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Speak Out Now

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Oakland Teachers Strike to Defend Public Education

Oakland teachers are entering the second week of a strike to defend Oakland schools. Teachers, students, parents and school staff were out in force on Thursday and Friday by the thousands. Drivers of cars going by the picket lines honked their support. Community members brought food and helped run the solidarity schools so parents had a place to take their kids since they didn't want to cross the picket lines. Teachers are on strike to demand better educational opportunities for the young people of Oakland. There is good reason for this strike. Many students are crammed into overcrowded classrooms, and don't have access to a library. Programs like Art and P.E. have been cut. There are just 21 nurses for 37,000 students and one counselor for every 600 students.

The Oakland Unified School District claims it doesn't have the funds to provide for a decent education in Oakland today and is threatening to make \$30 million in budget cuts this year. It has announced the layoffs of 150 support staff and administrators and the closing of Roots International, and it is threatening to close 23 more schools. Each year the District says it's broke and it ends up with a surplus of tens of millions.

Teachers have been working without a contract for a year and a half. They are demanding smaller class sizes, more counselors, nurses and other support staff, no school closures and a pay increase for teachers. Oakland teachers are the lowest paid in the Bay Area and can't afford to live near where they work. This results in a constant turnover of teachers - one out of every five leaves each year - which creates a tremendous instability at the schools.

Underfunded education, overcrowded classrooms and underpaid teachers are not unique to California. Most school systems are severely under-funded, receiving insufficient funding from the state and the federal governments. Since 2008, states across the country have made \$23 billion in cuts to K-12 funding. In that same time period, the number of K-12 teachers and other school workers has fallen by 135,000, while the number of students has risen by 1,419,000.

For-profit, non-unionized charter schools are taking advantage of this situation. They claim to offer a better education, but they don't. They select the students they want, screen out students they don't want and return them to the public schools. Most charter school teachers and staff are not unionized and have to teach a standardized curriculum. They are paid less and get fewer benefits. Oakland already has 44 privatized, publicly-funded charter schools. And it's likely that the School District will hand over many of the schools they want to close to these charter school organizations or to real estate developers.

Is this the future we want to offer to our young people? The politicians who defend privatizing our schools don't represent our interests. They willingly sacrifice the futures of young people to the profiteering of the corporations.

The money exists for quality public education and more! We are surrounded by enormous wealth but supposedly no money for education! The Bay Area has the largest number of billionaires in the world (at least 106). In 2018, the richest 400 people in the U.S. had a total wealth of \$2.89 trillion, more than the bottom 64 percent of the country combined.

We don't have to accept this. Teachers in this country, from West Virginia to Arizona to L.A. have already stepped forward to defend public education. The same fight is in front of us in Oakland today. This isn't just a fight by 3000 teachers. We have to stand together and make it our fight too. If we organize our forces together, we can use our power to defend our interests. Education should be a right not a privilege.

Support the teachers' strike!

Join the picket lines - at schools across Oakland info on the web go to: bit.ly/strikemap

Contribute to the feed students at the Solidarity Schools which provide food and a safe place for students who are too young to be on the picket lines and for nourishment those on the picket lines - <https://donorbox.org/breadfordlines>.