

Teacher Activism: Teacher Protest Actions on Education Policy

Teacher protest actions take many forms, including **strikes, walkouts, sickouts, rallies, marches** or any combination of these actions. While there may be various legal definitions for the term “strike,” most of these terms are used to describe teacher-led activism to change education policies at the school, district or state level. In 2018 and 2019, teachers participated in protest actions to negotiate changes to a broad swath of education policies that impact teachers and students. Depending on the scale of the teacher protest, these actions often resulted in school day cancellations or scheduling changes for students and their families. This outline summarizes the various teacher protest actions seen across the United States in 2018 and 2019.



Between February 22, 2018 and May 20, 2019, there were at least

30 TEACHER PROTEST ACTIONS

14

At the **STATE LEVEL**
(11 of which occurred in multiple school districts).

9

At the **DISTRICT LEVEL.**

6

At a **CHARTER SCHOOL** or charter school network.

1

At a **PRESCHOOL** provider.

 **HIGHER TEACHER PAY** was the most common motivation for teacher protest actions.

Other common motivations included:



Better benefits
(or a stop in the reduction of benefits).



Smaller class sizes.



Increased support services and staff.



A **limit in the expansion** of charter schools.



Increased funding for education.



State Examples



In February 2018, teachers in **WEST VIRGINIA** kicked off the current wave of protest actions with a walkout lasting nine school days. In 2019, teachers walked out again, this time for two days. Much of the debate continued in a special session called by the governor.



In 2018, **WASHINGTON** experienced the most district-level strikes in a state. An increase in state funding, resulting from litigation, led districts to negotiate new teacher salaries and contracts. At least 13 separate districts experienced teacher strikes during these negotiations.



One of the largest teacher protests was in **NORTH CAROLINA**, where more than a reported 800,000 students missed class because of a May 1, 2019 rally.



Some states **passed legislation** addressing one or more of the motivations for teacher protest actions.



The **OKLAHOMA** Legislature passed [a bill](#) in 2018, increasing minimum salary requirements for teachers (averaging about \$6,000 per teacher). Following the bill's passing, teachers walked out to advocate for additional funding for their classrooms. In 2019, Oklahoma included just under \$59 million for increased teacher pay in its [FY2020 budget](#).



ARIZONA'S teacher walkouts and protests were met with a [proposal](#) from the governor to fund a 20% raise by 2020. After an initial 10% average raise was approved in the FY2018 legislative [budget](#), another 5% raise was included in the [budget](#) for FY2019.



During **OREGON'S** large-scale teacher walkout, teachers advocated for the passage of a [bill](#) to establish a commercial activities tax to increase funding for education. The bill was ultimately enacted.

Resources

- The [State Education Policy Watch List](#) tracks legislation related to teaching in all 2019 legislative sessions.
- 50-State Comparison: [Teacher Leadership and Licensure Advancement](#)
- Policy Snapshot: [Teacher Development and Advancement](#)