

As Stanford nurses strike continues, Oakland teachers launch one-day strike against school closures

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On Friday, more than 2,000 teachers in the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) are expected to take part in a one-day strike in opposition to planned school closures and mergers due to a major budget deficit in the district. Schools will remain in-session Friday, though the district is encouraging parents to keep their children home due to expected teacher shortages.

The walkouts take place as 5,000 Bay Area nurses at Stanford Health Care maintain their strike, which began on Sunday. They are determined to fight against burnout, resulting from being continuously overworked, and are demanding better wages, staffing ratios and working conditions.

The two job actions demonstrate the potential for a broader offensive of the working class in defense of its standard of living against runaway inflation, mass death due to the pandemic and the danger of nuclear war. It follows a nationwide teachers strike earlier this week in Sri Lanka, where teachers demonstrated against an inflation rate of more than 30 percent and demanded the downfall of the government.

In California alone, hundreds of thousands of workers, including 20,000 dockworkers and others who occupy critical choke points in the world's supply chains, have contracts that are set to expire over the course of the next three months. Both teachers and striking nurses must make an appeal to workers across the state for a united struggle.

OUSD faces a \$50 million shortfall and plans to close seven schools and merge 15 additional schools over the next two years. The district also plans on laying off staff and leaving vacancies unfilled. Educators have been working under an expired contract since 2021 and because of stagnant wages face cuts to their income due to the crippling rise in inflation and the high cost of gas, energy and food prices. The Oakland Education Association (OEA) has remained silent regarding contract negotiations with the district.

Despite mass opposition among teachers and students to the lack of COVID-19 safety in the schools, the OEA has enforced all the mass infection policies demanded by the Biden administration and carried out by the district. Wildcat sickouts by teachers took place in January due to lack of COVID-19 safety during the devastating Omicron surge. The vast majority of the OEA bargaining team resigned after the executive board went behind their backs to loosen COVID-19 safety protocols in the district. Thousands of students also went on strike in January demanding high-quality masks, outdoor eating spaces and regular testing. All necessary mitigations to stop the spread of SARS-CoV-2 have since been lifted.

Indoor masking mandates ended Monday without a whimper from the union. This abandonment of teachers' health is starkly exposed by newly released statistics.

Nineteen percent of educators nationally are suffering from Long COVID, a suite of disorders that include vision loss, fatigue, cardiac and pulmonary conditions and mental distress. As of February of this year, 75 percent of children and adolescents had been infected by COVID-19, according to a new report released by the CDC.

Despite claims by President Biden that "Kids don't get COVID very often. It's unusual for that to happen. They don't—the evidence so far is children aren't the people most likely to get COVID," over 1,500 children in the US have already died from COVID-19.

The end of mask mandates in OUSD is a death sentence for students and teachers. Two subvariants of COVID-19, BA.2.12 and BA.2.12.1, are ravaging the Northeast and Midwest. The national 14-day change in cases has risen by 59 percent. When these subvariants begin to infect a maskless population in the Bay Area, the results will be devastating.

Cassidy, a high school student at a charter school in Oakland, told the *World Socialist Web Site* that there is mass support for preventing COVID-19 infection at her school.

"The students voted by over 70 percent to keep the mask mandate." The school has complied with this demand.

"Once we came back from spring break," she added, "immediately a bunch of people were out sick. One class I'm in is normally 12 people, and about half the class was gone. There are so many more people who have it than before break. One of the people who had it got it kind of bad, too. She said she almost had to go to the hospital. If it had kept going as it was, she was going to go to the hospital the next day."

"I know a lot of people, even if they aren't talking about Long COVID exactly, are talking about how exhausted they were afterward. After I got it, I didn't have it that bad, it was a long time before I had my strength back. For a lot of people, if you got symptoms at all, it wipes people out for a long time. It takes so long to feel like you did before. My friend on the rowing team couldn't do what she was able to do before because she was so exhausted and physically weak from COVID."

"I think a lot of students are just trying to keep the mandates we have in place right now and hoping it [another surge] is not going to happen until we're out of school. I think a lot of people are kind of terrified to think about it."

The one-day strike was organized by the OEA under the legal framework of an unfair labor practice (ULP), based on claims that the OUSD was in violation of a district policy that requires adequate time be given to schools and families to plan for school closures. In other words, the OEA is merely calling for a delay to the school closures to allow for community input, but it fundamentally accepts the cuts by the district.

No real demands are being made to halt the budget cuts, which include school closures, nor are economic demands like wage increases being raised in the strike.

OEA President Keith Brown also claims the district failed to carry out an equity analysis of the proposed school closures, since the school closures would disproportionately impact African American and Hispanic youth. The tactics of the OEA officials follow a well-used playbook, where the unions accept austerity and attacks on public education as long as the union has a seat at the table and the attacks "equitably" impact workers of different races.

The strike is being limited to one day by the union in order to defuse opposition among teachers and allow them to blow off steam. For months, anger among teachers, students and parents has been mounting not only over brutal budget cuts, but also over COVID-19 safety concerns.

The OEA strike will be held in conjunction with the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU), under the slogan "Stop Privatizing Oakland! No Stadium at Howard Terminal! No Closures! No Cuts!" The ILWU is

planning its demonstration to oppose the city's plans to build a new baseball stadium and condominium complex at the Port of Oakland.

The ILWU is clearly nervous about the growing resistance among its own members. The union has thrown its weight behind the US/NATO-led proxy war against Russia in Ukraine, declaring it would no longer handle Russian vessels in US ports. At the same time, the union worked out a deal with the Biden administration last fall to operate ports in Southern California 24/7, placing the burden of the supply chain crisis on the backs of dockworkers. Significantly, the union said nothing in its statement about its own contract, which expires July 1, impacting over 22,000 longshoremen along the entire West Coast.

The union's attempt to direct workers' attention towards pressuring Democratic-led school boards and the local and state governments is a dead end. Democratic Governor Gavin Newsom has championed the privatization of education and amid the pandemic carried out herd immunity policies throughout the state.

At the national level, the Biden administration has imposed drastic cuts to all vital social services, including education, in order to pour billions into America's war machine and the reckless drive toward war with Russia now, and China in the near future. On Tuesday, the *New York Times* published an article which revealed that the share of wealth in the US owned by the top 0.00001 percent of households has increased by 1,200 percent since 1982.

The unions have no intention of waging a political struggle against the capitalist system, which is the source of war, growing austerity and the present policies of mass infection. Teachers should instead take the struggle into their own hands by expanding the network of independent Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committees that have been formed worldwide over the course of the pandemic to oppose the union-backed premature reopening of school districts.



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