

As fall semester begins in the US

How teachers can fight to defend public education

Rena Cassimeda
25 August 2025

To join the Educators Rank-and-File Committee, fill out the form below.

The Educators Rank-and-File Committee, affiliated with the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), issues this urgent statement to teachers, parents and students as the new school year begins.

We urge educators to reject the capitulation and collusion of the Democratic Party and trade union bureaucracies with the Trump administration. Educators must take the lead in a working-class counter-offensive against the fascist president's attack on democratic and social rights.

The urgent task is to form independent rank-and-file committees in every school and district and prepare for a nationwide general strike. Only through organizing on this basis can we mount the unified struggle needed to defend our rights and the future of our students.

Democracy and education under attack

This school year unfolds under the shadow of unprecedented assaults. Trump's deployment of the National Guard to Washington, D.C., and threatened use of forces in Chicago, New York and other cities marks a calculated move toward dictatorship. Immigrant families are being rounded up, detained and deported.

The corporate-financial oligarchy knows its policies are deeply unpopular. It relies on repression and war to maintain its grip on wealth and power. Tariffs drain workers' incomes, while trillions are cut from food stamps, Medicaid and other vital programs.

Public education is a prime target. The aim is to roll back generations of social progress, suppress opposition and stamp out critical thought and culture. Defending the right to free, high-quality education requires a conscious struggle

against capitalism and imperialist war—not futile appeals to the courts or the Democrats.

Securing this right demands a revolutionary movement of the working class to expropriate the oligarchy and place economic and political life under democratic control.

What teachers face this year

Cuts to education and social programs: Trump's "Big Beautiful Bill," backed by both parties, slashes \$12 billion from public schools, on top of expiring pandemic aid. The result: layoffs, crowded classrooms, gutted health services and growing child hunger. Medicaid and food stamp cuts worsen the crisis.

The Supreme Court's decision to allow the termination of \$780 million in NIH grants—targeting Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) programs—signals a purge of research and initiatives the White House deems undesirable, enforcing authoritarian discipline in schools.

Escalating privatization: Fourteen states now have universal voucher programs; over half of all K-12 students are eligible for some voucher scheme. Trump's plan turns education into a tax shelter for the wealthy, diverting billions from public schools to private and religious institutions while deepening inequality.

Citing a four percent nationwide enrollment decline since 2019—up to 10 percent in major cities—federal officials now demand closures and privatization. But this crisis stems from bipartisan austerity that has deliberately destabilized public education.

War economy priorities: Social spending cuts free up resources for militarism. Schools are converted into recruiting grounds for imperialist wars, while remaining programs funnel students into defense and tech labor

pipelines. Education Secretary Linda McMahon openly declares education must serve corporate and military interests—not independent thought.

Attacks on immigrants and democratic rights: ICE raids will intensify, targeting students, parents, even teachers. States slash programs for English Learners while imposing loyalty tests, religious mandates and censorship laws. Texas requires the Ten Commandments in classrooms; Oklahoma screens teachers for political views; California’s AB 715 would have imposed speech controls. Genuine education and free thought are under siege.

Build rank-and-file committees now!

Teachers face contract expirations in California, Philadelphia and other cities amid these unprecedented attacks. The leaders of the National Education Association and American Federation of Teachers function as Democratic Party adjuncts, suppressing real struggles to protect their privileges.

We call for militant, democratic rank-and-file committees in every school and district, coordinated nationally and internationally, to unite educators, parents, students and workers in a common fight against austerity, dictatorship and war. Their demands must reflect what educators and students need—not what corporations and politicians claim is “affordable”:

Real rank-and-file control: Committees must oversee all negotiations and contracts, stripping power from the union bureaucracy and transferring to educators in the schools.

Full funding for public schools: Demand wage increases, healthcare, pensions, smaller classes, more support staff and safe buildings. No public money for private or charter schools!

Expropriate the billionaires: Redirect trillions from war, policing, and corporate handouts to education, healthcare and social needs.

Defend immigrant families: End deportations and oppose ICE raids and militarized police deployments.

No censorship or repression: Defend free speech, oppose loyalty tests and religious mandates and protect historical truth in classrooms.

•Prepare a general strike: Unite educators and workers nationwide to defeat bipartisan attacks on schools and rights.

Break with the Democrats and union bureaucracies

The devastation of public education bears the Democrats’ fingerprints. From Biden to governors and mayors, Democrats have overseen closures, privatization and cuts—even diverting COVID relief from classrooms.

In Chicago, “progressive” Mayor Brandon Johnson and the Teachers Union pushed through a sellout contract imposing mass layoffs. Elsewhere, the NEA and AFT prepare similar betrayals, suppressing strikes and enforcing austerity.

These bureaucracies channel teachers into dead-end lobbying, token protests, and electoral diversions to protect the status quo. Teachers must recognize: saving public education cannot go through the Democrats or union officials. Only independent rank-and-file committees, organizing mass action, can lead this fight.

The pseudo-left—including Sanders, Ocasio-Cortez, Mamdani and the Democratic Socialists of America—seeks to trap opposition within the Democratic Party, whose pro-corporate and pro-war policies paved the way for Trump. Their claims that social inequality can be overcome without a frontal assault by the working class on capitalism are lies.

The fight for public education is inseparable from the fight against war, dictatorship and capitalist rule itself. Building rank-and-file power and a socialist movement of the working class is the only path forward.

The future of education—and society—depends on what we do now, in unity and struggle.

To join the fight for rank-and-file committees, fill out the form below.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact