

School funding protests spread in France

Students cite shortages, overcrowded classrooms

Layli Foroudi
REUTERS

AUBERVILLIERS, France – Maisa, a 17-year-old in a poor Paris suburb who aspires to be an English teacher, joined tens of thousands of other students and their supporters last week in protests that spread across France over dilapidated schools, classroom overcrowding and teacher shortages.

At Lycee Le Corbusier school in Aubervilliers, a suburb north of Paris in the Seine-Saint-Denis department, protesters said schools in poor neighborhoods like theirs faced the worst conditions.

“Last year I took the high school French exam without a French teacher, and teachers have a huge impact,” Maisa said. “These are not conditions to study in.”

As protests raged at more than 1,200 French high schools this week, police responded with tear gas and rubber bullets in some cases. More than 5,000 people were arrested, and some protesters were seriously hurt with eye injuries, broken teeth and blows to the head. Interior Minister Laurent Nunez called it a “climate of unacceptable violence” and called for order.

Amelia, 15, joined Maisa in the crowd outside the school gates and held a sign reading, “Our address should not decide our future.” She said she was demonstrating to demand the same rights as students elsewhere in the country.

“The education authority is not investing enough in the suburbs,” she said. “It’s classist and racist.”

Ulysse Rabate, a political scientist at Paris 8 University, said the protests show the way that France’s marginalized urban neighborhoods are increasingly influencing national politics.

“When there is a collapse of the public service, of public education, those who feel it the most, and the most violently, are those at

The nationwide demonstrations and blockades have become a political flash-point at a sensitive moment for the government, which announced a series of deeply unpopular spending cuts in its



French high school students block access to the Lycee Paul Eluard high school in Saint-Denis, near Paris, on Sept. 30 as they protest to demand the hiring of substitute teachers, increased resources and better learning conditions.

ABDUL SABOOR/REUTERS FILE

2027 budget on Oct. 1.

The education budget is set to increase by a below-inflation 1.7% to nearly \$74 billion, excluding teacher pensions.

The education ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Education Minister Edouard GEFRAY said that education remained a priority and the below-inflation budget increase was due to population decline.

The protests started in the Parisian suburbs, where poverty levels are high, then spread to Paris itself and other French towns, including Marseille, Strasbourg, Tours and Lille.

At Lycee Le Corbusier, classes including math, humanities, English and sports have been canceled since the start of the academic year due to a teacher shortage, according to Karima Kara Ali, an elected parent representative.

In Seine-Saint-Denis, two-thirds of high schools took part in protests on Oct. 1, the CGT labor union said. Youth, teachers and parents in four towns complained of unsanitary school conditions and chronic staff shortages including of



Masked protesters stand in a street amid clashes during a protest by high school students at the Lycee Berthelot high school near Paris on Oct. 2.

SARAH MEYSSONNIER/REUTERS FILE

nurses and social workers.

Louise Paternoster, a representative for the Seine-Saint-Denis branch of the CGT’s education union, said the area does not get adequate resources for its student population and their educational needs.

Two-thirds of schools in the department have unfilled teacher positions,

according to a union survey.

Not enough teachers

“Our students are losing out on study time. Some schools don’t have drinking water. We are not equal to other departments,” she said, blaming shortages on government cuts of 3,256 teacher positions nationwide in 2026.

In Pantin, a town on the northeastern edge of Paris, teacher Dilan Roche joined her students as they protested outside their school last week to support their demands and protect them from the police.

“What they wrote on banners, we wrote in a letter to the local education authority: overcrowded classes, no nurses, no social workers – which is problematic for students with learning difficulties, many living in precarity,” she said.

While France ranks in the middle of OECD countries for spending on education, the average expenditure per secondary school student has remained little changed over the last decade, standing at \$13,130 in 2024 and \$13,411.85 in 2010, according to education ministry data.

The last nationwide high school protest movement on this scale demanding more funding came in the 1990s. That followed the government sharply expanding access to the baccalaureat, the school-leaving exam that typically paves the way to universities, without providing schools with sufficient additional resources, said professor Clemence Cardon-Quint at Paul Valery University, who researches education funding.

The movement won an increase in funding, but spending per student later stagnated despite growing demands on schools.

Cardon-Quint said students and teachers have taken on additional responsibilities over the years, including navigating Parcoursup, the university admissions system introduced in 2018 and criticized by some students and teachers as opaque and discriminatory.

“In a period of budgetary restraint, it is more difficult to reduce inequalities,” Cardon-Quint said.

Poll finds Democratic gains in 5 red states

Mike Snider
USA TODAY

With less than a month until November’s midterm elections, Democrats running for the U.S. Senate have forged leads or dead heats in five traditionally Republican states – momentum that suggests the party has increased its potential for flipping the chamber for the remainder of President Donald Trump’s term.

Democrats need a net gain of at least four seats currently held by Republicans while also holding onto their current Senate seats to assume control. The Senate has 53 Republicans and 47 Democrats including two independents – Sens. Angus Young of Maine and Bernie Sanders of Vermont – who caucus with them.

