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WALK-INS IN 200 CITIES/2000+ PUBLIC SCHOOLS
CALL FOR MAJOR INVESTMENT IN SCHOOLS IN BLACK & BROWN COMMUNITIES

Third & Largest in Growing Series of Parent-Student-Educator Actions
Demanding Broad Reforms

The third, and by far the largest, of AROS’s nationally coordinated mobilizations will take place in over 2000 public schools in 200 cities across the nation on Thursday, October 6, 2016. The actions will focus on a wide range of issues facing schools, particularly those in Black and Brown communities. AROS affiliates want an end to the long-standing and systematic under-funding of their public schools.

AROS-coordinated walk-ins on February 17th of this year drew participation in 33 cities. A second round on May 4th saw walk-ins in 70 cities.

The Walk-Ins give local educators, parents and students the opportunity to mobilize together around a range of issues in a platform identifying 6 specific areas of reform that the national coalition supports:

» a call for the investment of billions of dollars in public schools, particularly in Black and Brown communities;

» a call for “sustainable community schools” — which AROS identifies as having five major components such as expansive, culturally relevant curriculum, restorative practices and wrap-around services;

» an end to the expansion of unaccountable charter schools that drain billions from traditional public districts;

» an end to harsh discipline policies and a commitment to restorative practices in all our schools;

» an end to high stakes assessments;

» strong parent and community engagement in schools and an end to practices and policies (such as state takeovers) that disenfranchise local voters and eliminate local control in schools.

The October 6th walk-ins will feature many cities that are engaged in specific campaigns around these platform planks. In particular, AROS is developing a strong national focus on the failure of the federal
government, as well as states, to fully invest in public schools in Black and Brown communities. Later this fall, AROS will be launching a national initiative on investment in public education, including a call for closing the billionaire’s tax windfall known as the “carried interest” loophole. Several of the upcoming walk-ins will be tied directly to fights for revenues. For example:

» In **Los Angeles** the walk-ins will focus on passage of Proposition 55. The ballot initiative would extend an existing tax on incomes over $250,000 per year (for an individual). The State has dedicated 89% of the estimated $5 billion in annual revenues from the tax increase to K-12 schools across the state. Instead of the usual morning walk-ins, Los Angeles activists will be rallying after school, then fanning out to canvas neighborhoods in support of the initiative.

» With **Chicago** facing another round of school cuts and a potential teachers strike, 300 schools will walk in to support a proposed ordinance that would redirect surplus funds primarily used to support developers to the public schools. The ordinance, if passed, could generate $150 million for Chicago Public Schools.

» Across the Commonwealth of **Massachusetts**, walk-ins are being planned around the upcoming ballot initiative known as Question 2, which would lift the cap on the number of charter schools allowed to operate in Massachusetts. The Save Our Public Schools/Massachusetts campaign is opposing the initiative, pointing out that local school districts across the state stand to lose over $450 million in revenues that would be transferred to charter schools next year.

xxxx
On October 6th, walk-ins will be happening in 200 cities across the country, and at 2,000 individual schools. Some of those actions will be large, some will be smaller. The power of the walk-ins is in the coordinated mobilization that they represent.

We want the walk-ins for the Schools Our Students Deserve to trend on Twitter for much of the day, on October 6th. We want the walk-ins to be unavoidable on Facebook and through other social media. In order for that to happen, we are asking every school hosting a walk-in to arrange for the following:

1. Designate one or more individuals to tweet out a picture and a report on your walk-in tagging @ReclaimOurSchls with the hashtag #ReclaimOurSchools. The tweet should lift up your local demands.

2. Take a picture at your walk in! Post the picture on Facebook with the hashtag #ReclaimOurSchools.

3. Send photos from your walk-in, as well as any local press coverage of the walk-in to info@reclaimourschools.org. Please include your city, school name and how many people came to the walk-in.
These talking points are meant for use with either national or local media. There are three sections, the first two are for national media. We suggest that when we speak with local reporters, we say that we have local issues and a nationally coordinated campaign. We would begin with our local talking points and then move to the national ones.

SHORTEST STATEMENT OF OUR MESSAGE:

What we are doing here today at ________ is happening all across this country... 200 towns and cities, 2,000 public schools. What it represents is the fight for the soul of American public education. Our slogan is The Public Schools ALL Students deserve that means first and foremost, for Black and Brown and poor students for whom the promise of public education has never been realized and it means all students, not just a few.

Together, parents and students and educators are walking in to reclaim their schools from the charter industry and the testing craze and from unequal, inadequate funding.

TOP-LINE NATIONAL TALKING POINTS FOR OCTOBER 6TH

1. WE WANT LONG-OVERDUE INVESTMENT IN THE SCHOOLS THAT SERVE BLACK AND BROWN COMMUNITIES. THIS IS BASIC RACIAL JUSTICE:

The Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools (AROS), a coalition of ten national community organizations and two teachers unions, is coordinating Walk-Ins at 2,000 public schools in over 200 cities, with 100,000 participants, to call for much needed and long overdue investment in the public schools that serve black and brown communities.

