

Friends of CRONA: Emily Rubin on the Oakland Teachers' Strike

Emily Rubin



I started teaching transitional kindergarten at Glenview Elementary in Oakland this year. The first year of teaching at a school is bonkers no matter where you are, but the Oakland teachers' strike made it a wild time to start.

There is something that feels really scary about not knowing if you're going to go on strike. There's a lot of uncertainty that makes people nervous. But as we got closer and closer to the strike, we started talking more about what a strike would look like and what plans we needed to put in place. Most of us were clear that this struggle wouldn't get anywhere if we didn't put our passion behind it. We are all deeply passionate about what we do. The most important part of the fight was remembering one thing: "What's your why?" We would ask ourselves, "Why am I here? Why am I doing this?" For us, it was for the kids and the future of our community. It was to take care of people. Once that clicked, it was full steam ahead.

We went on strike for seven days this February. The days were long — call time was at 5:45 a.m. and we went home at around 3:30 p.m., marching 10 or 11 miles every day. I felt like I was marching into battle with my

colleagues, and every subsequent day the strike continued, we came back feeling more inspired and more prepared.

The entire Oakland community felt electric and alive during our strike. There were community rallies daily. From the teachers, students and parents to our Oakland neighbors and community members, it really felt like everyone had our backs. It was really inspiring and empowering.

Any strike is hard work — but you're doing it for such a strong purpose. For me, it was for my students. I had a lot of my five-year-olds come join me on the picket line — it was pretty adorable. At nap time, sometimes they'll say, "No, we're on strike!" I think it taught everyone, including our students, a lot about our strength as a community.

Striking is something that you can't ever really understand until you're doing it. It's hard physically, mentally and emotionally. But it feels worth it and it's such a rare and incredible opportunity to be able to look back and say, "There I was. I made change." I've never bonded with people so quickly. I've never felt so passionate about the work I do. And I've never felt so supported in trying to make change. It was incredible. We saw that we have power to make the change we want, and that motivation and encouragement is what stuck with me.

My advice to the Nurses of CRONA is this: Remember why you're in this job. For most of us, I think it's for the purpose of helping a community and doing work that feels like you're giving back. But looking out for yourself is the only way you can take care of others. Take time to think about what you want to see in the future of your work, and ask yourself, "If I don't do anything, will that change come?". If you want to see change, you have to put in the work to make that happen, and you won't get anywhere if you're not banded together. Fighting for what you believe in is what unites us all.

There's a lot of fear about going on strike because there are so many unknowns, but the worst thing would be to let that fear get in the way. Change is never easy and starting a movement is never easy, but it's the only way to keep moving forward.

Oakland teachers stand strong with CRONA!