

“Everyone should go out on strike, even nationwide”

Mass support for teachers’ walkouts in Washington state

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29 August 2018

Teachers across Washington state continue to walk out, demanding restoration of educational funding and adequate salaries. Contracts for all school workers have been reopened as a result of a legislative funding package and a state Supreme Court decision known as *McCleary*.

The suit was first filed in 2007 by families alleging the state failed to meet its constitutional obligation to provide adequate education for its children. In 2014, the state was held in contempt and fined \$100,000 a day, but money from the state legislature—still woefully inadequate—has only just been released. Teachers, justifiably, feel they deserve substantial increases to make up for years of stagnant wages.

“A unified struggle is necessary,” parent Michelle Rodriguez told the *World Socialist Web Site*, rallying in support of Vancouver teachers who are walking out today. “Any part of society that is struggling is an attack on society as a whole. Everybody should go out on strike, even nationwide. They are dividing teachers district by district, it should be a united struggle.”

Rodriguez added, “I’m here because kids should not worry about their parents paying bills. We need to completely remake our political system. I am a socialist, we need health care for everyone, we need housing for everyone. We should make sure that people who don’t have what they need are provided for.”

On Monday, teachers in Evergreen voted to join those in Longview and Washougal on strike.

Teachers in Vancouver, Evergreen and Ridgefield are slated to strike Wednesday, with educators in Ridgefield citing overcrowded classes and rejecting meager pay offers of 12.8 percent. Kent is slated to hit the picket lines on Thursday.

Across the state, strike votes and mass rallies of educators and community supporters are taking place, including:

- Camas voted for strike action with 95.7 percent approval.
- Sumner will strike September 5 if there is no agreement. At a standing-room-only school district meeting last week, Bonney Lake High School teacher Michael Howard told the crowd, “That money is ours—we’re not asking for it, we’re telling you.” Bus driver and food service workers also voted to authorize a strike.
- Lake Tapps is being offered only 3.1 percent and has voted to strike.
- Hockinson district educators voted for strike action after failed bargaining on Sunday and Monday.
- Battle Ground teachers rejected a 16.5 percent offer over three years by 98.4 percent.
- In Tacoma, hundreds rallied Tuesday morning, protesting an insulting 3.1 percent increase as negotiations continued.
- Puyallup teachers in their hundreds protested the lack of an agreement in Pioneer Park.
- A mass rally was held in Centralia, which has already voted to strike. “Two-point-one million comes to Centralia and they’re not wanting to pass those funds to us, our teachers,” said Lauri Johnson, a choir teacher, to KIRO7, adding, “We had 40 teachers leave us this last June to local schools.”
- A Spokane meeting of hundreds of educators was a sea of roaring red-shirted teachers threatening to strike, as bargaining continued in the state’s second largest district.
- In Seattle, the largest district, a mass membership

meeting was held Tuesday to vote on joining the growing list of districts seeking sizeable pay increases and more funding for education.

In Vancouver, more than 100 teachers and supporters rallied at the district headquarters as bargaining continued. Without a settlement, Vancouver educators will also walk out on Wednesday. The school district, meanwhile, issued a news release stating that it would suspend payments on teachers' health care and authorize legal action against them. The Evergreen district approved a similar vindictive resolution earlier.

On August 23, Republican state senator John Braun sent a letter to Governor Jay Inslee, Attorney General Ferguson and state school superintendent Chris Reykdal demanding the state seek a legal injunction to quash the strikes.

On Tuesday, Braun spoke in Longview and threatened that state funding could be cut next year "if it is carelessly bargained away by school districts" this year, warning teachers to "be careful." His remarks on funding were echoed by Democratic State Senator Dean Takko (D-Longview), who said, regarding future funds for education, "I don't know if that's something I would want to do."

While Braun's letter describes the struggle of educators as "bickering over the bounty," he has long been a bountiful recipient of campaign contributions from military contractor Boeing, which casts an immense shadow over all Washington state government. Braun, among others who voted to give the wildly profitable contractor a \$9 billion tax cut in 2013, was exposed for accepting the maximum political contribution in the aftermath of its successful passage in the legislature. The lavish Boeing tax incentives backed by Democratic Governor Inslee exceed the settlement under *McCleary* to fund schools for the state's nearly 1 million schoolchildren.

For their part, parents, students and other workers express a growing support to educators. This is true nationally, as was confirmed by the annual PDK Poll, which announced that 78 percent of public school parents say they would support teachers in their own communities if they went on strike for higher pay. Support to teachers in West Virginia jumped by 16 percent in the wake of their walkouts last year.

In Longview, where teachers began the strike wave last Thursday, hundreds of community members

flooded the high school cafeteria on Monday to support teacher demands at a school board meeting. Recent graduates related how teachers changed their lives, and the audience broke out in song, "The More We Get Together," in response to the remarks of a kindergarten teacher. They will continue on strike Wednesday after bargaining failed on Monday.

Kyle Sharpe, a special education teacher, who also attended the rally for Vancouver educators, told the WSWS, "All schools should be funded equally. The Trump administration is divisive on every level."

Ann Williams, who worked for 32 years in the communications industry, told the WSWS that she wanted to protest in support of her daughter who is a teacher. "The year my husband and I retired 11 years ago, we paid zero in health care. Now we are paying \$800 total a month. In the 1970s, with every contract we got more and more. In the 1980s, we got less and less. In the phone company [Bell Telephone] before they broke up, there were national strikes. Twenty years ago, the wage was \$30 an hour, now it is down to \$17 to \$19 an hour."

"Teachers work extremely hard, and they deserve a fair contract and a living wage," Tiffany Morrisey, a seventh-grade teacher at Odyssey Middle School, told the *Columbian*. "There's just no excuse for school districts to be giving them the runaround like this."



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