2. WE WANT THE NEXT PRESIDENT TO CLOSE THE WALL ST. BILLIONAIRE TAX LOOPHOLES THAT ROB OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF MONEY THEY NEED TO EDUCATE OUR CHILDREN WELL:

In this presidential election year, the candidates of both parties are calling for the closing of tax loopholes that benefit Wall St. billionaires while helping to starve our schools of the resources needed to support the public schools all our children deserve. We call on whomever our next president is to ensure that much of the money gained from closing these loopholes is used to provide our kids with expert and experienced teachers, a rich and challenging curriculum, small class sizes that permit more one-on-one learning, and end to harsh discipline and jail-like school environments, and the health care and social services they need to succeed.

3. WE WANT MONEY FOR PUBLIC “SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS” AND AN END TO SIPHONING AWAY RESOURCES TO CHARTER SCHOOLS:

When public schools are well-funded, they work well. The 5,000 public “sustainable community schools” in cities around the country provide a world-class education. We want more of them rather than an expansion of charter schools that siphon money away, resist accountability, and so often refuse to enroll or push out students with special needs, while performing on average no better, and often worse than, the under-funded public schools in our cities.
TALKING POINTS IN ANSWER TO REPORTERS’ QUESTIONS OR TO RAISE IN LONGER CONVERSATIONS WITH NATIONAL AND LOCAL REPORTERS:

Who we are

» Today, teachers, parents, students and community members are walking in at 2,000 schools in over 200 cities. We are expecting up to 100,000 people to participate, making this the largest mobilization in support of public education in recent history. We believe that taking action together will lead to positive change.

» This action is coordinated by the Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools (AROS), a coalition of coalition of ten national community organizations and teachers unions.

» For too long, schools in black and brown communities have been deprived of the funds needed to provide our children with expert and experienced teachers, a rich and challenging curriculum, small class sizes that permit more one-on-one learning, and the health care and social services they need to succeed.

Our Demands

» We are walking in to demand long overdue investment in the public schools that serve black and brown children. Only adequate funding is just and equitable funding.

» Too many black and brown children and communities do not have the resources we know they need to do well. Their schools must be able to provide them with the education that all our children deserve, an education that prepares them for a bright future.

On Community Schools

» Public “sustainable community schools” like the 5,000 operating now in cities around the country can provide the world-class education that we want for our children. They demonstrate that when public schools are well-enough funded, they work very well.

» Public “sustainable community schools” provide what our children need to succeed through:
  • expansive, culturally relevant curriculums
  • appropriate evaluations of student and teacher performance rather than excessive, high-stakes testing
  • restorative disciplinary practices rather than suspensions, expulsions and jail-like atmospheres
  • counseling and health care services that support learning
  • an atmosphere that encourages parent and community involvement rather than state takeovers and other means of eliminating local control.

» We demand an end to treating black and brown children like criminals. Schools that impose rigid behavior codes on children — like silent lunch periods and humiliating punishments for minor infractions — are not educating students for a productive future. They are criminalizing children. We must instead invest in constructive and restorative approaches to discipline and school cultures, like those created by public “sustainable community schools” that are respectful and focused on learning.
Charter Schools

» Even if we ignore the fact that charter schools, on average, achieve no better results than our badly funded public schools, and even if we overlook the growing number of instances in which charter operators have committed massive fraud with the taxpayer money they’ve received, you can’t build a national educational system based on schools that depend for much of their support on donors from Wall Street — the financial services/management consulting/venture capital industries — subsidized by taxpayers.

» While some charter schools do a good job, many are run by incompetent or unscrupulous profit-seekers who also sometimes even take over the better charter schools. Other charters spend vast sums on consultants who are paid many times the salaries of classroom teachers who, in any event, are not paid adequately and who receive only a fraction of the support they need to succeed.

» Charter schools avoid and resist public accountability for the taxpayer money they receive. They claim to be public schools when they ask for money but claim they are private schools and therefore unaccountable when they are asked to justify how they spend, and the results they achieve with, the public money they receive.

» Charters siphon money away from the public schools that serve black and brown children. On top of that, they routinely refuse to enroll students with special needs and push out students who encounter difficulties once enrolled.

On Investment

» Our schools and communities have been starved of the resources we know they need—billions more than they currently receive.

» We can get that money from making the very wealthy and corporations pay their fair share. Wall St. billionaires continue to benefit from tax loopholes that rob our schools of much of the money they need. We have to close those loopholes and make sure much of the money gained goes to the most underfunded public schools.

» You can’t buy good teachers, good school buildings, much-needed support services on the cheap. Our children and our country’s future prosperity depend on making adequate and equitable funding of schools that serve black and brown children a top priority. The resources are there if the political will is also.

Presidential Moment

» Neither candidate has given enough attention to the issue of public education other than to speak in broad generalities and repeat the oft-quoted statistics on our losses in international rankings.

