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AN INJURY TO ONE IS AN INJURY TO ALL

Inspired by West Virginia, Teachers in Oklahoma and Kentucky Walk Out

By Joseph Hancock

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(Part II in a series on education)



In an unprecedented display of support for public education, the state Capitol in Kentucky filled with teachers protesting pension changes Monday, and thousands of Oklahoma educators walked out of classrooms in the latest

rebellion against cuts to public education in Republican-led states.

Many Oklahoma schools, including the three largest districts of Oklahoma City, Tulsa and Edmond, were closed Monday. Districts announced plans to keep campuses shut down into Tuesday with teacher demonstrations expected to last a second day.

Oklahoma Gov. Mary Fallin signed legislation last week granting teachers pay raises of about \$6,100, or 15 to 18 percent. But some educators say that isn't good enough and walked out.

"If I didn't have a second job, I'd be on food stamps," said Rae Lovelace, a single mom and a third-grade teacher at Leedey Public Schools in northwest Oklahoma who works 30 to 40 hours a week at a second job teaching online courses for a charter school.

The demonstrations were inspired by West Virginia, where teachers walked out for nine days earlier this year and won a 5 percent increase in pay. Teachers in Arizona are now considering a strike over their demands for a 20 percent salary increase.

"Their success has shown us that collective activity can work," Kentucky teacher Corey Sayre said of the West Virginia walkout.

Oklahoma ranks 47th among states and the District of Columbia in public school revenue per student, nearly \$3,000 below the national average, while its average teacher salary of \$45,276 ranked 49th before the latest raises, according to the most recent statistics from the National Education Association.

Alicia Priest, president of the Oklahoma Education Association, said during the rally that drew thousands to the state Capitol that teachers will continue pressing their demands for lawmakers to approve more funding for pay raises and classrooms.

In Frankfort, Kentucky, teachers and other school employees gathered outside the Kentucky Education Association a couple of blocks from the Capitol, chanting "**Stop the war on public education.**" Strikers held signs that said "We've Had Enough."

"We're madder than hornets, and the hornets are swarming today," said Claudette Green, a retired teacher and principal.

Kentucky teachers chanting "We won't back down" crammed into the Capitol, filling the Rotunda and hallways near the House and Senate chambers. Schools across the state were closed, due either to spring break or to allow teachers and other school employees to attend the rally.

The rally is happening after hundreds of teachers called in sick Friday to protest last-minute changes to their pension system. Teachers have rallied several times during Kentucky's legislative session to protest the pension bill, but Monday was by far their biggest event.

