

“It honestly upsets me as a student”—Las Vegas students, parents denounce attacks on public education

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Following student-led walkouts in support of teachers’ demands for increased pay in Clark County, Nevada, reporters for the *World Socialist Web Site* spoke with students, community members and parents last Friday at Basic Academy of International Studies in Henderson, a suburb of Las Vegas and one of two schools where students walked out last week. The Clark County School District (CCSD) is the fifth largest in the United States.

In a coincidence, perhaps, after WSWs reporters visited the high school and distributed articles in support of the teachers’ struggle—and all sections of the working class against capitalist exploitation—CCSD Superintendent Dr. Jesus F. Jara sent an email to every high school student in the district that read in part:

It is good for students to be informed about current events. But sometimes, false information spreads fast, and I encourage you to consider both positions and gather information from multiple sources so you can best develop your own conclusions.

Jara’s email also threatened students who walked out in support of their teachers. “Every Day Matters,” Jara wrote, a reference to a CCSD initiative pushing in-person attendance in the face of a massive surge of COVID-19. “And you need to be in your classes.”

Every two years, the teachers union, the Clark County Educators Association (CCEA), negotiates with CCSD for a contract. After the current round of negotiations failed, the district declared an impasse and the union, after appealing to the Republican governor, requested an

arbitrator to settle the dispute.

There are an estimated 1,200 teacher vacancies within the district. Since September 8, at least seven schools have had to cancel classes due to teacher shortages, and on September 15 the district reported five schools were forced to consolidate classes due to “high” teacher absences.

It is illegal for teachers and other public employees to strike in Nevada. While Democrats controlled the state government for five years between 1992 and 2023, including in 2019–2022, the party, which was allegedly overtaken by “socialists” in 2021, never attempted to overturn this anti-worker legislation.

In 2022, for the first time since 2015, the starting salary for teachers was increased by the Clark County district from \$43,000 to just over \$50,000. For months, teachers have been demanding increased pay to combat the enormous cost-of-living increases in southern Nevada.

According to realtor.com, the median listing home price for Las Vegas is nearly \$442,000, while the median rent for a two-bedroom apartment is \$1,495. A recent study found that Nevada residents spend on average just under \$400 on utilities every month, including over \$170 for electricity and water alone.

The district has refused the teachers unions’ modest demands for a 10 percent pay increase this year, and 8 percent next year, provoking mass anger not only among teachers but their students and parents as well. This past Saturday, parents, teachers and students held rallies at five different locations throughout the Las Vegas Valley in

support of teachers' demands.

Outside the Basic Academy of International Studies, Jenelle, a second-year student at the school, told this reporter she did not participate in the walkout but had heard about it and was supportive of students who did. She said compared to last year there are far more substitute teachers teaching her classes and fewer students overall. Jenelle heard rumors that the district might be shortening the school day in response to the teacher shortage.

On the sidewalk outside the school, chalk messages from students in support of teachers' demands were still visible from the walkout the week prior. "Teachers need to be paid," "CCSD pay them more" and "We don't need you, we need our teachers," were some of the many statements of support.

As students were rushing to class, directly in front of the school hundreds of cars were lined up waiting to go to a local food bank that operates Monday through Friday mornings and occasionally on Saturdays. WSWS reporters spoke with David, an older veteran on Medicare, waiting in line for food.

While David did not have any children currently enrolled in the school district, he denounced Superintendent Jara and said the teachers deserve at least a 20 percent raise this year alone. "You can make more money being a porter at a casino than you can being a teacher in this town," he said.

"Inflation is out-of-control," David said, explaining that the price of the medicine he needs is over \$100 a week. He said that every seven days he and his niece have to pool together \$250 just to pay for utilities.

Maria, a mother and worker, grew up in Clark County and is raising her family in Las Vegas. One of her daughters recently graduated college, while two of her children are in high school and her 9-year-old is in elementary school.

"I think teachers should be paid more overall. It's a profession that you have to care about. And a lot of teachers end up, you know, they end up spending their own money for their school supplies and stuff," she said.

Maria continued, "I went to [school] myself for medical billing and coding. I have a degree in health information

technology and that still cost me \$25,000. I was able to pay off my loans. My daughter was looking at going to public university in California, and the total for the four years would have cost her like \$270,000."

A young student, who chose to remain anonymous, spoke in defense of her teachers while waiting for the bus: "They are dealing with other people's children. They deal with stuff every day just to be paid *almost* as much as a fast food worker.

"And it honestly upsets me as a student. Especially because not only is it kind of affecting the teachers—I don't want to sound selfish here or pretentious, but it's also affecting the students' education. They are trained to teach and train our children to become the future, and they're getting paid like a Taco Bell worker."

The student told the WSWS that in the midst of an ongoing surge of the COVID-19 pandemic some "teachers are getting fired for having a flu. It's sad because the district thinks, or accuses, the teachers of faking it."

"Teachers deserve so much more. And I think CCSD and a lot of other school districts are going to be the downfall of our education system," she said. "I've already had eight substitute teachers this year. In fact, my reading teacher just quit and now we have a substitute. So I guess this sub is now a first year teacher.

"[Her teacher] just walked out. It was probably the pay, but also maybe the students. The students were not very nice. I think a lot of the issues with the students is probably a lot of the same thing, as far as their parents aren't making a lot of money.

"It is disheartening, it's sad to watch a bunch of teachers, one of my teachers—if she didn't have her husband she wouldn't be able to pay rent or care for her kids. She has an entire family to take care of and if something happened to her husband, she would be unable to care for her family."



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