» While our tax status limits us from endorsing any candidate, we are clear that we need a president who has a commitment to making major investments in public schools, particularly those serving black and brown children whose schools have been badly underfunded for decades. This requires political will and courage.

• We also need a president who will stop siphoning more taxpayer money away from public schools and into charter schools.
TWEETS

1. [SCHOOL NAME] is walking in today to support public education & to #ReclaimOurSchools! [photo]

2. Thousands of students, parents & educators are walking in on Oct 6 to #ReclaimOurSchools. Join us! [link]

3. Educators, parents, & students at [SCHOOL NAME] demand investment in our school! We are walking in to #ReclaimOurSchools! [photo]

SAMPLE GRAPHICS

Click below to download a layered Photoshop file to help you make your own share graphics.
The United States promises our children equal access to a free public elementary and high school education. But too many Black and Brown children have been denied schools good enough to make this promise meaningful. Instead of honestly acknowledging the root causes of struggling schools and investing in real equity in public education, today’s policymakers and deep-pocketed corporate education “reformers” offer misguided strategies that fail to address the central problem: a failure to invest in Black, Brown and poor children, the educators who teach them and the communities in which they live. This is a crisis in values, in what we believe and who we believe in. It is a crisis of civil rights — and of human rights.

HERE’S WHAT WE NEED:

BILLIONS OF DOLLARS FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN BLACK AND BROWN COMMUNITIES – RESOURCES THAT HAVE FOR SO LONG BEEN DENIED

WHAT’S WRONG: Too many of our leaders claim that we can’t afford to pay for a public education system that serves all our children. Yet they always find the money for new prisons, new defense spending and continued tax breaks that benefit corporations and the super-wealthy.

THE WAY FORWARD: Close the billionaires’ (“carried interest”) tax loophole, tax the very wealthy and corporations so they pay their fair share. Fix school funding formulas to ensure equity. Invest in strong schools and strong communities.

QUALIFIED TEACHERS, RELEVANT CURRICULUM, SOCIAL & HEALTH CARE SERVICES

WHAT’S WRONG: Far too many of our schools lack the comprehensive programs and services that would guarantee our students a bright future. The opportunity gap between affluent schools and those in low-income communities — particularly communities of color — sets children up for failure.

THE WAY FORWARD: We know what our children need: experienced teachers with appropriate educational resources; rich, challenging, culturally-relevant curricula; a welcoming school environment that doesn’t operate as if students are criminals; and schools that provide social and health services that help to overcome the challenges kids bring with them to the schoolhouse door. We need to invest in 10,000 sustainable community schools. The federal education law — the Every Student Succeeds Act — should be utilized to fund and support sustainable community schools.
STOP FLOODING OUR COMMUNITIES WITH UNDER-PERFORMING AND UNACCOUNTABLE CHARTER SCHOOLS

**WHAT’S WRONG:** Few charter schools have produced the academic gains they promised, nor do they accept the responsibility for educating the most disadvantaged students. Yet their presence is diverting already-scarce resources from the public schools that 95% of students still attend.

**THE WAY FORWARD:** We promise all our children universal access to a free, public education. We can do that through a unified, well-funded system of public schools. It is time to stop opening new charter schools until stronger laws are passed to ensure transparency and accountability for charters and the companies that manage them.

STOP TREATING BLACK AND BROWN CHILDREN LIKE CRIMINALS

**WHAT’S WRONG:** Armed police officers in schools, high rates of suspension, zero tolerance discipline practices and push-out continue to be everyday experiences for students — particularly Black and Brown children.

**THE WAY FORWARD:** We demand schools that are rooted in a culture of mutual respect and a commitment to educate young people, not frighten and control them into submission. We must embrace and invest in positive discipline practices and restorative justice as critical components for building that culture.

END HIGH STAKES TESTS. MAKE TIME FOR TEACHING & LEARNING

**WHAT’S WRONG:** Taking a test is not an educational activity. Children are now incessantly measured, but rarely provided with the learning opportunities they need to succeed. Rather than helping children and parents and informing teachers, tests are being used to justify academic tracking, over-representation of Black and Brown kids in special education, push outs and school closings.

**THE WAY FORWARD:** End the use of high stakes tests that rank and punish students, teachers and schools. Give educators the space to teach and assess students in ways that support learning, and allow for an expansion, rather than the narrowing of their educational experience.

PARENTS, COMMUNITY & EDUCATORS MUST BE DECISION MAKERS

**WHAT’S WRONG:** Too many “reforms” remove schools from local control, muting the voices and decision-making power of parents and local communities. The recent wave of state takeovers are not about educational improvement; they are aimed at paving the way for more unregulated charter schools, and new profits for textbook, testing and IT companies.

**THE WAY FORWARD:** End state takeovers and the privatization of public schools. Restore elected school boards that allow those closest to communities to make decisions.

We know that strong schools depend on strong communities. We tie our fight for education justice to fights for economic justice, racial justice and all those who struggle for a more just and fair America and world.

