

Students stage walkout in support of teachers during contract negotiations

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About 200 students staged a noon walkout Thursday in support of teachers during ongoing contract negotiations with the Del Norte Unified School District.

The student protesters marched from Del Norte High School, down Washington Boulevard, past the administration building chanting “Fair pay, all day” and “What does democracy look like? This is what democracy looks like.” The march concluded in the Walmart parking lot.

Organizers Sepherah Henderson and Kolton Cumbra, both juniors, said the goal of the march was simple.

“We’re fighting for the rights of teachers for fair pay and fair benefits,” Henderson told The Triplicate. “We just don’t to see our teachers go on strike. That hurts everybody.”

Del Norte High School Principal Randy Fugate and Superintendent Jeff Harris did not return calls for comment before The Triplicate’s deadline.

Del Norte Teachers Association President Marshal Jones was surprised to learn of the student walkout.

“We did not instigate nor recommend it. If they’re doing it, they’re doing it on their own,” Jones told The Triplicate. “Our issues are with the district. We are not advocating for students being involved. If parents want to be involved it’s their prerogative. We’re hired to teach. We just want to be compensated as we should be. The teachers at the prison got their cola raises immediately. The management got their 5 percent raise. While we’re still sitting at an impasse.”

The two sides met with a state mediator for more than 19 hours at Fact Finding session Dec. 5. Jones said the mediator now has 20 to 30 days to come to a final recommendation from her findings, then members will consider it and vote.

Jones said if the final recommendation is rejected, the DNTA could vote to strike by Jan. 15. He said he’s learned the administration is already taking steps to keep schools open should the union strike.

“Our district has contracted to Humboldt School District for substitutes to come up on buses to break up a strike,” Jones said he learned from “intercepted correspondence.”

“If teachers strike, the district seems to have an extra \$366 to give subs to break up a strike,” he added.

Jones said he and the DNTA members are growing more frustrated by a lack of progress with the administration while continuing to do their job and more.

“We’ve been very respectful to the Japanese delegation. Eighty teachers were there cheering them on when they arrived. We were a major part of that, and were thanked by (District 3 Del Norte County Supervisor) Chris Howard. But we were not asked to be a part of any of the other activities,” Jones said.

He added there has been a lot of “disinformation” in the community and said the district has created a three-prong attack of sowing fear, uncertainty and doubt. Jones said the the California Teachers Association warned his people to be ready for that..

“I’m a third generation teacher in Del Norte County. I have never seen the administration work this way. The leadership here has no history. They are not from here.”

Jones said the DNTA members will continue to get their message out to the community. In addition to attending the School Board meeting Thursday, they plan to be marching Friday in the Christmas parade and be at the Warrior’s state championship football game Saturday.