A new New York Times/Siena University poll, released Oct. 2, found Democrats have leads or were neck-and-neck in key Senate races in five states – Alaska, Iowa, Kansas, Ohio and Texas – considered to be reliably Republican.

Heading into 2026, Democrats had been considered a lock to regain control of the House of Representatives. But growing disapproval of Trump’s handling of the economy and the Iran war have fueled Democrats’ chances of control of the Senate, too. Control of both houses of Congress could help Democrats block Trump’s agenda.

The Times/Siena poll found Democrat Mary Peltola, a former member of Congress, held a 7-point lead over incumbent Sen. Dan Sullivan in Alaska. In Texas, Democrat James Talarico had a six-point lead (51% to 45%) over Republican Ken Paxton, according to the poll, conducted Sept. 21-Oct. 1.

Also in the poll, former U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown had a 3-point margin in Ohio over Sen. Jon Husted, who was appointed to fill the empty seat left when JD Vance became vice president.

In Kansas, where it has been more than 90 years since a Democrat was elected to the U.S. Senate, Methodist pastor Adam Hamilton is tied with Republican Sen. Roger Marshall, the poll



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found. Similarly, Democrats have not won a Senate race in 18 years in Iowa, where Democratic state Rep. Josh Turek trails Republican U.S. Rep. Ashley Hinson by 1 percentage point.

Here are the findings from the latest Times/Siena poll:

- **Alaska:** Peltola (D) 50%, Sullivan (R) 43%
- **Iowa:** Hinson (R) 48%, Turek (D) 47%
- **Kansas:** Hamilton (D) 45%, Marshall (R) 45%
- **Ohio:** Brown (D) 49%, Husted (R) 46%
- **Texas:** Talarico (D) 51%, Paxton (R) 45%

The poll also found that 57% of those surveyed across the five states strongly or somewhat disapproved of Trump’s job as president – just the latest sign of voter displeasure with the president’s performance.

More than one-fifth of likely voters (21%) said the economy was the most important issue in deciding their vote. Other important issues included inflation/cost of living (8%), character/competence of candidate (8%) and immigration (8%).

Recent polls have indicated Democrats are also competitive in five other states Trump won by double digits in 2024: Florida, Nebraska, Mississippi, South Carolina and Kentucky.

Contributing: Fernando Cervantes Jr., Terry Collins, and Sarah D. Wire, USA TODAY.

Former rep sentenced for Venezuela lobbying

Anthony Thompson
USA TODAY

Former GOP Rep. David Rivera was sentenced to 10 years in federal prison on Oct. 2 after a jury found him guilty of secretly lobbying U.S. officials on behalf of the Venezuelan government and laundering millions of dollars connected to the work.

Rivera, 61, was sentenced by U.S. District Judge Melissa Damian in federal court in Miami. A jury convicted him in May after a six-week trial.

The Republican represented South Florida in the U.S. House from 2011 to 2013. Prosecutors said Rivera worked on behalf of Venezuela’s government in 2017 without registering as a foreign agent, as required under the Foreign Agents Registration Act.

Rivera pleaded not guilty. His lawyers argued he was working to help Venezuela’s opposition remove then-President Nicolás Maduro from power, rather than advancing the interests of Maduro’s government.

According to the Justice Department, Rivera and co-defendant Esther Nuhfer obtained a \$50 million contract with a subsidiary of Venezuela’s state-owned oil company, Petróleos de Venezuela, or PDVSA.

Prosecutors said the pair used the contract to advance the Venezuelan regime’s interests in the United States without



Former U.S. Rep. David Rivera represented South Florida in the House from 2011 to 2013.

MARCO BELLO/REUTERS FILE

registering as foreign agents.

Rivera and Nuhfer lobbied U.S. officials, including then-Sen. Marco Rubio of Florida and Rep. Pete Sessions, R-Texas, and arranged meetings between U.S. policymakers and senior Venezuelan officials, including Maduro and then-Foreign Minister Delcy Rodríguez, now the country’s interim president.

Evidence presented at trial also showed Rivera and Nuhfer used coded language in text messages to describe their activities, according to the Justice Department.

Prosecutors said Rivera was paid \$20 million by the U.S. subsidiary of Venezuela’s state oil company.

The Justice Department said Rivera depos-

ited about \$1.5 million in proceeds from the contract into his Florida state congressional campaign account between March 2017 and August 2018. He also used proceeds for other purposes, according to prosecutors.

Nuhfer, 52, was convicted of conspiracy to violate FARA, violating FARA, conspiracy to commit money laundering and engaging in a transaction involving criminally derived property. She was previously sentenced to five years in federal prison.

Rubio testified during the trial about a 2017 meeting with Rivera, when Rubio was a U.S. senator.

Rubio said Rivera did not disclose that he had a contract with Citgo, the U.S. subsidiary of PDVSA, when Rivera met with him about Venezuela.

When a prosecutor asked Rubio how he would have reacted if he had known Rivera was working with Maduro’s government, Rubio said it “would have been shocking to me,” according to Reuters.

Rivera was charged in 2022 during the Biden administration. His lawyers also argued that the Trump administration has placed less emphasis on FARA cases.

Contributing: Reuters



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