WWW.RECLAIMOURSCHOOLS.ORG  #RECLAIMOURSCHOOLS
Hailey,

In case you missed last week’s message from AFT’s leaders about planned walk-ins across the country, I wanted to make sure you have all the information you need to participate in this important event on Wednesday, May 4.

On that day, as part of a national movement organized by the Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools, AFT members and leaders will join thousands of educators, students, parents and community allies in events calling for the Public Schools All Our Students Deserve. During similar events on Feb. 17, more than 40,000 people walked into 838 schools in 30 cities as part of a national movement, and we expect even more cities this time. Already, 40 AFT locals have signed on.

Join us and help build the movement for educational justice.

Our goal for the day is to show educators, parents and students walking together to reclaim our schools and advocate for the public education all children deserve, regardless of their ZIP code, race or income. We’ll gather in front of our schools and engage the community in dialogue. And then, we will all walk in together.

At this moment in history, it is our duty to fight back against privatizing our schools and our profession, but we must also fight forward for the Public Schools All Our Students Deserve.

Learn more about the May 4 walk-ins. You can also contact me at ezachary@aft.org, or go to www.reclaimourschools.org.

In solidarity,

Eric Zachary
AFT director of human rights and community relations
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 2016

CONTACT: Ira Arlook
202.258.5437 • ira@fenton.com

Parents, Students and Teachers “Walk-In” at 900+ Public Schools in 30 Cities to Demand the Kind of Education that All Children Deserve

Call for Adequate Funding Too Long Denied to Public Schools Serving African American & Latino Communities

Decry Role of Wall St. & Corporate Billionaires in Attacks on Public Education

Thousands of parents, teachers and students staged “Walk-Ins” at over 900 public elementary and high schools in 30 cities this morning (Wednesday, February 17) as classes begin. They gathered, placards in hand, thirty minutes before the start of the school day, then walked into their public school buildings to show support for an adequately funded approach to public education called “community schools,” now implemented in systems serving five million students. The largely African American and Latino parents and students want the benefits afforded by community schools for their children. In some cities, Walk-In participants focused their concerns on issues including adequate tax revenues for their public schools, opposition to over-testing, an end school takeovers, and other local issues.

These Walk-Ins are the opening salvo in a major battle—a national campaign—to ensure that the country that invented public education as an essential feature of a democratic society continues to offer it. Here are the basic demands, followed below by comments from participants in today’s Walk-Ins:

» We demand a world class public education for all children—the kind of education that all children deserve and the very kind that has often been denied to black, brown and poor children. Our country has the resources to fully fund our schools and the obligation to our children to do so.

» We demand accountability and transparency for Charter Schools and operators. Every school that receives public funds is held to the same high standards of transparency and student success, including schools serving students of color, students with special needs and low-income students. And we want to stop the growing involvement of billionaires, like the Walton Family, in public education.

» We demand revenue to fully fund our schools. We want those Wall Street and corporate titans who claim to be education reformers to contribute their fair share of the tax dollars needed to ensure adequate public school funding for the low-income African American and Latino communities that need it most.
Public schools and public education are under attack and most aggressively by Wall Street and hedge fund billionaires—many of whom nearly brought down the entire U.S. economy in 2008—and companies like Walmart, infamous for the mistreatment of its employees and low wages that harm communities that need the most help. Wall Street and Walmart lobbyists continue to press for unaccountable charter schools and other dubious approaches that promise much but so often fall short in practice, while siphoning off taxpayer dollars that our public schools need to succeed. These are the people who have received the lion’s share of the nation’s wealth over the past several decades but who continue to resist paying their fair share of the taxes needed to fund our public schools adequately.

We know that our public schools can provide tools, time and support that students need whatever their zip code to inspire their natural curiosity, imagination and desire to learn. But only if they are funded to offer relevant and challenging curriculums, emphasize high quality teaching rather than constant high-stakes testing, more one-on-one instruction time, positive discipline, needed support services like vision testing and food banks as well as parent involvement in planning and decision-making.

Schools that incorporate these features produce better results than other approaches and do so without closing schools—a problem that now plagues so many neighborhoods where insufficient or misallocated resources have failed our students. This effective approach to educating our children, embodied in community schools, is much needed in low-income African American and Latino communities. See link below:


It is a bitter irony that so many of those Wall Street billionaires and corporate CEOs who have acquired almost all of the new wealth created over the past several decades continue to deny and deflect attention from what African American and Latino communities know only too well, that our public schools have been sabotaged by consistent, long-term underfunding. These moguls foist upon us failed, undemocratic alternatives including school takeovers and for-profit control of our schools rather than pay their fair share of the tax revenues needed to provide the education that all our children deserve. Over the coming months, and however long it takes, we will fight to reverse this state of affairs and ensure that public schools in low-income communities of color survive and flourish.

