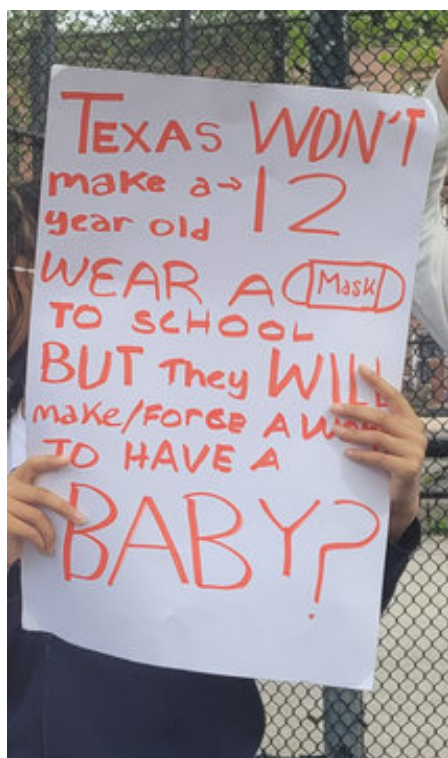


Brooklyn middle school students walk out for abortion rights

written by Struggle-La Lucha New York bureau
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Across the U.S., Bans Off Our Bodies student walkouts took place May 12 to protest the Supreme Court's attack on abortion rights, including in Richmond, Virginia; Brookfield, Connecticut; Austin, Texas; Louisville, Kentucky; Urbandale, Iowa; and Stevens Point, Wisconsin.

Students at several New York City public schools participated. Struggle-La Lucha spoke with Dru, a seventh grader at Arts & Letters 305 United in Brooklyn, who joined a walkout by middle-school students and documented the event with videos. She talked about how the students organized the action, and how the school administration worked to sabotage it.

After the draft Supreme Court decision to overturn *Roe vs. Wade* leaked May 3, "People I talked to were upset about it," Dru told SLL. "Some kids in my class were the ones planning the walkout. They gave out small hand-written leaflets announcing it."

“Before the walkout the co-principal said she was all for it. Most of the teachers said they were in full support. They sent out permission slips to leave the school grounds, but that was about it.”

On May 12, she said, “During second period, the majority of the class got up and went downstairs. We passed the other co-principal, and there was a sign taped to the door next to him that said: ‘By participating in this walkout you are participating in a civil disturbance. Keep in mind that there could be severe consequences for doing this.’ He didn’t say anything, he just watched.

“After a few minutes there was a large crowd of more than 100 people in the schoolyard. People held signs they made. We crowded around a bench where the organizers gave talks with a megaphone.”

Handmade signs held by the multinational crowd read, “Free and safe abortions for all,” “Our bodies, our choice,” “Abortion is a personal decision, not a political debate” and “Access to abortion is a human right.”

One powerful sign said, “Texas won’t make a 12-year-old wear a mask to school but will force a woman to have a baby?”

Dru continued: “After a few minutes we said we were going to march around the neighborhood so people would hear our message, since standing around in the schoolyard wasn’t really a walkout. Then some school staff members locked the gate. We were like, ‘What?’ So we turned around and went to the entrance to the public park next door, and they locked that too!

“A group of kids rushed to the last open gate and held it open so everyone could flood out. We walked down the sidewalk chanting and carrying our signs.

“When we got to the next block the assistant principal and another staff member said if we didn’t go back we’d be in trouble. Even people with parental permission

were told we had to go back,” she said. “Enough people were scared that we all went back to the schoolyard together.

“People got back up on the bench and continued to speak out. At no point did the cops appear, but all the gates were locked and school staff were guarding every gate. The person standing by the gate we’d escaped from apparently had the list of people with parental permission, but they never made an announcement or told us anything.

“One of my parents talked to the school office, and was told that they’d let us go after informing us we’d be marked absent. But that never happened.

“Everyone in the crowd was chanting. One of my friends said we should start circling in the schoolyard. After we’d been outside for about an hour some people started to give up and went back inside. The school staff were advising people to go back inside, and they were also telling people the [citywide students’] protest at Union Square was happening later than it really was. ‘You guys can’t stay out here that long.’ I was determined to stay as long as there were people out there.

“When there was only a small group left in the schoolyard, after they had been trying to discourage us and run out our time, they finally said, “We can’t legally stop those of you with parental permission.’

“They could have let us march in the neighborhood and come with us to make sure we were being safe. The people who went to Union Square went without any adults, even though before they said school staff would accompany the walkout.”

Dru concluded: “The next day during the community meeting the co-principal said: ‘During the walkout yesterday a lot of you were concerned about getting in trouble because of that sign I had. But you won’t be getting in trouble from us. This was an inspiring experience. Protests are meant to be uncomfortable.’

“The kids who organized for the walkout were so excited. And it was kind of a slap in the face to them how the school treated it. They did everything they could to defuse the walkout. And afterward they said all kinds of sweet things about how inspiring it was. I was really angry.”

Dru’s parent Greg told SLL: “I was in constant contact with Dru by text during the walkout. I spoke to the school office. I’ve watched all of Dru’s videos. Everything backs up her version of events, not the spin that school officials put on it.

“It was a rotten way to treat these students who wanted to speak out for their rights that are under attack. In my opinion, this conduct is deeply at odds with the progressive, diverse, community-oriented values this school administration claims to uphold.

“I’m very proud of the students. They did everything they could and left egg on the faces of the school administration and the higher-ups in Mayor Eric Adam’s administration who were calling the shots. Their ‘jailbreak’ from the schoolyard to the street was especially courageous and inspiring.

“I think next time, student organizers and concerned parents will know better than to trust the school officials’ promises and will plan accordingly.”

