

No Layoffs! No Cuts!

A fighting strategy to defend public education in San Diego's Sweetwater Union High School district

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The plan by officials from the Sweetwater Union High School District in San Diego, California to slash tens of millions of dollars from the school budget is an attack on students, teachers, parents and the entire working class. The proposal must be rejected, and a movement developed to oppose all layoffs and cuts.

The consequences of the planned cuts will be devastating. The proposal that will be finalized by March 15 and go into effect in July only covers \$20 million of the supposed \$30 million deficit, meaning this is only the beginning. The initial measures include laying off 237 full-time teachers, counselors and site managers. The closure of all 12 learning centers, which provide vital services for hundreds of students, will have drastic and irreparable consequences.

Over the past two weeks, hundreds of teachers have organized pickets and thousands of students have staged walkouts to protest the cuts. The school board, however, is ignoring public sentiment and going ahead with its draconian cuts. Far from fighting, the Sweetwater Education Association (SEA) has told teachers and students they have no choice but to accept the school authorities' dictates.

Teachers and students can and must defend the right to high quality public education. But the fight must be expanded! The Socialist Equality Party calls on teachers, students and parents to form independent rank-and-file and neighborhood committees in every school and in the broader community to mobilize support.

These committees should organize mass meetings and online discussions to develop a strategy to fight back. They should adopt a series of demands that begins with

what teachers and students need, not what the district officials, trade unions, or corporate-controlled politicians say is affordable.

These demands should include:

No cuts, no layoffs, no closures!

The current \$20 million in cuts will cause irreparable harm to teachers, staff, students and their families. Learning centers must stay open and be expanded. Teachers and students must oppose all reductions in staffing and vital services and demand the restoration of all reductions since 2018.

A sharp reduction in class sizes

SUHSD teachers have a total student cap of 176 students per day. This equates to 30-35 student class-size on average. Many general education classes have 40 students per class. Middle to high school classes should have no more than 24 students with a teacher and an aide. The present class sizes are not compatible with providing students with the education they need and deserve.

A massive investment in public schools

The claim that there is no money to vastly expand public education is a lie. There is plenty of money, but the question is, who controls these resources and decides how they are allocated?

The \$30 million budget deficit is a tiny fraction of what is monopolized by the corporate and financial elite. California's richest individual, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg, has a personal fortune (\$70 billion) that could cover the deficit 2,000 times over. The amount spent by the Trump administration on its reactionary border wall (\$11 billion) is 367 times the

Sweetwater budget deficit.

There should be full funding for education with *more* teachers paid living wages and benefits as well as robust arts and music programs; libraries; nurses; psychologists; and staff, materials and structures for learning at every school site. This is only possible through a frontal assault on the wealth and power of the super-rich and a vast redistribution of wealth.

A public inquiry into the loss of \$68 million since 2018

There has been no serious accounting for where the budget deficit has come from and who is responsible for it. Rank-and-file committees of school workers and students must be allowed to inspect the financial books of the school district.

The only way to win these demands is through a broad struggle that appeals to the working class, completely independent of the teacher unions, which are allied to the Democratic Party budget-cutters and have proven they will do nothing to oppose the grotesquely unequal distribution of wealth.

The SEA has stated that there is nothing it can do about the layoffs and has warned teachers not to take independent action along with protesting students because this would be a breach of the union's contract with the district. This only underscores the fact that the whole labor-management system the unions are part of is nothing more than a rope around the necks of workers.

Sweetwater teachers, students and parents should follow the example of the University of California grad students, who are openly defying both the university administration and the United Auto Workers union to fight for living wages. Sweetwater teachers have already begun to form rank-and-file committees independent of the Sweetwater Education Association, and this must be developed and expanded.

Over the past two years, mass struggles and strikes by teachers have erupted in cities and states from West Virginia, Oklahoma and Arizona to Los Angeles, Oakland and Chicago. In every case, however, the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers—unions run by executives who make hundreds of thousands of dollars a year—have worked to smother opposition and impose the austerity measures demanded by school districts and the states.

The teacher unions are politically allied with the

Democratic Party, which is no less responsible than the Republicans for the attack on public education in California and throughout the country. Whether it was under Bush's "No Child Left Behind" program, Obama's "Race to the Top," or Trump's wholesale attack on public schools, the ruling elite is united in defunding and privatizing public education as part of the redistribution of wealth from the working class to the rich. Now the unions are backing Joe Biden, a proponent of charter schools and other attacks on teachers.

Sweetwater teachers, UC grad students and other educators in California are in a direct political fight against the Democratic Party, which controls virtually all the levers of political power in the state. This includes Governor Newsom and his predecessor Jerry Brown, who oversaw the largest growth of the charter school industry in the country.

There is mass support around the world for a struggle to defend public education. As Sweetwater teachers conduct this fight, across the border in Puebla, Mexico, teachers are blockading freight rail lines to fight budget cutting. Over the past month alone, hundreds of thousands of teachers have taken to the streets to oppose austerity from Ontario, Canada to Sri Lanka, Brazil and Mexico.

The Socialist Equality Party is spearheading the fight to unite the entire working class—black and white, immigrant and native born in the United States and internationally—in a common political movement against inequality and capitalism.

We urge all teachers, students, parents and workers in San Diego to participate in our emergency online meeting Tuesday, March 10 at 7:00 pm PDT. Register now to attend, at socialism2020.org/sweetwater



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