**QUOTATIONS FROM WALK-IN PARTICIPANTS FROM CHICAGO, PHILADELPHIA, MILWAUKEE, HAZELWOOD MO, DALLAS AND LOS ANGELES AND AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS**

**CHICAGO, BRIGHTON PARK NEIGHBORHOOD**

*This is our education. Our future depends on the type of education we get right now. Kelly High School has struggled with budget cuts that have left the school with fewer extracurricular opportunities and fewer teachers. Alongside our teachers, it’s up to us as students to raise our voices and demand the education we deserve,* said Evelyn Solis, a senior at Kelly High School on the Southwest side of Chicago.

*There is no need for new charter schools in our neighborhood. We already have amazing options and we want the public, neighborhood schools we already have to be able to thrive,* said Stephanie de Leon, a senior at Kelly High School and President of its Student Council.
In Brighton Park, we see no evidence of a long term plan for the future of sustainable, high quality, public education in Chicago, other than the privatization of and systematic disinvestment from public education that is destabilizing communities in our city. I am walking-in because it is time for an elected school board in Chicago that will invest in sustainable, community schools, said Anita Caballero, a Brighton Park resident and President of the Board of the Brighton Park Neighborhood Council.

PHILADELPHIA

I’m doing the walk in to bring parents together, and bring to light the injustice the School Reform Commission has committed, t ion Holmes, a parent at Wister Elementary School who has led the fight against a charter takeover of the school. (The state imposed School Reform Commission recently overrode the recommendation of the Philadelphia District Superintendent and voted to turn the school over to a charter operator.) They are stealing our public schools from our communities, and they have taken away our right to choose, as parents, who we want to educate our children, so I’m walking in for justice, justice for our families, to end the SRC (School Reform Commission) and their reign of terror in Philadelphia Public Schools. Walk with me, Our school today, your school tomorrow,” said Gail Tarver, a Wister grandparent.

MILWAUKEE

I am a Milwaukee public school special education teacher and I’m proud to be walking in with thousands of educators, parents and students on Wednesday for public community schools that welcome and serve all of our students in Milwaukee. Milwaukee wants public community schools not takeovers. We love our public schools,” said Amy Mizialko.

HAZELWOOD MO

I am a band alum. I started playing in 4th grade at Russell until I graduated from West. There is no reason these should be cut. Kids need PE to help burn off excess energy so they can focus better in the classroom. Music stimulates the minds just as much, if not more than math and science, said Andrea Till Scarborough Class of 2008 Hazelwood West High School. Hazelwood MO school district (racially diverse, working class area in North St. Louis County with 34 schools that announced this week cuts of 28 teaching positions in music and PE). I’m walking in to stand up for public schools and the students at Cold Water Elementary, said Connie Steinmetz, Hazelwood reading specialist.

DALLAS

Strong public schools are the backbone of strong neighborhoods. That’s why I am walking into Dunbar Elementary with my son on February 17 and fighting for community schools in Dallas. Our kids deserve the best education we can provide them, said Cristina Lopez, a parent-leader with a son in Dallas ISD.

LOS ANGELES

As educators, there is nothing more important than engaging meaningfully with our students, our parents and our community. On Wednesday, in 170 LAUSD schools, we will celebrate and stand together to show our strength and demand well-funded public education for every student in Los Angeles, said Mike Ramirez, 1st grade teacher, 20th Street school.
AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS’ PRESIDENT

All across the country, people are speaking up for racial and economic justice—and a high-quality public education is key to both of those goals. Today, we’re walking in—parents, educators, students and communities—to demand that policymakers invest in public education. We demand rich curriculum, programs that support the whole student, multiple pathways to college and career and a fair wage and voice on the job for educators and staff. We’re walking in to demand full and fair funding of all schools, and to reclaim the promise of a high-quality public education for every student in America, said Randi Weingarten, President, American Federation of Teachers.

####
NEWSCLIPS FROM PREVIOUS WALK-INS – NATIONAL AND LOCAL

PRINT

Washington Post
ThinkProgress.org
CommonDreams.org
Boston.com

TV

News8 / WTNH.com
NewsChannel4 / KFOR.com
Parents, teachers and children rally for public education at schools across the nation

By Emma Brown

Parents, teachers, children and community members rallied in support of public education at schools across the country Wednesday morning, many of them calling for more funding and less testing.

Thousands of people were expected to participate in the “walk-ins” at more than 800 schools in 30 cities, according to the Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools, which organized the event. The organization is a coalition of groups including the nation’s two largest teachers unions.

The walk-ins became venues for many different messages including de-emphasizing standardized tests, slowing down charter school growth and ending state takeovers of local school systems, as well as building more community schools, which offer a host of social, emotional and physical health supports.

Many students and parents showed up with signs declaring appreciation for their local schools and the educators who work in them.

