

What to know about France's high school protests

By Lynsey Chutel and Zane Irwin, *The New York Times*, pub. Oct 3rd, updated Oct 13th, 2026

Students angry about poor school conditions and teacher shortages in France staged fresh demonstrations on Tuesday, the latest turn in a weekslong protest movement that has heightened a sense of fiscal and social crisis in the country.

Marches and school blockades were held in cities around France, including Nantes, Lyon, 5 Strasbourg, Marseille and Paris. The education ministry said that about 200 of the country's roughly 3,700 high schools were closed on Tuesday, down from nearly 900 schools a week ago.

"High school students can, of course, continue to express themselves through the freedom to protest," Édouard Geffray, the education minister, told France Inter radio. 10 "However, my deepest hope is that everyone will be able to return to class with their teachers."

Several student organizations have vowed to continue protesting until their demands are met. Some were expected to join a separate day of demonstrations over the cost of living that is scheduled for Saturday, when French schools will start a two-week fall break.

15 Hundreds of people have been injured since the protests began last month amid escalating clashes with riot police. Thousands have been arrested, most of them minors, law enforcement officials said.

The protests erupted in a heated climate, as the government tries to pass a belt-tightening budget and as France approaches presidential elections next year. The French 20 government has called some of the students' demands legitimate but has condemned "urban violence" and accused the far-left party France Unbowed of stoking the demonstrations. The party has rejected the accusation.

Here's what to know:

Why are the students demonstrating?

25 Students are frustrated by crumbling infrastructure, overcrowded classrooms, overloaded schedules, a shortage of teachers and staff, and underfunded schools, according to the student union that is one of the movement's main organizers.

Some are also calling for the abolition of state-run admissions platforms for higher education and universities that they call unfairly selective.

30 "Classrooms are not ventilated, and we can barely open the windows," Issam Makhoulfi, 15, a student at Rosa Parks High School in Seine-St.-Denis, a working-class suburb of Paris that is a center of the protest movement, told The New York Times.

Unions and left-wing parties have seized on the protests as part of a wider expression of discontent as President Emmanuel Macron, who is term-limited, nears the end of his second 35 term in office.

"The public education system is in a catastrophic state after 10 years of Emmanuel Macron," Sophie Vénétitay, the leader of a teachers' union that has joined the students' protests, said on the sidelines of a recent march. "It is lacking everything."

Have the protests become violent?

40 Many of the demonstrations began peacefully but escalated as protesters fired mortar-

style fireworks and attacked schools and other infrastructure, resulting in millions of dollars of damage, officials said.

45 The French Education Ministry has asked schools to host opportunities for dialogue, so long as schools meet “essential security conditions.” Mr. Macron acknowledged on Monday that the students had legitimate concerns but said “time, consultation, discussion, and respect” were required to address the issues, as well as “calm” and “order.”

At least 24 schools have been ransacked or set on fire, Mr. Geffray, the education minister, told France 2 last week.

50 Rights groups, including Amnesty International, criticized the use of tear gas and stun grenades to disperse minors.

More than 6,500 people have been arrested, and more than 750 police officers, as well as roughly 300 students and staff members, have been injured in the unrest, according to French officials.

55 France has a long history of youth protests that sometimes have turned violent, including student-led protests in 1968 that nearly toppled the government and helped transform French society.

How have the authorities responded?

60 The French government has strongly condemned the violence and responded forcefully. Gérald Darmanin, France’s justice minister, said on Friday that he had directed prosecutors to pursue criminal charges where possible and to hold parents liable for damage.

But the government has also acknowledged some of the students’ grievances. It quickly scrapped plans to increase some higher education registration fees announced as part of the 2027 budget.

65 It has also vowed to quickly deploy 3,000 substitute teachers to high schools hit hardest by staffing shortages and announced plans to better include students in decision-making related to schools. The education ministry set up an anonymous national online survey for high schoolers to voice their concerns — and Mr. Geffray, the education minister, said on Tuesday that over 80,000 students had done so.

70 But student leaders have largely dismissed the government’s proposals, calling them insufficient fixes for longstanding structural problems in France’s school system.