

# Los Angeles school support staff hold rally as contract talks officially reach impasse

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19 December 2025

*California educators: build rank-and-file committees to push for a statewide strike! Fill out the form below to find out more.*

On Monday, December 15, Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 99, representing 30,000 classified staff members in Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), formally declared an impasse in contract negotiations with the second-largest school district in the country.

Classified workers are the most exploited section of the workforce in the district, many from countries in Latin America and Asia. They include bus drivers, custodians, cafeteria workers, teacher assistants, special education aides and playground supervisors. They have been without a contract since June 30, 2024.

On Tuesday, the union held three rallies to announce plans for an Unfair Labor Practice strike vote to happen sometime “early next year.” One was held at LAUSD headquarters in downtown LA, another in the South Bay and a third in the San Fernando Valley. The media has not revealed the numbers in attendance at these rallies, but the South Bay rally was very small, with about 40-50 classified staff and teachers. The turnout likely reflects the huge impact that ICE raids have had on the city’s population, as well as a loss in confidence towards the bureaucracy.

After nearly two years of talks, the district has offered only an 8 percent wage increase over three years, a pay cut after inflation. Meanwhile, the support staff has worked throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the wildfires in Eaton and Palisades and other crises. According to union figures, 99 percent of support staff can’t afford a 1-bedroom apartment, 65 percent can’t afford food and 1 in 10 have been homeless while working at LAUSD.

But despite this, the SEIU bureaucracy has kept

workers on the job without a contract for more than a year, only now even organizing a strike vote at some undetermined point in the future. Teachers in Los Angeles and 32 other school districts across the state, including almost every major district, have been working without contracts this semester. The California Teachers Association is stringing them along with a hypocritically-named “We Can’t Wait” campaign while forcing teachers to do just that.

Summing up the bureaucracy’s attitude, United Teachers Los Angeles president Cecily Myart-Cruz spoke about the need for a “general strike” in a Labor Day Speech, only to immediately qualify her remarks with: “maybe in 2028, not now. We have to prepare for that.” In the meantime, she proposes that workers need to support the Democratic Party.

Across the country, educators want to fight against the attacks on public education. And thousands of students have walked out at districts in Oregon, North Carolina and other cities to oppose brutal ICE raids. But the bureaucracy is doing everything it can to block a mass movement in defense of public education. This is because this would threaten their connections with corporate America and the Democrats, who are carrying out massive cuts in school districts across the state and the country.

There are signs their grip on the situation is starting to weaken, including a four-day strike by teachers and support staff at West Contra Costa County Unified School District and a 99 percent strike vote in San Francisco. But matters can come to a head only if educators take matters into their own hands to force an end to the bureaucratic stonewalling and impose their decision for a statewide strike. This means rank-and-file committees must be formed among teachers across California, linking together educators and workers in

school districts large and small to communicate and coordinate joint actions.

WSWS reporters attended the December 16 rally at Harry Bridges Span Middle School in Wilmington in the South Bay region of Los Angeles. Several workers spoke about the impact of the ICE raids and how many people are afraid to appear in public; one teacher said the week before the winter break is very stressful for everyone and said it was not a good time to call a rally.

One of the speakers at the rally was a special education assistant and playground director. “LAUSD has built a system that depends on workers like us but they refuse to prioritize us,” he said, “When it comes to understaffing, that’s become normal ... But it’s not normal. And it’s not acceptable because when workers don’t have enough support, students don’t have enough support. In addition, when they stretch one worker across three jobs, the whole school community feels the loss. LAUSD is holding onto billions in reserves while refusing the basic dignity of paying frontline workers enough to live.”

Susie, a special needs assistant with 26 years in the district, told the WSWS that she was hospitalized for a week but the school was so understaffed that there was no one to cover her position. “I was checking in from the hospital asking if my students were okay,” she said. She described being bitten and injured on the job and then denied essential medication by her insurance company, even after hospitalization. “I shouldn’t have to fight this hard just to get the medication I need,” she said.

Asked about a movement in the broader working class, Susie did not hesitate. “If they said strike tomorrow, I’m here for it,” she said. “This district would crumble without classified employees. You can’t run schools without us. From the moment the gates open to the moment they close, nothing works without classified workers.”

On the need to form rank-and-file committees independent of the union bureaucracy, she expressed agreement, noting that workers themselves had begun questioning the limited nature of the rally.

Chandra, a special education assistant with 19 years in the district, described how in-house staff must provide months of one-on-one support without funding before getting approval for a student’s Individual Educational Program. Once the IEP is finalized, the

district frequently brings in a subcontracted agency worker. “They come in and take over after all the hardest work is done,” she explained. “They take my effort, my connection, my relationship with that child.”

Now in her 60s, Chandra described periods of homelessness despite decades of service. “I’ve slept in my vehicle because I couldn’t afford a place,” she said. “After the last strike [in 2023], I was finally able to get an apartment. If striking is what it takes so I never have to live like that again, I’ll do it. This isn’t just an LAUSD issue. It’s national, even international.”

Sarah, a transitional kindergarten instructor with nearly seven years in the district, pointed to the union’s deliberate timing of the rally, held during the chaotic final week before winter break. “Everybody is exhausted,” she said, explaining the lower turnout. She also raised concerns about the climate of fear created by ICE raids. “People didn’t use to worry about being picked up just for showing up to a rally. Now they do, and they shouldn’t.”

Like many of her coworkers, Sarah described living conditions that reflect systemic exploitation. A single mother living with her parents, she said she loves her job and her students but cannot survive on her wages. “I should be able to support my son on my own income,” she said. “A little more money would make a huge difference, not just for me, but for everyone.”

They all supported the WSWS’s call for a general strike to mobilize the working class against the Trump dictatorship and were interested in finding out more about building independent rank-and-file committees.



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