Walk-ins were expected at more than 100 schools in Chicago, where many schools’ budgets are being cut mid-year:
Boston schools are on vacation this week, but activists gathered anyway on the steps of City Hall to protest millions of dollars in proposed budget cuts, according to Boston.com:

Emma Brown writes about national education and about people with a stake in schools, including teachers, parents and kids.
‘We’re At War’ Says Organizer Behind Education Protests Sweeping The Country

April 25, 2016

Keron Blair will look you directly in the eye the whole time he’s talking to you, making sure you absorb every single word he’s saying. His personality seemed a bit reserved when he sat down with me at a Starbucks to discuss Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools, the coalition he is director of, which been responsible for organizing and supporting school protests across the country. But when you listen to his speeches, you hear a minister’s voice.

“Public education...could die on our watch,” Blair said at a recent event for the Milwaukee Teachers Association. “The reality is what drew me to this fight is the shared acknowledgement that we are in fact at war, and what I’ve learned about wartime is that you cannot operate with the same kind of rules. You’ve got to make some wartime adjustments.”

AROS’ ongoing protests have conveyed exactly that level of urgency.

The coalition’s campaign began with a “day of action” where cities across the U.S. protested cuts to public education, the closure of schools in low-income neighborhoods that are predominantly black and Hispanic, the expansion of charter schools, and the proliferation of standardized testing. An estimated 40,000 parents, teachers, and students from over 830 schools in more than 30 cities participated in the February 17 walk-ins. A spokesperson for AROS said the protests were biggest in Los Angeles, Milwaukee, Seattle, and Chicago.

AROS believes that schools are ultimately community institutions that help in the fight against poverty by providing support services. The coalition rejects top-down reform from “corporate executives, entrepreneurs or philanthropists,” and wants the voices of teachers, parents, and students to be prioritized in the decision-making process about important changes in education policy, whether local, state, or federal.

Drawing inspiration from other grassroots movements like Occupy Wall Street and Black Lives Matter, Blair easily weaves together various political and economic issues to ensure that AROS is engaged in a broader fight—one focused on narrowing the gap in economic inequality and focusing on the voices of teachers, students, and parents in black and Hispanic communities. Blair says he learned what not to do from Occupy Wall Street as well. He wants to make sure the message isn’t so broad that people don’t see a focused policy agenda.
“I came to AROS because I felt that the fight for education and public schools in this country would be one of the defining fights of the decade,” Blair said.

Blair's background as an immigrant helped inform his views about the value of public schools. Blair and his mother emigrated from Jamaica to the United States, where he attended Roosevelt Junior-Senior High School in New York. At the time, the school was struggling, but it was important as a community center for immigrants, Blair said.

“It was under-resourced, but it was public, and it was local, it was free, and so I enrolled and got my classes and I was free to participate for a year in the life of a public school that then prepared me to go on to Howard University,” Blair said. “Where do people coming to this country of immigrants go to get their orientation, to live in this country, to learn the language, to learn to drive, to make friends, to know the whole community? We go to school.”

He didn't always want to be an organizer. Although Blair first began exploring activism in his time as an undergraduate student at Howard University, he initially aimed to become a minister leading a social justice congregation and studied liberation theology. But after going to New Orleans to work on recovery efforts in 2007, he realized he wanted to be an organizer instead of a minister.

“I felt that the fight for education and public schools in this country would be one of the defining fights of the decade.”

Today, Blair brings the discussion of barriers for students of color, such as systemic racism, to the fore. When he's giving speeches, he makes sure to emphasize the importance of race in the conversation over who gets to control public schools. Issues ranging from school resource officers, to metal detectors in schools, to state takeovers of schools represent the racist impact of what Blair considers to be bad policies.

For instance, Blair connects efforts to wrest control of school boards and close schools in predominantly black and Hispanic neighborhoods to the voter ID laws that prevent many people of color from casting a ballot, saying they are both examples of distrust of people of color to govern themselves.

“For us, it is rooted in racism that says certain people should not have access to the political process,” he said. “When you have an appointed school board like they do in Chicago, that school board is unaccountable.”

His point of view is similar to that of Chicago Teachers Union President Karen Lewis, who has called Chicago Public Schools’ decision to close around 50 schools in 2013 “racist” and “classist.”

Chicago isn't the only major city school district embroiled in controversies over community control of schools and school closures. Governors have been considering state takeovers of school districts all over the country, including Detroit and Philadelphia. Ohio Gov. John Kasich (R) has advocated for, and in the case of Youngstown City School District, won executive control of schools over the years. Meanwhile, school districts across the country are going broke and are unable to
provide things like updated textbooks, Advanced Placement classes, extracurricular activities, and in some cases, suitable drinking water. There are ongoing lawsuits in states such as Connecticut, Texas, and New York to enforce the quality of education promised by states’ constitutions. In Chicago and Detroit, teachers are going on strike to protest poor school conditions and lack of support services. In sum, there is no shortage of outrage over the state of education in public schools.

Blair remains focused on practical solutions to fix what’s broken in public education. He sees it as a battleground, and given the high stakes, he said it is necessary for groups to put aside their histories and work together.

“We are under serious attack,” he said. “We're at war and we have to focus on winning.”
What School Walk-Ins Teach Us
by Jeff Bryant

There’s a dangerous myth being perpetrated that the American public has given up on public education.

