

# North Carolina educators in first fight of 2026 against austerity and war

Educators Rank-and-File Committee

6 January 2026

*Hundreds of teachers across North Carolina called out of work today, January 7, to demand increased funding for public education. Early reports from NC Teachers in Action, a new group of educators not formally affiliated with the national teachers' unions, indicate that between 650 and 750 educators at 52 schools participated. Local demonstrations are taking place at nearby intersections, and some educators held rallies before school in support.*

*Teachers are demanding the restoration of longevity pay, the unfreezing of step increases, the restoration of master's pay, the reinstatement of retiree health coverage, and full funding of the decades-old Leandro plan to increase funding statewide. Currently, North Carolina ranks 43rd in the nation for teacher pay.*

*The Educators Rank-and-File Committee distributed the following statement.*

The mass action by teachers across North Carolina is welcomed and supported by educators and working people everywhere. This is not just a local fight—it is the first battle of 2026 and part of the rising tide of opposition by the working class against the attack on the right to public education, growing austerity, the witch-hunting of immigrants, dictatorship and war.

Your fight for livable wages and healthcare is the fight of workers everywhere. These are not luxuries or special benefits. They are the basic social rights required to keep public education functioning and allow teachers to live where they work.

North Carolina funnels enormous tax cuts to the wealthy while schools remain underfunded. This is not simply mismanagement or a local problem. This is deliberate class policy imposed by both corporate-controlled parties to further enrich the corporate and financial oligarchy that rules America.

Wealth is being systematically transferred upward to billionaires and corporations while educators are told there is "no money" for salaries, counselors, nurses, or special education support. This austerity, imposed by Democrats and Republicans alike, has defined state and national policy

for years. It has now reached an explosive point.

The current "fiscal cliff" facing public schools across the country resulted from the Biden-Harris administration allowing federal ESSER pandemic funds to lapse with no replacement. The Democratic Party—including its leaders from the local to the federal level—has partnered with the Republicans in decades of defunding, charterization, and austerity. Appealing to Democratic state legislators or voting "lesser evil" will not restore the living standards and schools we need.

## Trump's war on public education and democracy

The Trump administration has brought the war on public education to a new level. It is dismantling the Department of Education, slashing budgets and canceling grants. The goal is clear: destroy what public education has achieved and lay the basis for mass privatization and the transformation of schools into centers of religious, militarist and ultra right-wing indoctrination.

This is inseparable from a broader turn toward authoritarianism and imperialist war, including the invasion of Venezuela. While schools are starved, military spending surges. The federal government just allocated \$1 trillion for war with bipartisan support. Public funds are redirected away from classrooms and into weapons, surveillance and war preparations.

The social logic is unmistakable: both political parties consider education to be an unbearable deduction of resources that can better be spent on war and enriching the oligarchs. Over the past year, billionaires in the US, consisting of 900 individuals, increased their wealth by a staggering 18 percent, to a record \$6.9 trillion this year. Ten individuals alone increased their wealth by \$750 billion.

The egalitarian and democratic principles embodied in public education are not compatible with such levels of

social inequality. American society is dominated by mega-billionaires whose interests are completely antithetical to the principle that every child, regardless of income, race or immigration status, has the right to high-quality public education.

On the contrary, the ruling class wants to spread ignorance, hostility to science and culture and scapegoat immigrants for the social crisis produced the capitalist system. That is because they have nothing to offer the students in our classrooms but low-wage jobs, poverty and war.

That is why the fight against underfunded and overcrowded schools, the exploitation of teachers and the cuts to public education must be combined with a fight against Trump, his Democratic Party enablers and the capitalist system they defend.

Young people in North Carolina have already shown the way. Thousands of students and youth have mobilized against ICE raids with powerful walkouts. These are not separate fights. The struggle to defend public education, to stop ICE's Gestapo tactics and to oppose war and dictatorship are one unified struggle against the capitalist oligarchy.

## A rank-and-file movement

The current walkouts and protests in North Carolina have largely been driven by rank-and-file educators themselves, independently of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and National Education Association (NEA). For years, the union bureaucracies have blocked resistance to the bipartisan attack on public education under the slogan "school reform with us, not against us."

In the face of Trump's existential threat to public education and democracy, the unions have blocked any strike action by teachers in Chicago, Los Angeles and other locations—only emboldening Trump. AFT President Randi Weingarten writes a book "Why Fascists Fear Teachers," but proposes nothing but impotent lawsuits and electing Democrats in the mid-term elections. But Trump ignores the courts, and the elections, if they are held at all, could very well be held under conditions of martial law and war.

Fed up with the collusion of the AFT and NEA bureaucracies, tens of thousands of educators in West Virginia, Oklahoma and Arizona began a series of wildcat strikes in 2018, which united teachers and all school workers and quickly won popular support. But this powerful movement was shut down by the AFT and NEA leaderships

that isolated teachers, imposed secret backroom deals and redirected anger into elections and lobbying. Educators were told to return to work and wait for "friendly politicians." Those politicians were never delivered.

You must confront this reality with clear eyes. The unions and the Democratic Party will attempt to control, contain and betray your struggle. They will urge you to accept scraps and compromises. They will funnel anger into upcoming elections that benefit only the ruling class.

Do not let your power be stolen.

## Build independent power from below

To prevent another betrayal, educators need independent, democratically controlled organizations to coordinate action and connect with workers across geography and job categories. This means building rank-and-file committees in every school and neighborhood to transfer power from the union apparatus to the educators in the school buildings. Meet, discuss, and formulate demands together.

The Educators Rank-and-File Committee urges North Carolina educators to fight for the following demands:

- \* Inflation-beating pay increases.
- \* Full staffing levels (counselors, nurses, special education support).
- \* Restored benefits with no premium increases.
- \* Safe schools for all students, regardless of immigration status.
- \* Billions for public education not corporate tax cuts and war.

Today's call-out can be a one-day headline—or the beginning of a powerful movement that unites teachers, students and workers against austerity, repression, and war.

Rank-and-file committees, united under the banner of the International Workers Alliance and Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), provide the means to unify an unbeatable force: the massive working class.

The future of our schools, our communities and democratic rights depends on what you build next.

Contact us by filling out the form below.

In solidarity,

Educators Rank-and-File Committee



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**wsws.org/contact**