

Teachers, students, parents speak out from Ocean Beach rally

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The strike by educators in San Francisco has exposed both the deep social crisis in public education and the immense power of teachers and school workers when they take collective action. Rallies have drawn broad support from parents and students, and the demand for decent wages, affordable healthcare and properly funded schools has resonated across the city.

That power, however, is now being channeled into a deal designed to contain and suppress it. The United Educators of San Francisco (UESF) bureaucracy is promoting a tentative agreement brokered by former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Mayor Daniel Lurie—an heir to the multibillion-dollar Levi Strauss & Co. fortune.

Their intervention shows that the strike has struck a nerve among the ruling elite of a city defined by staggering wealth inequality, where billionaires and multimillionaires coexist alongside underfunded public schools.

The interviews below were conducted at a rally at Ocean Beach on Thursday. They reveal the depth of that support and the determination of educators, parents and students. Students themselves have turned out in solidarity, recognizing that their own education is directly bound up with their teachers' working conditions.

Educators and their supporters must reject the agreement and oppose the attempts to ram through a sellout. The strike must continue on a new basis, under rank-and-file democratic control and the expansion of the strike to link up with other workers engaged in struggles, including the 31,000 Kaiser nurses across the West Coast and to teachers in Los Angeles, who have authorized strike action. The issues raised in this strike cannot be resolved through backroom negotiations with the political representatives of the city's billionaires,

but only through the independent mobilization of the rank and file.

Michelle has worked in education for seven years. "The main things we need right now are healthcare and wages. Sanctuary schools is another thing as well as Special Education. So there's a lot on the table right now. I think that the money's there. I think maybe the mayor needs to do more about getting funds into the schools. I know there's a way to make it happen if they really wanted to do it. People are tired and fed up and the schools are very underfunded. We've just got to get more money into classrooms so we can support the students better."

Heidi works in hospitality and fine dining and came to the rally at Ocean Beach to show her support for her kids' teachers. She has been struggling to juggle childcare with her job while the teachers are out on strike. "Our after school program has some capacity to help out with childcare, but it's being done on a first come, first serve basis. So that feels a little dystopian."

"I came out today because my kids' teachers, they're incredible. Both of my kids have IEPs, so it's not even just the teachers, it's also the paraprofessionals that work with them every day.

"They have a music program. My son is learning the trumpet right now. We would like to keep all of those, they call them 'extracurriculars,' but I mean, learning how to read music opens up so much for learning math and for learning languages. So they're actually kind of STEM fields in their own right, not just extras or fun subjects.

"I wait on millionaires every single day, and they literally don't even know this whole strike is happening because their kids don't go to the public schools here. It's ridiculous and kind of shameful that in a city full of millionaires, we can't pay our teachers enough to

actually live here too. I grew up in Alameda and had teachers that were commuting long distances from the city. So we had this issue way back then. Here we are decades later and it's even worse," she said.

Shoshana and Heather spoke with the WSWS. "We came out for our students, the teachers, the staff, paras, the janitors. Everybody. We're here for everybody to make SFUSD better. We're out here for the caseloads, for the health insurance, for our Special Education. We got the sanctuary schools, which is great. And we also need raises so people can afford to live here.

"The cost of living is too high. Sometimes a teacher gets a job and then they can't afford to pay their rent or they can't afford to live here. Or teachers come from other places and they can't find a place to live and have to leave. There's so many openings and vacancies because of that. The kids need stability, they need consistency. That's what helps students is to have consistent teachers in the classroom. But teachers gotta eat! Everyone's gotta eat and be able to live.

"The wealth gap is crazy here. There's money somewhere, so let's tap into those resources. Let's get creative with how we find money to support education, with how we manage the money.

"SFUSD needs to be taking care of our health care across the board and set a precedent no matter what, whether you have kids or not, and you should be able to afford health care and afford to live here no matter what."

A contingent of students from Ruth Asawa High School joined the rally at Ocean Beach in spite of the poor weather. "It's super important to show our support as students because the teachers' pay directly impacts us and the way that they teach us and the education we're getting," one student said.

"Teachers deserve our support. They're striking so they can get a livable wage so they can focus on teaching us and giving us a good education. It's sending a message to the district to have all of us students here," another said.

"When the teachers are happy, we're happy. Right now it seems like they're not that happy, so we just want to be here for them until they get what they want. I think access to free public education is very important, especially in a big city like San Francisco with so many lower and upper class kids. It's important that we all come out to show our support for the

movement and for the teachers because without them, our schools would be really bad. We also want to work to make our schools a lot better, like more access to AP classes and funding and stuff like that from the state."

One student said, "In San Francisco living costs are so much higher than usual and I think teachers haven't been paid correctly in a long time. I've been in public school since elementary school and our teachers just put so much effort into making our education as well-rounded and interesting as possible. It's kind of just our duty to be out here for them. Teachers have done so much for us and this is really the least that we could do."



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