Those making this claim point to the swelling enrollments of charter schools and the spread of school vouchers that allow parents to transfer their children out of the public school system at taxpayer expense. And it’s true, giving parents more opportunities to “vote with their feet” and leave the public education system is chipping away at the population of students enrolled in public education. But does this mean support for public education is declining, and parents are happily transferring out of the system?

This week, thousands of teachers, parents, students, and community supporters of public education demonstrated nothing could be further from the truth in a series of “walk-in” protests in over 30 cities involving 900 schools.

Those big numbers come from the event sponsors themselves, the Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools, a national alliance of parent, youth and community organizations and labor groups that support public education. But numerous news stories in local press outlets and a lengthy Twitter stream of eyewitness accounts to the protests seem to prove those claims to be authentic.

It’s hardly surprising these events brought out thousands of strong supporters for public schools. That’s what they were intended to do. What’s important, though, is to hear why the walk-ins are happening and what protestors are saying.

There’s something in the air...

What’s A “Walk-In?”

Walking into schools – as opposed to walking out – is a symbolic gesture of support for public education and an opportunity for concerned citizens and the media to see the conditions and challenges these schools face.

The walk-in concept originated in North Carolina and St. Paul, Minnesota, where teachers and students – unable or unwilling to walk out of schools – held walk-ins to voice their concerns, educate their communities, and galvanize support for public schools.

This week’s events come at a time when, “The future of public education in the United States stands at a critical crossroad,” according to a statement from AROS. The statement authors see “a web of billionaire advocates, national foundations, policy institutes, and local and federal decision-makers” working to “dismantle public education and promote a top-down, market-based approach to school reform.”

But what do people on the ground see?
Why People Are Walking In

In Boston, the walk-in took place at City Hall where hundreds gathered outside to protest an estimated $50 million budget shortfall for the city's schools. "At the proposed level, district schools could lose teachers, after-school programs, and elective classes like languages and arts," according to a local news account. The crowd presented to the mayor a list of demands and a petition with more than 3,500 signatures, then proceeded to march to the State House to present their demands to the governor too.

As part of the protest, ninth graders at one school, according to the Boston Globe, wrote a letter to the mayor complaining of the budget cuts and “asking that you come to our school and explain to our students why you are letting this happen.”

School budget cuts were a point of contention in Chicago as well, where walk-in protests occurred at hundreds of schools across the city. "We're united as a community," Chicago Teachers Union vice president Jesse Sharkey tells a local reporter. “The cuts are unacceptable.”

Parents and students joined the teachers at many of the Chicago events, according to another local reporter, and voiced their disapproval of school budget that have swollen class sizes and eliminated course offerings. "Not every school is able to get what they want for their students," one teacher explains. "I hope they get exactly what they’re asking for," a parent chimes in.

At another Chicago rally, teacher Michelle Gunderson tells the reporter, “Schools are under-funded all over out country, especially in large urban districts.”

“We need to create revenue for our neighborhood schools,” a parent at the featured rally adds. “We don’t need more charter schools.”

Charter schools were also a point of protests in Los Angeles, where 20,000 were expected to turn out at events across the city, according to LA School Report. The target of the protestors' ire is a proposed plan to expand the city’s already considerable supply of charter schools, which siphon money away from public schools.

“It’s a zero-sum game for funding,” another Los Angeles press outlet quotes American Federation President Randi Weingarten saying, “because of the attempts to create more and more and more charters at the expense of fixing local public schools.”

A public school student tells the reporter her school “is something that we need to protect … If we don’t, it’s going to fall into ruin and it’s not going to be the same.”

Signs and posters at one Los Angeles event, according to another local report, “focused on what students loved about their school – the teachers, the music.” Participants in the protest fear these are the things being taken away from them in order to fund more charters.

Numerous walk-ins across the state of Wisconsin protested funding cuts to schools while more resources are directed to charter schools and voucher programs. In Milwaukee, “Parents, educators and community leaders gathered at nearly 100 of Milwaukee's public schools,” according to a local account. Protestors there spoke out against alleged “takeovers” of their public schools by charter school organizations and private schools funded by vouchers. In La Crosse, educators complained of the tough choices they have to make while charters and vouchers sap their resources without decreasing the costs of operating local schools. The result is loss of libraries, art and language programs, and support staff for students who need extra help.

In St. Paul, Minnesota, demonstrations in front of over 50 schools focused on funding demands teachers are making in upcoming contract negotiations. At rallies at more than 50 schools in Paterson, New Jersey, teachers, parents, and public officials spoke out against budget shortfalls and “private corporations [that] come in here and open schools that are not public.” In Denver, protestors advocated for “smaller class sizes, deeper community partnerships to provide services for families, and greater accountability for charter schools.” In San Diego, protesters wanted increased support for public
schools and called for less emphasis on standardized testing. In Austin, walk-ins at three schools focused on funding for “community schools” that would offer increased health, emotional, and counseling supports for schools.

