

Seattle students walk out against education cuts

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Students from five Seattle High Schools walked out of class on Wednesday to protest further proposed cuts to K-12 education in Washington state. Hundreds of students walked to Red Square at the University of Washington, where they joined university students. It is estimated that upwards of a thousand students took part.

The students carried signs reading: "You cut school so we cut class" and chanting, "We're the future of our nation, no more cuts to education," among other slogans.

The Seattle school district released a public statement that threatened students with punishment for participating in the action. "We certainly appreciate our students involvement and interest in the state's current funding issues, especially K-12 funding. We are proud of our civic-minded students. However, we encourage our students to stay in class... Discipline is up to the principal's discretion. Typically, absences are excused with parent/guardian permission."

This was the second walkout by students of one of the participating schools, Garfield High, in two weeks. On November 30, students walked out of class and marched to City Hall. They cited the loss of programs and increased student fees as a result of the cuts. That protest was inspired by the arrest of one of Garfield High's teachers at the state capitol earlier that week. Jesse Hagopian was taken into custody while attempting to make a citizen's arrest of state legislators for failing to fulfill the state constitution's mandate to fully fund education.

Washington state has seen several reductions to education funding by Democratic Governor Christine Gregoire. Her current proposal to close the budget gap includes threats of yet deeper cuts if a 0.5 percent sales tax referendum is not passed by popular vote. As is

always the case with such regressive tax schemes, those who can least afford it would be the most affected: the working class and poor.

Democratic State Senator Paul Shin suggested that Gregoire's proposals do not go far enough, and has called for a 1 percent increase instead.

The governor's proposed cuts are steep—\$250 million from K-12 and \$160 million from higher education.

State legislators ended a special session on Wednesday—day 17 of what was to be a 30-day special session dedicated to working on a budget proposal in light of news of a nearly \$2 billion expected shortfall. The start of the special session was delayed by protesters, many affiliated with the local Occupy groups.

The session was wrapped up early with a proposed budget including a delay in purchasing replacements for old school buses, the transfer of unclaimed funds to the general fund, and reductions in personnel to the Department of Ecology. Other state agencies that will see cuts include the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, where a 10 percent reduction is expected.

The additional cuts to education, health care and social programs threatened by Gregoire are in keeping with austerity plans being pushed by lawmakers around the country. The economic situation shows no signs of improving, and state governments—prodded and encouraged by the Obama administration—are responding with another round of brutal austerity measures.



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