

Little Lake City teachers continue strike, while UTLA claims LA teachers ratified new contract

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Around 200 teachers in the Little Lake City School District (LLCSD) have been on strike since April 16.

The district serves students in Santa Fe Springs, Norwalk and Downey in Los Angeles County. The vast majority of students come from low-income and disadvantaged households, and most qualify for free or reduced school lunches and other assistance programs. Teachers are demanding better healthcare, smaller class sizes and special education support.

While the strike has wide support, it is being isolated by the union bureaucracy. Only two days before Little Lake City teachers walked out, union officials canceled a far larger strike in Los Angeles Unified School District, the nation's second-largest. The strike was called off in the dead of night, following last-minute talks which included LA Mayor Karen Bass, a Democrat.

Last Friday, United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA) claimed its members ratified a new three-year contract with a 92 percent vote in favor. The size of the outcome raised eyebrows among many educators, who were opposed to the deal's inadequate pay increases, with newer teachers receiving higher raises than older ones, pitting teachers against each other. Worst of all, the contract paves the way for the district to move towards closing an \$800 million deficit over the summer.

Having isolated LLCSD teachers, the UTLA bureaucracy covered its tracks by calling for UTLA members to show up at LLCSD pickets last Friday, when all LAUSD schools were already closed for Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day.

Beth, an academic support teacher at Lakeview Elementary, explained to the WSWs how the district's healthcare plan has changed since January. "In

December of last year, we were paying zero, and now it's upwards of \$1,400 a month.

"For our starting teachers, 25 percent of their income now has to go towards healthcare, and they're faced with this horrible decision of, 'Should I stay in this district with these students that I love, or should I go somewhere else to be able to protect my family?' It's an awful decision that they have to make."

Lorena, a 2nd and 3rd grade special education teacher, said: "They're trying to use healthcare as a bargaining chip for us to basically choose healthcare over our students, and we're not willing to do that."

She continued: "And not only that, but they're not giving the appropriate support. So we have lots of students whose IEPs [Individualized Education Program] aren't being followed who need one-on-ones, where it's stated in their IEPs, and the district is not providing the support for these students.

"We haven't had any increases to the COLA either, and so it is affecting everybody. It's affecting the teachers; it's affecting the students' learning environment, and we just want the district to settle this so that we can go back into the classroom and be with our students and teach our students."

Diana, another special education teacher, said: "I took off my daughters [from my healthcare plan] who are older. They're going to college, so I told them that they have to get [health] care through their college, and that's been really inconvenient for them. ... We went with my husband's insurance, and we're still having to pay \$600 just for the two of us.

"In special education, we had four teachers in our program, and now we only have three. So I have 18 students right now, sixth graders, with behavioral

needs, with severe educational needs. And they need support, and I don't have an aide. I haven't had an aide since January this year.

“The rich keep getting richer, and it's like the cost of living goes up but everything else goes up around us except for our pay. So it's really unfair. That \$1,400 in extra healthcare costs, that's nothing to [billionaires]. That's probably a night out or a dinner to them, but to us that's rent, that's food, that's groceries, that's car payments. So, yeah, that's a huge effect on us, and from what we're seeing, they could care less.”

Lisa, an 8th grade US history teacher at Lake Center Middle School, said: “Special education is not valued by the superintendent [Jonathan Vasquez]. ... He stated that special education funds are like throwing money into the wind. It's a waste of money. Many of our special education students, who need one-on-one aides, do not have them. They've let so many people go or they are just not staffing the positions.”

Lisa spoke about the political situation in the country more broadly. “I am totally against this administration. ... It's terrifying what has been happening, and when he ran the first time, I was out trying to convince everybody he was going to destroy this country, very much like the superintendent has destroyed our district.”

Asked about the necessity of a general strike involving workers in every sector, she agreed, “I think that would be great because they are out to get everybody.”

The struggle is reaching a new phase with the ongoing LLCSD strike and austerity coming soon in Los Angeles. Opposition must be organized from below through the formation of rank-and-file committees, consisting only of teachers, parents and students that will fight for independent action. Not only must Los Angeles teachers unite with teachers in Little Lake City, but they must reach out to workers across other districts to fight for a broader movement in defense of public education.



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