



## West Virginia teachers are on strike again. Here's why.

This time, it's not about pay raises.

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*Update: West Virginia's House of Delegates voted Tuesday afternoon to postpone action on the controversial education bill indefinitely.*

West Virginia teachers are furious with state lawmakers — again.

About 19,000 teachers walked off the job on Tuesday, closing down nearly every school in the state [for the second time](#) in a year. But this time, teachers are not fighting for pay raises. They're protesting Republican efforts to [privatize public education](#).

Union leaders called for a [strike Monday evening](#) after Republicans senators voted for a bill that would open the door to allowing the first charter schools in West Virginia. That means some of the money earmarked for public schools would be diverted to fund privately run charter schools, homeschooling, and online classes. The education bill would also make it easier to fire teachers without considering seniority during layoffs.

Senators passed the bill with a slim 18-16 majority and sent it to the House of Delegates. The chamber is expected to vote on the bill Tuesday afternoon.

"The state Senate is trying for a second time this year to ram through a so-called education bill that defunds public education, retaliates against teachers who stood up for their students last year, and appears to be driven by outside wealthy interests like Americans for Prosperity that, like [Education Secretary] Betsy DeVos, want to eliminate public schools," said Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, [in a statement](#) Monday.

The backlash caught [some lawmakers](#) off guard, considering that the education bill also includes money for pay raises and more nurses and school staff. But teachers say they won't allow the state to start privatizing public education just so they can get a raise. They want legislators to scrap the bill and start over.

So instead of going to class, thousands of teachers crowded the Capitol building in West Virginia Tuesday morning to express their disgust.

"Kill that bill," [they chanted](#). "Public schools yes, charter schools no."

This latest coordinated action comes nearly a year after West Virginia teachers launched [a successful nine-day strike in February 2018](#) to increase teacher salaries — a move that rippled across the country and fueled similar strikes in six states. And the trend continues in 2019: Teachers in [Los Angeles went on strike](#) in January, [Denver teachers](#) walked out of class last week, and [Oakland, California, teachers](#) plan to strike on Thursday.

Now educators in West Virginia are flexing their muscles again, showing politicians that they're willing to fight for more than a pay raise.

### **The national teachers revolt began in West Virginia**

Public school teachers in West Virginia started a national movement when they **launched a major strike** last February.

A total of 35,000 educators and school staff didn't show up for work during the stoppage, adding up to a total of 318,600 lost workdays.

Teachers in the state were angry that they hadn't received an across-the-board salary raise since 2014, and were among the lowest-paid teachers in the country. The average teacher salary in the state was \$44,701 in 2016, according to the National Education Association, making West Virginia 48th in the nation.

Lawmakers, both Democrat and Republican, have been cutting corporate and business taxes for more than a decade. As a result, public schools have been losing millions of dollars a year in state money, which is the main source of funding for local schools, followed by local property taxes. The state of West Virginia now spends **11.4 percent** less per student than it did before the economy tanked in 2008.

So West Virginia teachers went on strike, shutting down all 680 public schools in the state for nine days. The walkout ended in March, after the governor and state leaders **agreed to give teachers** what they wanted: a 5 percent raise and a hold on increasing health insurance premiums.

Underpaid teachers across the country were watching.

More than 100,000 public school teachers in six states have walked out of class since, rebelling against years of **stagnant wages**, crumbling infrastructure, and **deep budget cuts to education**. The strikes in **Arizona, West Virginia, Kentucky, Oklahoma, California, and Colorado** had broad public support, forcing state lawmakers to raise pay and fueling a national movement to boost investment in public education.

Now West Virginia's teachers have started another battle. Whether their strategy will work a second time is still unclear.

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