extremely successful model of what Detroit can do in terms of creating successful public education," Driver said.

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