

# STOP THE WAR ON SCHOOLS!

## Fight for the future of working-class youth and public employees

The defense of quality public education is a major front in a battle between the corporate world versus the working class. Rightwing millionaires, politicians, and lobbyists have launched their assault with slogans of “school choice” and No Child Left Behind. But the real goals are creating a compliant, low-paid workforce and seizing education spending—\$630 billion a year—to bolster private profits in this time of economic decline.

On the opposing side, in every major city from California to New York, teachers and school employees have joined forces with other workers in an increasingly militant defense of schools, pensions, collective bargaining, decent wages, and social services.

More and more, these movements are powerfully linking labor and social issues. A teacher walk-out in Wisconsin sparked uprisings by students and other unions that inspired labor nationally. In Arizona, students, parents and educators fought the elimination of Mexican American Ethnic Studies and the closure of school doors to undocumented immigrants. These are moves in the right direction.

### ***Undermining education serves the wealthy and powerful.***

Attacks on schools serve one main interest: to drive down conditions of present and future U.S. workers so that corporate rulers can maintain their profits.

De-funding public education and narrowing curriculum hurt poor and working-class youth the most. Crowded classrooms and mandatory testing force teachers to reduce

attention to individual students. Instead of promoting critical thought — which often leads to protest and non-conformity — education is being limited to the skills necessary for a low-wage job. Girls, young queers, and youth of color have a harder time overcoming oppression when layoffs deprive them of supportive counselors and teachers. Remedial reading, foreign languages, art, music and physical education are treated as luxuries, not to mention potentially life-changing subjects such as ethnic, women’s and gender studies. For economic reasons, many youth are forced into the military to get access to higher education or job training.

Education is increasingly being run with a “corporate model” that pushes management authority and weakens job protections. For teachers, test scores are becoming the basis for bonuses and punishments. Seniority rights are vilified, making all workers vulnerable to arbitrary and punitive dismissal.

Starved of public dollars, schools will fail. So billion-dollar foundations (like the Gates, Walton Family, and the Broad Foundations) magnanimously step in. Their grants dictate the direction of non-profit, non-union charter schools. Leeching off school budgets, these enterprises operate with little public oversight. Some promise that investors can double their money after several years—but how is that possible without cutting education quality?

Charters are proliferating in inner cities where parents are sick of racist disparities in impoverished public schools long neglected by the system. But will rich foundations uphold the interests of under-privileged students? A study



by Stanford University's Center for Research on Education Outcomes concluded that 37% of charter schools perform *worse* than neighboring public schools. Charter schools also underenroll Special Education and ESL students, and serve fewer youth living below the poverty line.

The goal of well-funded, exemplary public schools *for all* is a legacy of Reconstruction and the Civil Rights Movement that must be fought for rather than abandoned.

### ***Build a labor/community united front to save education.***

From statehouses to the White House, both Republicans and Democrats are betraying working people. Clinton, Bush and Obama all instituted policies to undermine quality education and increase corporate control.

So who can teachers turn to? First of all, to their own vast power as organized labor. Teachers must push their unions to boldly take action to defend their rights as workers and improve conditions in the classrooms. Unions must listen to the grassroots leadership of female educators and teachers of color who are rooted in their communities and have a passionate stake in children's minds and futures. Stopping the decimation of teachers' unions is a matter of survival for the whole labor movement, since teachers are the largest unionized workforce.

Teachers will find a powerful army of allies among other school staff, parents, rank-and-file unionists, and human services activists. They can forge a powerful unifying program in de-

fending the most vulnerable — low-paid workers, the unemployed, immigrants, people of color, queers and youth. The continuation of public education, living-wage jobs, and the social safety net depends on this alliance. This program resonates strongly with women, who carry the full burden when social services disappear.

Ultimately, saving public education is part of a bigger fight for a society that values people, not profits. As long as the capitalist system exists, there will be an educational hierarchy. It is time for education activists to take a stand for socialism—a system in which the wealth created by workers belongs to all and the needs and development of humanity are the highest mandate.

Let's jump-start this movement with the following demands:

***Say no to high-stakes testing and corporate-controlled curriculum and "standards."***

***Stop teacher layoffs, public school closures, privatization, and charter schools.***

***Defend collective bargaining for teachers and all organized labor.***

***Declare free, high-quality education from pre-school through college as an inalienable right for all, regardless of immigration status.***

***For a labor party, including teachers and the community, to fight for quality education and jobs for all.***

***Provide funding for schools and public services by ending U.S. wars and steeply taxing big business and the rich.***

## **PARTICIPATE IN EYEWITNESS REPORTS ABOUT SAVE OUR SCHOOLS**

**Aug. 18 - New York City.** 7pm. Freedom Hall, 113 W. 128th St. • 212-222-0633 • nycradicalwomen@nyc.net

**Aug. 20 - Portland, OR.** 7pm. Bread & Roses Center, 6834 NE Glisan St. • 503-240-4462 • rwpdx@igc.org

**Aug. 26 - San Francisco.** 7pm. 747 Polk St. • 415-864-1278 • bafsp@earthlink.net

**Aug. 27 - Seattle.** 7:30pm. New Freeway Hall, 5018 Rainier Ave. S. • 206-722-6057 • rwseattle@mindspring.com

**Sept. 10 - Columbia, MD.** 2pm. Howard County Central Library, 10375 Little Patuxent Pkwy • 410-964-2878  
fspbaltimore@hotmail.com

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