

Seattle Public Schools set to close up to 21 schools next year

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Seattle teachers, students and parents: Speak out against the cuts! Fill out the form below. All submissions will be kept anonymous.

The Seattle Public Schools (SPS) declared at a September 18 public school board meeting its intent to close between 17 and 21 elementary schools next year. The closures would impact hundreds of teachers and staff while devastating working class communities across Seattle.

If one of the plans goes through, the number of Seattle public elementary schools would be reduced from 63 to either 52 or 56. About 50 percent of Seattle's students will be forced to change schools, according to the district's own numbers. It has not been announced when the next school board meeting will take place.

The closures are part of a wave of massive cuts, driven by a "fiscal cliff" caused by the cut-off of COVID era federal funding for schools. In Chicago, the school district has announced a nearly \$1 billion deficit for next year.

The cuts also were announced during the strike of 33,000 Boeing workers concentrated in the Seattle area. No doubt thousands of Boeing workers on the picket line have children in the Seattle school district. Around 50,000 Washington state public employees also took part in a one-day walkout recently. This demonstrates the potential for a fight against the closures by the working class, uniting teachers with Boeing workers and others.

Communities across Seattle have reacted angrily, with parents rallying outside the district headquarters on Thursday. Hundreds of parents also demonstrated outside of the school board meeting on Wednesday.

Almost 150 people had signed up at the board meeting to testify against the school closures, while only 25 openings were available, according to KUOW news. Parents whose children attend TOPS K-8 have told the local news station that SPS is considering closing the only elementary school which focuses on educating the deaf

and hard of hearing.

Parents and students protested outside Catharine Blaine K-8 on Tuesday evening. Significantly, the protest was largely motivated by the students, with the Seattle Education Association nowhere to be seen. These demonstrations took place across multiple schools.

Parents, students and staff have innumerable concerns. Michelle Dunlop told KOMO News: "You can't have that many schools impacted and not cause so much damage to the community, kids, to everyone involved." Parent Ashley Cappel was shocked to learn that SPS was considering closing John Stanford International School, a school focused on providing dual language programs. "For my family, it means that my child no longer has access to dual language immersion. It means that my community is decimated."

Sixth grader Evelyn, who attends Catharine-Blaine K-8, told King5 news during their protest that, "I just don't want Blaine to close, I love this school so much. I love my teachers and my community and the staff here. It's like a human body, everyone does something to contribute."

The district explained to outraged parents at the Wednesday board meeting that SPS is facing a \$105 million budget deficit. One parent took to social media to explain that the district demanded the community accept "cuts in transportation, staffing, programs, and (will) even introduce mandatory fees." This same parent illustrated that much of the meeting was dominated by pie charts and graphs, which were supposed to prove the necessity of the most drastic cuts.

The money does exist to prevent these school closures. But the federal government, rather than invest in education, is funneling a trillion dollars a year into war, including arming and equipping the Israeli genocide in Gaza, as well as tens of billions in funding for the proxy war in Ukraine.

The Biden administration has terminated the \$122 billion Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER), which was only ever meant to delay the enormous crisis facing public education nationally.

Washington state contains 13 billionaires, three of whom are worth more than \$100 billion. However, according to the Washington Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, minimum wage workers pay 18 percent of their incomes on local and state taxes. The billionaires, on the other hand, pay just 3 percent.

SPS claims that these closures are part of a general plan to create, using the Kafkaesque-style phrase of “well-resourced schools.” Far from well-resourced, these closures will increase class sizes, decrease the variety of school programs available to students, increase transportation costs to families, etc.

Mobilize the working class against the closures

The closure of up to 21 Seattle schools is not only an attack on educators and students but on the working class as a whole. Money is diverted out of working-class schools and jobs and into the pockets of the military and Wall Street.

It is imperative that Seattle educators and staff link their struggle with the Boeing workers through the formation of rank-and-file committees that are controlled democratically by the workers themselves. Only by these means can Boeing workers and Seattle educators win their necessary demands and prevent the devastating closures.

They must also appeal for support for teachers fighting similar closures across the country, especially in the city of Chicago.

Over 6,000 Seattle educators fought for “well-resourced schools” during their courageous 2022 strike. This included COVID-19 safety measures and against the crippling workloads and stress which have exacerbated the ongoing staffing crisis.

But the Seattle Education Association (SEA) betrayed the education workers. The SEA corralled workers back into classrooms days before workers could vote on the tentative agreement. The SEA bureaucrats knew that forcing teachers back into the schools would make resuming the strike exceedingly difficult. Teachers and staff had even democratically passed a resolution

declaring that they would stay on strike until a TA was passed. The SEA bureaucracy ignored this resolution.

Two years later, the SEA bureaucracy has continued its betrayal and not voiced any opposition to the school closures. The union knows that the elections are imminent and will do whatever is necessary to prevent the explosion of opposition to the Democratic Party, which dominates Seattle and Washington state governments.

The SEA made one public statement to King5 News on May 10, requesting that the district “listen closely to community feedback.” By “feedback” the union bureaucracy means only that it be allowed a seat at the table in deciding where the cuts will take place.

The SEA leaders are silent because they are waiting for the Democratic Party to provide them with marching orders. The union has been discussing the school closures with the district behind closed doors from the very beginning.

Neither Socialist Alternative, whose former member Kshama Sawant was a Seattle City Council member until the end of 2023, nor the Seattle chapter of the Democratic Socialists of America has posted anything on their official websites opposing the proposed school closures. This is only fitting due to their longstanding role in providing political cover for the union bureaucracy and the Seattle Democratic Party.

Just as Boeing workers rebelled against a sellout brought by the machinists union, a real opposition can only take place from below. Teachers in Seattle must take up the example set by Boeing workers and form their own rank-and-file committee to enforce the will of the membership and plan out their own campaign in defense of education, uniting with workers across the city and the world.



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