
East Los Angeles students walkout for educational reform (East L.A. Blowouts), 1968

- [\(mainly or initiated by\) people of color](#) [1]
- [\(mainly or initiated by\) student participants](#) [2]
- [an example of paradox of repression](#) [3]

Timing

March 1,
1968

to:

October
1968

Location and Goals

Country:

United States

Location City/State/Province:

Los Angeles

[View Location on Map](#)

Goals:

Bilingual bicultural education; more Latino teachers and administrators; smaller class sizes; better facilities; and the revision of text books to include Mexican American history.

Later, goals were to release the LA 13 and reinstate Sal Castro as a LAUSD teacher.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 013. Deputations
- 016. Picketing
- 019. Wearing of symbols
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 048. Protest meetings
- 051. Walk-outs
- 062. Student strike
- 162. Sit-in

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 016. Picketing
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 3rd segment:

Methods in 4th segment:

Methods in 5th segment:

Methods in 6th segment:

- 162. Sit-in

Segment Length:

Approximately 5 weeks

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Human Rights

National/Ethnic Identity

Group characterization:

- parents
- students
- teachers

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Teacher Sal Castro, student Paula Crisostomo, college student Moctesuma Esparza

Partners:

United Mexican American Students (UMAS), Educational Issues Coordinating Committee (EICC), Brown Berets

External allies:

Black nationalists, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), Chicano Legal Defense Fund

Involvement of social elites:

Senator Robert Kennedy and Cesar Chavez supported the release of the LA 13

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- EICC
- UMAS

Groups in 2nd Segment:

- ACLU
- Black nationalists
- Cesar Chavez
- Chicano Legal Defense Fund
- Robert Kennedy
- SDS

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length:

Approximately 5 weeks

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Los Angeles Board of Education, Los Angeles Police Department

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Senior students blockaded exits to prevent walkouts

Campaigner violence:

Not known

Repressive Violence:

Police beatings in and outside of high schools

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

2 points out of 6 points

Survival:

0.5 points out of 1 point

Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

Total points:

5.5 out of 10 points

Notes on outcomes:

Although most of the original demands were not met, the walkouts had a profound effect on college recruitment of Latino students as well as an increase in Chicano teachers and administrators.

They were successful in releasing the LA 13 and having all charges dropped.

The Chicano movement spread throughout the southwest as a result of the walkouts, inspiring numerous other campaigns.

In late 1967 East Los Angeles housed a school system entrenched in racism. The Mexican American community

had the highest high school dropout rate and lowest college attendance among any ethnic group. The poor facilities and constant underestimation of student capabilities by teachers created an atmosphere hostile to learning. The oppressive conditions coupled with the inability to make changes compelled students, activists, and teachers to meet and discuss the situation. They decided that making their plight public was the best way to pressure the school board into compliance with their demands for education reform.

Teacher Sal Castro, along with student leaders such as Paula Crisostomo, college students like Moctesuma Esparza, and groups such as United Mexican American Students (UMAS) and the Brown Berets, developed thirty-six demands to bring to the Board of Education. These goals included bilingual, bicultural education, Latino teachers and administrators, smaller class sizes, better facilities and the revision of text books to include Mexican American history.

Their needs were not met, and so the students threatened walkouts, which they called “Blowouts.” Los Angeles public schools are paid based on the number of students in class each day. By walking out of homeroom before attendance was taken, the students could target the schools financially. An ad hoc committee, UMAS, and college students established Blowout committees at Roosevelt, Lincoln and Garfield high schools, plus a central coordinating committee. Their meetings were almost always infiltrated by plainclothes policemen.

Wilson High principal Donald Skinner canceled a student production of Neil Simon’s “Barefoot in the Park,” citing it as too risqué for a Mexican American audience. The incident was enough to prematurely trigger the walkouts. Although Wilson was not one of the original three schools intending to walk out, 300 students there walked out on March 1, 1968. The administration had senior students blockade the main exit, but resilient students found the auditorium door. They pushed the school entry gates back and forth, as students inside demonstrated by throwing fruit, books and more over the gate. Policemen and photographers showed up on the scene as the students were told to return to class. Some refused, forming sit-ins and rallies. As a symbol of the walkouts, students wore the image of a foot on their clothes. They said they would not return to class until their demands were met.

On March 5, two thousand students walked out of Garfield High. They were met by policemen and an angry administration. The next day 2700 students walked out carrying leaflets on education reform. They continued to walk out on the 7th and the 8th.

As planned, Roosevelt High School walked out next on March 6. The principal locked the gate, but determined students climbed over the fence only to be met by police, who beat the students.

On March 8, Belmont High students attempted to walk out, but found their school invaded by police. Police arrested and beat students.

After walking out March 8, 10-15 thousand students from the main five East LA schools, adding Lincoln and Jefferson, held a 9 AM rally at Hazard Park. They carried signs reading “Chicano Power” and “Viva la Raza.”

After a week of protests, the LA Board of Education set a meeting for March 11. Chicano students, parents, professors, and community members formed the Educational Issues Coordinating Committee (EICC) as their representative voice. At the meeting, the EICC asked for amnesty for all students involved in the walkouts as well as a community meeting to discuss the needed education reform. The Board agreed and the students returned to school.

1,200 people attended the community meeting held at Lincoln High on March 28. The EICC presented the original 36 demands. Although the Board claimed to agree with the needed changes, they cited a lack of funds

to follow through. This prompted the students to walk out of the meeting.

On March 31, thirteen of the walkout organizers were arrested for conspiracy to disturb schools and the peace, a felony charge. Included in the LA 13 were Sal Castro and Moctesuma Esparza. Sympathizers began demonstrations to release the LA 13 immediately. Students and community members held picket lines in front of the Hall of Justice downtown. They were supported by Black nationalists, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), Senator Robert Kennedy, and Cesar Chavez. Legal defense was provided by the Chicano Legal Defense Committee and the American Civil Liberties Union. During this time, focus shifted to the LA 13 and direct action in the schools ceased.

On June 2, over 2,000 supporters rallied at the Central Police station as Sal Castro was released on bail. However, he could not resume teaching until cleared of the charges. Activists demanded that the Board reinstate him. They began sit-ins at the Board office. 35 supporters sat there for eight days until they were arrested on October 2. On October 3, Castro was reinstated.

Organizations began to fall apart after the refocus on the LA 13. Students became disillusioned with the original demands. The Board did begin to recruit and hire more Chicano teachers and administrators. Change was not immediately apparent in the high schools; however a significant change occurred in the college recruitment of Latinos. Although most of the demands were not met, the walkouts unified and empowered the Chicano community, which in the process became a political force.

Research Notes

Influences:

This campaign inspired 1994 student walkouts against CA prop 187, 2006 walkouts against H.R. 4437, 2009 walkouts against Arizona immigration legislation, and similar demonstrations throughout the southwest. (2)

Sources:

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Additional Notes:

See PBS documentary "Chicano! Part 3- Taking Back the Schools" and HBO film "Walkout" for more information on this campaign.

Edited by Max Rennebohm (28/07/2011)

Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:

Rebecca Contreras 24/04/2011

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