

Los Angeles Unified School District to cut at least a dozen special education classes

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The Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) will be shuttering at least twelve special needs day classes across the city by August, a report by CBS Channel 2 revealed Thursday. The move comes even as representatives of LAUSD, the United Teachers of Los Angeles (UTLA), the California Teachers Association (CTA) and other organizations crowd daily about how the California schools are flush with cash.

This cynical attack on a vulnerable section of the student body also comes shortly on the heels of an agreement that the district had reached with the Office for Civil Rights (OCR), after they had investigated LAUSD for violating the civil rights of students with disabilities and special needs.

What prompted the investigation were claims from parents of more than 66,000 LAUSD students with disabilities who complained that their children had been neglected since the beginning of the pandemic, with little or no education or specialized assistance, despite federal law requiring that districts provide free appropriate public education (FAPE).

According to the agreement with the OCR, LAUSD agreed to “take steps necessary to ensure that students with disabilities receive educational services, including compensatory services, during and resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.”

In response to the OCR investigation, LAUSD offers no explanation for how the elimination of a large percentage of special needs classes across the city is in any way ‘compensatory,’ especially in light of the recent estimate by the Legislative Analyst of a \$33 billion budget surplus for California TK-12 public schools and California Governor Gavin Newsom’s proposed budget, which includes an increased per-pupil spending of \$3,000.

As one parent in the Channel 2 report stated,

“unfortunately, we are an afterthought, this community, the special needs community is an afterthought.”

The OAC investigation found that LAUSD violated the civil rights of students with disabilities by failing to provide them with FAPE during the pandemic. Federal civil rights law entitles all students to FAPE.

According to the OAC, the district’s violation included:

Limited the services provided to students with disabilities based on considerations other than the students’ individual educational needs. Failed to accurately or sufficiently track services provided to students with disabilities. Directed district service providers to include attempts to communicate with students and parents—including emails and phone calls—as the provision of services, documenting such on students’ service records. Informed staff that the district was not responsible for providing compensatory education to students with disabilities who did not receive FAPE [Free Appropriate Public Education] during the COVID-19 school closure period because the district was not at fault for the closure. And, failed to develop and implement a plan adequate to remedy the instances in which students with disabilities were not provided a FAPE during remote learning.

By closing twelve special needs day classes across the city, LAUSD is spitting on the agreement they reached with the OAC in April and is leaving tens of thousands of children with special needs out in the

cold. Moreover, together with the entire political establishment it is falsely claiming that the pandemic is essentially over and that the population “must learn to live with the virus,” contributing to mass infections among teachers and students.

The LAUSD has a well-documented history of indifference for special needs students even before the COVID pandemic. In 2017, a report by the Office of the Independent Monitor found that a student with a physical disability in Los Angeles would be unable to enter through the main entrance of one every five schools within the district. One in four sites had vertical access problems and fewer than one-third of schools had accessible restrooms on campus.

The previous year, then-Board President Monica Garcia came under sharp criticism from children with disabilities’ advocates after she made a statement at a board meeting in which she lamented that a \$700 million shortage for special ed would take money from “our own kids.”

The proliferation of charter schools in the city is also detrimental to children with disabilities. The conversion of public schools into privately-operated charter schools results in a lower percentage of children classified with moderate to severe special education needs.

The role of the United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA) has contributed directly to the current situation: as the current contract expires on June 30, their proposals to LAUSD in reference to special education are completely toothless and self-contradictory, such as the bizarre suggestion for “enforceable class size caps” and at the same time “support for classes that violate class size caps,” or the request for special day classes to have paraprofessionals who can be pulled from classes to “assist with other duties.”

The current contract, which resulted from the UTLA’s sellout of a six-day strike in 2019, demonstrates that the union is united with the district and city government against teachers, parents and students. One of the biggest “gains” in the contract which the UTLA promoted at the time of the deal was the appointment of a joint union-district Class Size Task Force that would meet quarterly to “review monthly reports...” and “...all approved waivers related to class size averages and/or maximums.” But such task force did not even prevent the closure of twelve special

needs day classes after a civil rights investigation into the district.

The UTLA’s mothership, the California Teachers Association (CTA), fared no better. The head of CTA, E. Toby Boyd, published a statement on June 8, titled, *‘Optimism for Our Future,’* in which he mentions nothing about cuts in LAUSD. Instead, he paints a rosy picture of a public education system which has returned students and teachers to the classroom without any COVID-19 safety measures in place, despite a handsome budget surplus.

Organizations like CTA and UTLA are headed by people making hundreds of thousands of dollars annually, who shill for the Democrats. Randi Weingarten, President of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), with a salary that exceeds half a million dollars a year, recently traveled to Poland and Ukraine to stump for NATO’s war against Russia. But neither educators nor students, whether with or without special needs, have any interest in war.

With their contract set to expire in less than a month, Los Angeles public school teachers need to draw a balance sheet of the last few years. The last contract in 2019 was a betrayal all down the line. And now, with California supposedly awash in extra money, not only does the UTLA propose a pay cut for educators over the course of the next three years after accounting for the astronomical rise in inflation, but, as LAUSD makes plans to victimize the most vulnerable section of students and educators, the UTLA remains silent!

The WSWs calls on all teachers, students, parents and support staff to make preparations now to take the initiative of the coming struggle out the hands of the highly paid functionaries of the UTLA in order to engage in a fight with the city and state governments to ensure a safe and quality education and workplace for all without discrimination. This can only be done by forming rank and file committees that are under the direct democratic control of educators, students and parents themselves.



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