The common thread throughout these protests is pretty clear: lack of funding and support for public schools while resources are being directed elsewhere.

Who is responsible for that?

**Who Has A Choice?**

Views can differ on whether there is “a web” of collaborating groups – as AROS contends – directing education policy, and whether or not the intent is to “dismantle” public schools, but it’s very clear the thousands of people involved in this week’s walk-ins feel they have little choice in what’s happening to their schools.

They did not choose to chronically under fund their schools and send public money somewhere else. Someone else chose to do that.

While some parents may find charter schools and vouchers can provide useful workarounds for them, that doesn’t correct the chronic under funding of the entire system and the unwillingness of political leaders to take that problem on. Participants in this week’s walk-ins see the hard, bitter truth of that. Good for them.
Students from more than 40 Boston Public Schools will hold a walk-in Wednesday

The movement is part of a national day of action.

By Allison Pohle

When thousands of students walked out of their classrooms in March to protest Boston Public Schools proposed budget cuts, some officials called them misinformed. Despite their pleas, the school committee ultimately passed the controversial budget, but students vowed not to stop protesting.

“When we did the walk out, some people made it seem like we were ignorant for leaving school,” said Snowden International sophomore Jailyn Lopez, who helped organize the walk-out. “That's why this time, we're going into the school.”

Students at more than 40 Boston Public Schools will take part in a “walk-in” Wednesday morning, during which they'll gather outside their schools and enter together in solidarity.

The movement is part of a national action supported by the Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools, a coalition of parents, students, and community groups. Students in more than 80 cities will hold walk-ins to show support for public education.

The Boston Teachers Union helped to coordinate the local movement. Each school will carry out the walk-in differently, but the union’s president, Richard Stutman, said those who participate will highlight concerns over school budgets, the growth of charter schools, and an overall lack of resources in public schools.

“We're very hopeful we will continue a national drive to focus attention on public schools,” Stutman said. “That might seem nebulous, but we're at a pivotal moment right now with charter schools and budgetary concerns locally, and we don’t feel like we’re getting a lot of support from local leaders.”

In response to the walk-in, Boston Public Schools issued a statement saying the district appreciates the passion advocates have for education.

“While BPS encourages respectful activism and advocacy, we will closely monitor these events to ensure student safety and a prompt start time for morning classes and valuable instruction,” the district said in the statement. “We support meaningful discussions on the BPS budget process and would like for members of our community to continue engaging with us on these matters.”

Boston’s walk-in comes in the midst of a number of heated education issues. City councilors are debating next year’s school budget, and, at the state level, officials are debating whether to lift the cap on charter schools. Last week, the city released the McKinsey report, a controversial district audit that suggested Boston Public Schools could save up to $85 million each year by closing 40 percent of its schools.

All of the issues are undeniably divisive amongst education advocated. But, above all else, Lopez said the walk-in is meant to show support for the schools.

“We as students cherish our education,” she said. “We're proving school isn't just about coming and sitting down and learning what two-plus-two is. It's all about bonds with teachers and the friends you make. It's about family.”
WEST HAVEN, Conn. (WTNH) — Schools across the country opened their doors Wednesday for what they called “walk-ins.” The idea of the “walk-in” is to show solidarity in support of public education.

The Savin Rock Community School in West Haven was one of the schools participating Wednesday. Students, parents, administrators, and teachers all calling for an equitable system of publicly funded schools.

“Public schools accept and welcome everyone,” said Kristen Malloy-Scanlon from the West Haven Federation of Teachers. “There is no lottery or waiting list. We are open to all and we are as diverse as we are available.”

The walk-in events happened in two thousand schools in 87 cities nationwide. The hope is to encourage states and municipalities to fully fund public education.
Parents, students hold `walk-in` rallies to support public education

Posted 6:00 pm, May 4, 2016, by Ashley Kringen, Updated at 06:35pm, May 4, 2016

MOORE, Okla. - Educators, students and parents rallied outside schools in Moore to stand up for public education.

The Education Association of Moore and Moore Public Schools worked together to host the rallies and ‘walk ins.’

Despite the state’s budget crisis, they are focusing on the positive aspects of education.

“We’ve been very frugal here in Moore and here at Apple Creek. We’ve made sure to hold some money and not just spend whenever we have it,” said Pam Huston, principal of Apple Creek Elementary School.

Huston expects classroom sizes to increase due to the budget cuts.

She also hopes their school system can save programs that are beneficial for students.

“Those are the things that keep kids in schools - athletics, music programs, drama,” Huston said.

At Plaza Towers Elementary, district leaders said the state’s $1.3 billion hole has forced them to find ways to save money, meaning some educators’ jobs could be eliminated.

“If someone retires or they move or relocate, that might be a position that we don’t fill,” said Superintendent Dr. Robert Romines of Moore Public Schools.

Despite the headache our public education system is dealing with, students want their teachers to know they care.

“They need to know that we support them, and they need to know that they support us,” said Haley Alonzo.