

New Jersey students punished for participating in school walkout

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Many of the tens of thousands of students who walked out from their high schools on Tuesday to protest draconian cuts to education now face disciplinary action from school authorities.

The walkout, which was organized largely through Facebook, was called to protest the mass layoffs of teachers and steep budget cuts in school programs enacted by New Jersey's Republican Governor Chris Christie. School districts will lose an average of 11 percent funding.

Christie responded to the walkout by trying to pit students against their teachers, saying that the protests made him wonder "why the students are protesting only against what the governor is doing, and not against what their teachers are doing." He insisted that teachers were to blame for the cuts because they "have not stepped up to join the shared sacrifice."

Protests are continuing. On Thursday, seventeen students who walked out of class from Eastside High School in Paterson were arrested for disorderly conduct, according to regional news site wpix.com. Other students are planning another walkout on May 12.

Officials at several schools responded to Tuesday's walkout by punishing students for seeking to defend their education and their teachers. Forty-five students from Cresskill High School in Bergen County were suspended after they left school. Administrators called parents and warned them of more suspensions if the protests continued.

The Gloucester County Times reported that in South

Orange-Maplewood students from Columbia High School "were charged with cutting class, which could affect their grades." Also, "Those who left the school property face Saturday detention."

According to postings on Facebook, students who walked out in Mt. Olive faced in-school suspensions.

At least one student at Cherry Hill High West has reportedly been suspended. Students at Dickinson High in Jersey City told WSWs reporters that those who walked out would be denied permission to attend an annual cultural event.

Students at Williamstown High were put under lockdown when the protest began, and those that left the school and now face disciplinary action.

Students at Millville Senior High School face disciplinary action for participation in the walkout as well. "If a student missed class they would be disciplined on a sliding scale based on previous violations that could result in a suspension," Superintendent Shelly Schneider told *TheDailyJournal.com*.

Some walkouts also took place on Wednesday and Thursday, and students who participated in these actions also face disciplinary action or arrest.

In Neptune Township High School, 100 students walked out. One student, Jeff Allen, told the media, "They say they are going to cut 19 to 24 teachers at the high school alone. We don't have enough teachers as it is. Our AP (advanced proficiency) classes are crowded as it is."

Allen and another student were suspended later in the morning. “We’re being made examples,” he said. “Our intentions were only good and for the pressing issue of the school budget.”

The New Jersey Education Association, the statewide teachers’ union, has played a shameful role in refusing to support the protests. The union, which has worked systematically to impose concessions on its own membership, denounced the walkouts. According to *The Star-Ledger*, on Wednesday the union “urged districts to punish students based on existing rules on skipping class, with no exceptions: ‘They’re going to have to pay the piper,’ NJEA spokesman Steve Wollmer said.”

New Jersey’s students acted in a courageous and principled manner to defend public education. Reprisals, including loss of privileges, demerits, suspensions, memos in computer databases or written reports must be rescinded. Charges against those arrested must be immediately dropped.



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