

Students and teachers speak out against Bloomberg's budget cuts

A WSWWS reporting team
14 May 2011

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to teenagers from Brooklyn who joined Thursday's march against the budget cuts announced by New York City's billionaire Mayor Michael Bloomberg. They work in the Cypress Hills Beacon Program, a community center that provides adult education, after-school and summer programs, and health and recreational programs.

Cypress Hill Local Development Corporation, a non-profit, faces \$885,000 in federal budget cuts, \$575,732 in state cuts, and now \$450,000 in city cutbacks. Of this, \$140,000 will be lost to the Beacon Program.

Kirby said: "I came down here to represent Cyprus Beacon. It's an after-school program that we work at. I get to help people in the community and to make a little money besides. I can't really make very much money any place else. The times are tough all around. My brother got laid off as a messenger. "

Steven added, "We're counselors-in-training at Beacon. We get kids together and we're sort of like a family. We help each other with academics. Our whole program is going to be cut, both the regular program and the summer program. We get paid to work there. It's really hard to get jobs—good jobs." When asked why they had come to Wall Street to protest, Steven remarked, "Because the balance between rich and poor is not fair."

Mary, who is a pre-kindergarten teacher in the Williamsburg neighborhood of Brooklyn, was initially hesitant about giving an interview because she feared for her job, given the economic and administrative pressures in schools, even though she has been teaching for 20 years.

"The neighborhood in Williamsburg has changed to big money," she said. "There will be charter schools for the upper crust and everyone else will have the 'reformed' schools. The mission of public schools is to

close the achievement gap. Bloomberg's formula does the exact opposite of that. The chants here should begin with 'What about the Millionaire's Tax!'

"We have education without representation, tyranny. The parents' voice has been taken out of the system. There is a hold on the elections for the CECs [Community Education Councils representing school district parents]. The charters use private money. This is discriminatory and anti-democratic. Obama and Duncan are anti-democratic, but the NEA and other unions are already pushing for Obama. How could they? Education has been changed into some kind of consumer nonsense."

Maria Cruz, a third grade teacher, and Shannon Guerrero, also an elementary school teacher, teach in the Washington Heights section of Manhattan. Raising the role of the unions and the Democrats in the attacks on education, Maria asked, "Why should schools be closed? What is the union doing? Teachers don't go downtown to the union and demand 'how can you help us?'"

Shannon added, "There needs to be a new party, not the Democrats, because it is not working. More money is taken from education, even with Obama. It will hurt the majority of students, African-American and Hispanic." Maria worried, "Where are you going to place our kids? Or, is it decided that they are already just going to be cleaning?"

Gary Sneed works in the AIDS Service Center on 14th Street at Union Square, which services sites in all five boroughs of New York City. It receives money from the City and has already suffered cuts. "We work with people at risk, infected or affected. I have gone to every rally. When they see the crowd is this big, I think they have to listen. They will see we will not let them treat us just anyway. They need to put money into

things we need: work, schools, education, medication, from HIV to high blood pressure, it doesn't matter, but to help save a life.

"We bailed out the bankers," Gary said. "Now they make bonuses. They need to give back. Back in the 1930s, it was not as serious as it is now."

Joy, an English teacher for 25 years, also asked that the name of her school be withheld because of fears of victimization. She told the WSWS:

"Bloomberg wants to dismantle education. It is conspiracy against the poor. It is an attack on senior teachers. The principals love this Mr. Bloomberg. Hey, teachers have no due process. They just pull us out of the classroom. They want to get rid of experienced teachers, and they want to replace them with young, inexperienced teachers. Starting pay is about half that of top salary, and the younger teachers are more easily manipulated. They have to be because they can be more easily fired.

"It is union-busting. However, I don't trust the union either. The union should never have let things get this far.

"It takes about six years to get tenure, and without seniority anyone who speaks out, let's say, against a bad principal, will be written up as insubordinate. We lose our freedom of speech.

"We do not have a curriculum any more. It has been watered down to make it easier to pass tests: we are supposed to teach to the test, not to teach real content. There is no discussion, no conversation.

"Get politics and big business—which are the same thing—out of education. The government is of the powerful, run by the powerful, and for the powerful."



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact