

# More than 1,000 protesters turn up at Ohio Statehouse rally for public education

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More than a thousand teachers and other demonstrators turned out May 1 outside the Ohio Statehouse in support of public education and against the Trump administration.

The demonstrators lined the blocks around Capital Square and marched, despite rain that was heavy at times, waving signs in support of public education. But the turnout was muted compared to the potential multiple thousands of demonstrators [initially expected by law enforcement](#).

Public education supporters were mixed in with other "May Day" protesters, who were opposing the Trump administration.

Gwynne Posey, a Grove City High School teacher in the South-Western City School District, said like many of the teachers there that she wanted legislators and the public to know that they were protesting for the kids they teach, not themselves.

"It's not about us and our paycheck, although that would be important — it's about the kids and what they would be losing," Posey said. "I work with kids who are underprivileged, who have tough home lives, they already have so little, why would we want to take more away from them?"

## **Teachers denounce state education funding plan**

Public school district teachers, officials, educators and public education supporters have been warning for months that the state's upcoming two-year budget plan will slash funding for public schools.

The Ohio House budget plans [to spend \\$231 million more on traditional public schools](#) over two years, making sure that no district

sees a cut — more than Gov. Mike DeWine's proposal to cut \$103.4 million [across hundreds of school districts](#) over two years.

However, public education advocates say that the proposed budget throws out the "fair school funding formula." Advocates also oppose a new House GOP plan to limit districts' savings as a way to provide property tax relief for homeowners.

Leslie Steffes, a longtime Columbus City School teacher who came out of retirement to work part-time again in the district as a reading specialist, said at the protest that "the people who are making decisions about our children, their futures, have never been in a school classroom."

"They don't really have any idea of what the children need right now," Steffes said. "Children are different, things have changed. Kids need a lot more, they need a lot more support, we need more teachers, more money, more resources — not less."

Regina Fuentes, spokesperson for the Columbus Education Association, said people were demonstrating on May 1 because they "are tired of these blatantly irresponsible cuts to education."

"These are our elected officials. We put you in that position to represent the people of Ohio," Fuentes said. "So represent us and do the job that we asked you to do, and don't cut public funding."

The Ohio Senate is currently deliberating on school funding as part of a June deadline to finalize the state budget.

## **City, state officials turn out to support demonstration**

Columbus City Council President Shannon Hardin was in attendance at the event, saying that he wanted to show support for public educators. In March, City Council passed a resolution supporting Columbus City Schools in its push for increased state funding.

"Today we are fighting for our children and our right to our children to have their public schools funded," Hardin said. "We have a Statehouse that is mimicking what they see in the federal government and trying to take it a step further, and in Columbus we're saying 'No.'"

At a press conference inside the Statehouse, House Minority Leader Rep. Allison Russo, D-Upper Arlington, said that there were legislators in the state government prepared to fight the Republican majority on the issue of funding public education.

"There are legislators in this building, although it doesn't feel like it, (and) we're on your side," she said.

Russo said that the state government had closed offices early in anticipation of the protest.

"I suppose there are many folks around here that are afraid our teachers, our educators, our librarians," Russo said. "If that gives you a sense of the environment that we are in right now."

### **Some Downtown offices closed early, anticipating traffic**

In addition to state government offices, anticipated traffic issues from what was expected to be a couple thousand protesters led administrative offices at the Franklin County Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court to close at noon on May 1. Franklin County Municipal Court closed at 2 p.m. while county Common Pleas Court operated under normal business hours.

Some Downtown residents were warned by their apartment complexes that it would be best if they were home by the early afternoon due to the possibility of heavy vehicle traffic caused by the protests.