

Detroit student protest organizers explain issues behind Cass Tech walkout

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On Monday, January 25, hundreds of Detroit high school students walked out of their classes to oppose the legal witch-hunt of teachers who have engaged in a series of “sickout” protests against deplorable conditions in the schools and the attack on public education being spearheaded by the school district’s state-appointed emergency manager.

The walkouts took place at three of the city’s top academic high schools, Cass Technical, Communication & Media Arts, and Renaissance. The protests were timed to coincide with the court appearance of 23 rank-and-file teachers accused by the district of organizing “illegal strikes.” As the leaders of the Cass Tech walkout explain below, students were also motivated by the lack of teachers and supplies throughout the Detroit Public Schools.

A video of the Cass Tech walkout by student Trinere Bass can be seen [here](#).

While the judge in the case rejected the district’s request for a temporary restraining order and temporarily delayed a direct confrontation with teachers, preferring instead to rely on the Detroit Federation of Teachers to suppress continued protests, the threat of injunctions, fines and even arrests are being held in reserve. Meanwhile, state legislators in the capital of Lansing are preparing the bipartisan restructuring plan for the Detroit Public Schools, which would sharply increase the number of charter schools and expand the attack on teachers’ jobs, wages and health and pension benefits.

The sickout protests by teachers and student walkouts were organized outside of the control of the unions and express the growing determination of the working class to defend the right to public education against the attacks by every level of the government from the Obama administration on down.

We the Students, formed by students at Cass Tech High School, organized a walkout of students at the school in support of the Detroit teachers. Below is a brief interview between the *World Socialist Web Site* and the students who led the protest.

WSWS: What made you come out and protest?

Natalya: Originally, We the Students decided to protest to be advocates for change. Our teachers have been standing up for their rights and their students’ as well. We have always supported our teachers and we believe it’s unfair that they are subjected to lowered wages and cuts to their health care benefits, as well as the conditions they are forced to teach in.

It is also not fair to us students, whose parents pay public taxes, to be subjected to the conditions that we are forced to “learn” in. In many DPS schools there are many teacher vacancies, there are minimal available desks because classrooms that were built for a class size of 30 now must accommodate 40 students. And those are only minor issues. When the injunctions were filed in an attempt to prevent further sickouts, it angered not only the teachers, but the students as well. We collectively decided that enough was enough!

WSWS: Have you or other students faced suspensions or other disciplinary measures?

Natalya: The initiators of We the Students who attend Cass Tech were not suspended. Students at Communication Media Arts High School who participated in the walkout were disciplined, with suspensions reduced from five days to one day.

WSWS: How do you view your walkout action within the broader context of the teachers’ sickouts?

Natalya: We the Students view our walkout as the first of many steps to achieve a better school system. Being that we are Americans, citizens of a democratic

government, we have rights that are displayed in the Constitution. Our First Amendment right is freedom of speech, which includes the right to peacefully assemble. The students are the future. We have a voice and we do matter. If we do not stand for something, we will fall for anything. This not only affects us, it affects the generations that follow after.



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