

# **Detroit students walkout against school closures and deteriorating conditions**

**Lawrence Porter**  
**27 April 2012**

Over 200 students at two high schools in Detroit's southwestern neighborhood, Southwestern High and Western International, walked out of class on Wednesday to protest the closure of Southwestern, the poor conditions at Western, and the growth of charter schools.

Students from Western said they walked out of school just before 11 a.m. in sympathy with the students at Southwestern High School, which is among nine schools slated for closure next year in the Detroit Public Schools district.

"Our walkout at Western was inspired by the walkout at Southwestern and it was in solidarity with it, but it was also against the conditions in our school system," stated Freddie Burse, one of the leaders of the walkout.

Freddie said the students organized the event themselves via Facebook after a student heard that there was going to be a walkout at Southwestern.

"The purpose of the demonstration was to make our voices heard and to speak up on our education system because we feel there are a lot problems there," continued Burse.

"We are also opposed to the growth of charter schools. The main one here is Caesar Chavez. The privatization of schools is the death of the school system."

Several students said they were especially upset with the announcement that Southwestern High School would be closed next year.

"It's about trying to save Southwestern High School," stated Natalie Rivera, a junior at Western, as she and several hundred students gathered in Clark Park with students from her school and Southwestern. "We are tired of the closing of the schools. We want them to stop.

"Southwestern students walked out so we felt we should walk out in solidarity. We want all of the schools to join together," continued Rivera. "We don't even have proper books in the school. We have to learn with old stuff that is not updated. The teachers take their own money to pay for the stuff we need."

The walkouts at Western International and Southwestern are the third student walkouts in the last month in Detroit.

Last month students at Denby High school walked out after the announcement that the school will be placed in the new statewide district for what are being billed as low-performing schools—the Education Achievement Authority (EAA). Another spontaneous protest took place at Fredrick Douglass Academy when 50 students walked out because they did not have teachers. After protesting that they wanted an education, the students were suspended for a day.

The Detroit school system has been decimated by the actions of a series of Emergency Managers—state-appointed directors that take over a school district in financial distress, that have been appointed by both Democratic and Republican governors—the systematic defunding of the system by state and federal administrations and the collapse of city property tax revenues, the archaic basis of public education funding in the US.

The present Emergency Manager, Roy Roberts, appointed by Republican Governor Rick Snyder, is implementing the closure of Southwestern. Roberts, a former General Motors executive, has outlined a plan to model a new school district dominated by charter schools similar to the New Orleans Recovery School District created after Hurricane Katrina. The charter school policy

is in line with President Barack Obama's Race to the Top educational initiative.

Avonte Latham, a junior involved in the walkout, said the government should provide more financial assistance to the Detroit school district. "I feel Michigan needs to give more money for schools. This is holding things back by closing schools," charged Avonte.

"I don't think they should be closing schools every year. They are forcing people to leave Michigan. When they decided to close Southwestern HS we decided to take a stand. Enough is enough. They are taking the schools out of the DPS system and putting them in a new system. It's not right."

Several students and their supporters said the closure of Southwestern would have a major impact on the choices for schools next year. Gabriela Alcazar, a community activist who attended the protest, said the students at Southwestern have been given two choices for schools that will only make matters worse.

"If Southwestern is closed the student will either go to Western or Northwestern," stated Alcazar. "Southwestern is already overstretched with 1,200 students. Northwestern is 15 miles away."

*The author recommends:*

Detroit schools manager names schools to close this fall  
[10 February 2012]

Jerry White campaigns in Detroit against school closings  
[14 February 2012]

Detroit school czar targets 15 schools, 600 teachers  
[21 March 2012]

School districts throughout Detroit area face cuts  
[18 May 2011]



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**