

Unite teachers, students and workers against Santa Ana, California layoffs and austerity!

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The Santa Ana Unified School District (SAUSD) is set to carry out a devastating round of layoffs, eliminating nearly 280 teachers and counselors by June 30, 2025. These cuts, pushed through in January and rubber-stamped in March, are part of a broader, calculated attack by the Trump administration on public education under the cover of a \$187 million “budget shortfall.”

Contrary to depictions that this is an unfortunate consequence of administrative mismanagement, the layoffs are a direct result of decades of bipartisan austerity and political betrayal.

The district claims declining enrollment and the expiration of federal COVID-19 relief funds are to blame. But the real story goes deeper. During the pandemic, federal ESSER (Elementary and Secondary Schools Emergency Relief) funds were never used to rebuild or expand public education. They were a temporary patch over deep budget holes caused by years of defunding and privatization. The politicians and administrators who leaned on these funds knew they would vanish by 2024 and did nothing to prepare except sharpen their knives for the inevitable cuts.

Now, as those funds dry up, the true face of this system is on display. There is always enough money to bail out Wall Street and finance imperialist wars, but when it comes to educating working class children, the answer is always “cutbacks.”

Santa Ana, the poorest and most heavily minority district in Orange County, will be hit hardest. This is not an accident. Nearly 60 percent of California’s K-12 students come from low-income households, and 20 percent are English language learners. In Santa Ana, those numbers are even more extreme. Instead of offering more resources, the district is cutting the few supports that remain.

Under the procedure followed in California, thousands of layoff notices are issued to teachers in the spring of each year, to take effect when schools reopen in the fall, in order to satisfy legal requirements for advance warning. Then a lesser number of teachers are actually laid off.

Noelle Carney Campbell, the Teacher of the Year at

Manuel Esqueda Middle School, is one of the many educators who received a layoff notice. She summarized the situation with painful clarity: “We don’t need to be cutting services, we need to be increasing services.”

On April 14, during a tense layoff hearing, Noelle shared the emotional experience of waiting to hear whether her job would survive the axe. When her number was skipped—meaning she was spared—relief quickly gave way to outrage and solidarity. “Even though I’m ‘safe,’ now I’m going to use my collective energy to fight for the rest of them because they should not be experiencing this.”

Her words point the way forward. The solution is not to wait for politicians or union officials to “negotiate”: It is high time to organize and fight.

This is a call to action for teachers, school staff, students and the broader working class: Form rank-and-file committees in every school, district and workplace to fight back against these layoffs and the assault on public education.

Santa Ana is only the tip of the iceberg. Thousands of teachers across California, from Crescent City near the Oregon border down to San Diego, are facing pink slips, program cuts and overcrowded classrooms. Far from being a local problem, this is a coordinated, nationwide attack on public education, designed to funnel public resources into the hands of private interests and strip working class youth of their right to a decent future.

The roots of this crisis are systemic and bipartisan. From Proposition 13’s assault on property tax-funded schools in 1978 to Proposition 98’s restrictive spending “floors,” from Jerry Brown’s Local Control Funding Formula to Gavin Newsom’s austerity budgets, both Democrats and Republicans have treated education as a target for cuts while handing out billions in tax breaks and bailouts to corporations.

And at the federal level, the situation is even worse. Under Trump, the war on public education has escalated to new heights. His administration slashed grants, pushed for charter school privatization and even signed an executive order

to dismantle the Department of Education itself, an unprecedented attack on the very concept of universal, high-quality education.

In response, California's Democratic leadership has offered little more than cosmetic gestures. Newsom's "education agenda" claims to support expanded pre-K and mental health services, but his budget slashes nearly \$800 million from the UC and CSU systems and leaves K-12 schools facing enrollment and funding crises.

All of this is the inevitable product of a system that values corporate profits over human needs.

The unions, rather than organizing a serious fight, have acted as enforcers for the very system attacking their members.

The California Teachers Association (CTA) has acknowledged the layoffs but refuses to mobilize any meaningful opposition. Their so-called "Fight for Schools" rally—politely asking Congress to reverse cuts—is a performance designed to release anger, not channel it into action.

United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA) has followed the same playbook. Faced with the threat of federal agents targeting immigrant students or mass layoffs destroying jobs, the UTLA's response has been limited to PR statements and appeals to "the process."

In contrast, many individual teachers have taken it upon themselves to actively defend immigrant students and their families, offering support against deportations and creating informal networks of protection and solidarity, often at personal risk. This grassroots defense highlights the gap between the real social conscience of rank-and-file educators and the toothless posturing of union leadership.

The reality is clear: The official trade union organizations have no intention of fighting. Their primary role is to manage the discontent of their members and keep the working class chained to a political establishment that is actively dismantling public education.

That is why the formation of rank-and-file committees is the most urgent task facing educators, students, parents and all sections of the working class.

These committees must be democratic and independent—controlled by the educators and workers themselves, not union bureaucrats or political operatives. They must reach out to:

- Teachers and staff in other districts facing similar attacks.
- Immigrant workers and youth daily being targeted for illegal deportations.
- Parents, students and school workers who are being directly affected.
- Public-sector and private-sector workers confronting

layoffs, pay cuts and austerity.

- Workers nationwide and internationally who are facing the same capitalist offensive.

Above all, these committees must link the defense of jobs to a broader political struggle for fully funded, high-quality public education as a social right, not a commodity sold to the highest bidder.

This means preparing for coordinated industrial action, including strikes, to demand the immediate rescindment of all layoff notices and full restoration and expansion of education funding at every level.

This is only the first step. Securing equal access to free education, from pre-kindergarten through university, requires the allocation of adequate resources. Ending privatization schemes, charter school expansion and the dismantling of public education demands nothing less than a direct struggle against the system that profits from their destruction.

The wave of layoffs in Santa Ana is only the beginning. If these cuts go unchallenged, more districts will follow. The future of public education in California—and across the United States—is on the line. The unions have abandoned the fight. It is time for rank-and-file educators and workers to take the struggle into their own hands.

The formation of these committees is not just a defensive measure. It is the first step in uniting working people across industries, regions, and borders to build a new political movement, one that fights for human need, not profit.

The assault on public education is a symptom of a system in deep crisis. Capitalism is not interested in producing educated, thoughtful citizens. It demands a cheap, compliant labor force. But working people have the power to change this, if they act collectively and independently.

The painful experience of Santa Ana must be the spark for wider resistance. The only answer to these attacks is unity, solidarity and collective action.

Form rank-and-file committees! Reach out to your colleagues, neighbors and fellow workers! Prepare for action! Organize for a future where education is not a privilege, but a right for all!

If you are interested in building an educators rank-and-file committee, fill out the form at the bottom of this article. Your information will remain confidential.



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