

Student Reading: Stories from the Strikes

“They’ve been starving the schools slowly but surely over the years,” said Taiesha Fowler, a 6th grade English teacher in LA. “Our state now has a \$21 billion surplus and we have 39, 40, and I talked to a teacher the other day that has 50 kids in his AP English class.” Michael Schepps, who teaches 7th grade world history, said, “I have 41 students, and in two of my classes it prevents me from doing things I want to do, such as group work. I used to do plays in my classroom, with costumes, and because of the numbers, I can no longer do that.”

(<http://www.labornotes.org/2019/01/los-angeles-teachers-strike-defend-public-schools-privatizers>)

"It's not about salary. It's about having a nurse everyday in our school," said Aida Trabanino, a 2nd grade teacher. "Currently we have a nurse for two days a week, and students get sick every day or get hurt every day." (<https://www.educationdive.com/news/on-strike-35000-la-teachers-begin-citywide-protest/545905/>)

Makailah Jenkins, 16, is a junior at Washington Preparatory High in South Los Angeles. One of her classes was so crowded that she had to stand until a student transferred, freeing up a seat. There is no one to teach AP U.S. History, so she takes it online. “I am being affected by these things as well,” Jenkins said. “It’s my duty to make my voice heard.”

(https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2019/01/14/los-angeles-teachers-set-strike-nations-second-largest-system/?utm_term=.a41efe990157)

Kirti Baranwal, an elementary school teacher in LA, said, “In elementary schools, in the upper range, there are 30 kids in a classroom. Our high school and junior high students are looking at 30, 40, and sometimes 50 kids in the classroom. So for one adult to meet students where they’re at—academically, socially, emotionally—is really hard with that many kids. Many of our students have witnessed domestic violence, they’ve witnessed family members being taken away by the police, by immigration enforcement. There are students who are homeless. In those situations, it is very hard for a student to focus on math, on reading, on writing... So this is why we are asking for counselors, for smaller classroom sizes. To really be able to support these students.”

(<https://theslot.jezebel.com/i-wont-see-you-because-im-going-to-stop-working-how-a-1831715319>)

"I'm not rich. This is a sacrifice for me," said second-grade teacher Wendy Ron. "I am not getting paid while I'm out here." Each day, LA teachers lose \$10 million dollars of pay. At the same time, the school district is also losing money. The state of California funds school systems based on daily student attendance. Because of lowered student attendance during the strike, the LA school district is losing out on approximately \$25 million dollars of state funding each day of the strike, although it keeps the unpaid teacher salaries.

(<https://www.cnn.com/2019/01/15/us/los-angeles-teachers-strike-day-2/index.html>)

A coalition led by parents and students in low-income communities of color called Reclaim Our Schools LA has created a “teacher-parent strike solidarity fund” to support both strikers and the families of students. The coalition calls on leaders to “fully and equitably fund our schools, invest in the community schools model particularly in high-need neighborhoods, and push back against the dramatic growth of charter schools that’s undermining the public education system.”

(<https://www.aros-wearela.com/>)

Student Reading: Risks and Benefits of Strikes

California has the highest student-teacher ratio in the country, at an average of 24 students per teacher, compared to a ratio of 12 to 1 in states like New Jersey, North Dakota, and Vermont. In other words, LA classrooms have many students per teacher.

(<https://www.publicschoolreview.com/average-student-teacher-ratio-stats/national-data>)

California also spends thousands of dollars less per student on education than the national average, when the numbers are adjusted for differences in cost of living between states. Where the national average is \$12,526 per student, California's adjusted average is \$9,417.

(<https://www.edweek.org/ew/collections/quality-counts-2018-state-finance/map-per-pupil-spending-state-by-state.html>)

The school district has offered to give teachers a 6% salary increase and to limit class sizes to 35 students in grades 4-6 and 39 students in middle/high school math and English. The teachers' union rejected the offer as "woefully inadequate" and declared this a "fight for the soul of public education." (<https://www.forbes.com/sites/frederickhess/2019/01/16/the-real-deal-with-the-los-angeles-teachers-strike/#416cdeb52218>)

The LA school district has \$1.8 billion dollars in reserves, which the teachers' union argues should be used to hire more teachers and support staff and give pay raises. However, superintendent Austin Beutner says those funds are set aside to pay pensions and health costs for retiring teachers in the next few years. He argues that giving teachers what they want would cost \$3 billion dollars that the LA school district does not have.

(<https://www.vox.com/2019/1/13/18181010/los-angeles-teachers-strike>)

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"In a good month, Jose Velasco, a painter, and his wife Maribel Cruz, a baker, make about \$1,000. They have little left after they pay the rent on their El Sereno apartment. The thought of possibly having to hire someone to watch their 9-year-old son during a teachers' strike upsets and overwhelms them. In Pacific Palisades, Shannon Soller, who runs a beauty and skincare business, would be able to work from home to care for her second- and fourth-graders — or potentially count on a nanny. Still, she's struggled to decide whether keeping her kids home is the right thing to do. "If you send them to school, will that mean you don't support teachers?" she said. "But if you don't send them, each day the school loses money."

(<https://www.latimes.com/local/california/la-me-edu-lausd-teachers-strike-parents-20190110-story.html>)

Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility | Why Did LA Teachers Go on Strike?

<https://www.morningsidecenter.org/teachable-moment/lessons/why-did-la-teachers-go-strike>

Past teacher strikes have taken place in conservative states like Arizona, West Virginia, Kentucky, and Oklahoma, where teachers were drastically underpaid in comparison to neighboring states and education spending was extremely low. After the teacher strikes, state governments agreed to raise taxes in order to increase teacher pay and education funding. However, some of these tax increases were immediately revoked: in Oklahoma, for example, on the same day that the governor signed the new education funding into law, legislators voted to revoke a new tax on hotels, meant to add \$50 million a year to the education budget. (<https://kfor.com/2018/03/29/fallin-signs-447-million-tax-increase-package-teacher-pay-legislation/>)