

In the face of threats from police and school administrators

# Las Vegas students walk out in support of teachers

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On Friday, October 13, over 100 students walked out of their classes at the Southeast Career and Technical Academy, in Clark County, Nevada, in support of their teachers, who are currently engaged in a bitter contract dispute. SECTA is a high school that provides career technical training programs while also providing an academic curriculum.

SECTA students walked out shortly before 10:00 am Friday morning and assembled in a courtyard on campus for approximately half an hour to demonstrate their solidarity with teachers 13KTVN reported.

The demonstration at the school included students from all grades. Leanne Vallecillo, a student at SECTA told 13KTVN, “Our aim is to shed light on the challenges our dedicated educators face daily, issues that impact not only their professional lives but the quality of education we receive. We believe that, as students, we have a powerful voice and can be advocates for the teachers who have guided us to excel at the highest levels.”

Another student who took part in the demonstration posted anonymously on social media, “We are fed up with how our teachers are being treated and how CCSD [Clark County School District] shows that they do not care we are being left with overworked, underpaid teachers and how sometimes we are left with no teachers. [Superintendent Dr. Jesus] Jara does not care about our education he cares about lining his pockets with money and we are done with it.”

Students are courageously taking a stand for public education in the face of threats from school officials and the police. The parent of one student who walked out wrote on social media that school officials “...called the police” and “threatened kids with getting suspended, kicked off of sports and no homecoming. The vice principal stood there watching, taking pictures, videos and tried to stop kids asking for names.”

Friday’s walkout is at least the third walkout by students in southern Nevada this month. The walkout at SECTA follows similar walkouts held the previous week at both Mojave High School and at Las Vegas Academy of the Arts, a magnet school that is in the downtown area.

Students at Mojave High School walked out at 11:30 am on Friday, October 6, and stayed out of class until the end of the school day, carrying signs and shouting out the slogans, “Pay our teachers!” and “Contract now!”

Friday’s walkout comes one week after thousands of teachers and their supporters held a downtown march and held a rally in front of the courthouse. The teachers have been in contract negotiations with the Clark County School District since March.

Teachers are currently asking for an 18 percent wage rise over the two-year life of the contract, an amount that was awarded to administrators at the beginning of August. CCSD says that they cannot afford to pay teachers, even though the state previously allocated an extra \$2 billion for K-12 education over the next two years. In addition, a supplemental bill was passed this summer which allocated \$250 million specifically earmarked for teacher raises.

The dispute between the teachers union and the district entered arbitration a few weeks ago. Negotiations between the parties had resumed for two sessions following secret talks that were held in the fall between the union, district and Trump-endorsed Governor Joe Lombardo, the former sheriff of Clark County. The talks took place at the insistence of the union, after teachers voted down the latest proposal from the CCSD by an overwhelming margin.

In the face of sky-high inflation, attacks from school administrators and an ongoing pandemic, public school teachers throughout the county have been leaving the profession at a steady clip, leaving thousands of students without teachers, or with substitute or uncertified teachers.

A teacher shortages database maintained by Kansas State University associate professor Taun D. Nguyen, data analyst/PhD student Chanh B. Lam, and University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign assistant professor Paul Bruno, estimates that there are 55,000 unfilled teaching positions across the United States. According to their research, Nevada has 31.17 teacher vacancies per 10,000 students, the seventh most in the country, behind Kansas at 33.68 vacancies, and ahead of Wisconsin at 30.93 vacancies. West Virginia leads the country at 59.35 vacancies per

10,000 students, followed closely by Mississippi at 58.67.

At the beginning of the year, the Clark County school district employed some 18,000 teachers for over 315,000 students. However, according to Clark County Education Association (CCEA) president Marie Neisess, 2,000 teachers have either retired or quit since the start of the school year, with an average of 20 leaving per week.

At the teachers rally held in downtown Las Vegas on October 7, teachers expressed support for joint-strike action with the roughly 53,000 local hotel and casino workers in Culinary Workers Union Local 226. “I wish they would” (strike), Maria, a teacher since 2001 told WWSW reporters. “All together so we can help each other.”

Andrea, another teacher also agreed, “The more people that are able to get a good living wage and able to save money, not just with paycheck to paycheck, I think the more people who come together and get money, I think that will help everybody in society.”

At a mass rally held at the end of September, thousands of Culinary Union members voted by a 95 percent margin for a strike. Despite the overwhelming vote, and the fact that contracts for over 40,000 workers expired in September, the Culinary Union has yet to set a strike date.

In an interview with the *Las Vegas Sun* last week, Ted Pappageorge, the well paid secretary-treasurer and lead negotiator for the Culinary Union, said that the “last thing” the union wants is a strike. While 95 percent of workers voted to strike, Pappageorge hoped that “informational pickets” would send a “message to the industry that they’re walking down the wrong path, and they’re going to have an opportunity to change that direction.”

On October 12 and again on October 15, thousands of cooks, servers, bartenders and other workers in the union participated in these “informational pickets” in front of eight properties along the Las Vegas strip owned by MGM Resorts International, Caesars Entertainment, and Wynn Encore Resorts.

In his interview with the *Sun*, Pappageorge emphasized that these “informational pickets” were “lawful” and “not meant to disrupt work.”

Due to an anti-strike law that has been on the books since 1969, teachers and public employees are legally barred from striking in Nevada. Despite the fact the Clark County Education Association was founded in 1960, it took until this month, 55 years later, for the union to file a lawsuit challenging the anti-strike law.

In a revealing interview with the *Nevada Current* published last week, CCEA Executive Director John Vellardita confirmed that the union has had “no conversations” with other public sector unions, such as the Culinary Union, about joining them in overturning the anti-strike law.

In their interview with Vellardita, the paper noted that the union bureaucrat would not, “rule out the possibility” of dropping the lawsuit if a “favorable contract” was presented to the union.

“That would be a decision the CCEA board of directors would make,” Vellardita said.

Despite the fact that several Democratic politicians were welcomed at last Saturday’s rally, the *Nevada Current* had a difficult time finding any Democrats that actually supported overturning the anti-strike legislation: “The *Current* reached out to the Democratic Senate and Assembly caucuses and asked whether they support overturning Nevada’s anti-strike law and giving public employees the right to strike. Neither caucus responded.”

In fact, the only Democrat the paper could find that would go on record— Assemblyman Reuben D’Silva (North Las Vegas)—said the union’s lawsuit “came as a pleasant surprise to him.” D’Silva claimed he previously “contemplated sponsoring a bill” to overturn the law but decided against it.

D’Silva told the paper that he was not “exactly sure” where his Democratic colleagues stood on the issue. One only need to recall the bipartisan legislation passed by Democrats and their fascistic colleagues last November that blocked railroad workers from striking to gauge the level of Democrats’ commitment to defending workers’ right to strike.

While the trade unions seek to isolate and suffocate the growing joint movement of students, teachers and parents through endless appeals to capitalist courts and capitalist politicians, a growing number of parents and students have begun discussing the need for a mass walkout of students at all CCSD schools. This is a welcome development, but it will not take place automatically.

Teachers, parents, and students need to organize themselves into democratically controlled rank-and-file committees, independent of the union as well as the two parties of big business. These committees can then chart the way forward for the struggle after formulating their demands, which meet their needs and not what the administration claims they can afford.



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