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Over 100 Hamden High School students walk out in protest of ICE

By AVA HIGHLAND and CHLOE GRANT

"We are the future and we need to do something," Hamden High School sophomore Ned Foley said to a crowd of 100 students protesting U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Friday morning.

The clock hit 10 a.m. and the students walked out of school in protest. The students walked for 1.6 miles — cheering, chanting and signs in hand.

"Say it loud, say it clear, immigrants are welcome here," the students chanted.

By 10:41 a.m., they arrived at the steps of Hamden Memorial Town Hall.

Spearheaded by Foley and senior Charlotte Stover, and with only about a week of preparation, the walkout drew an unexpected turnout of empowered students ranging from first-years to seniors.

"It was amazing to see the amount of people, I was not expecting this many people," Foley said to The Chronicle. "But then again, there's no way for us to gauge the turnout, there's no expected turnout… But this is great, and it actually does give me hope that people do care."

Walking towards the front of the crowd, Stover was heart-warmed to see the number of people following behind her.

When word spread of the walk out, some students didn't believe it could make an impact.

"I heard a lot of kids saying that this wouldn't change anything, that just showing up wouldn't make a difference, but every single one of these kids believes in the same cause," sophomore Elijah Leite said to The Chronicle. "And when you have that many numbers, that's how change is created. You need to make noise, you need to get together, you need to spread the word."

While some had their doubts, those who showed up knew that what they were doing mattered.

"We're all here because we believe in the power of community," Leite said. "We believe that change can be made, and we'll be the ones to make it."

One of the driving factors in holding the walkout was to remind students that they have the power to make change and stand up against what they believe to be wrong.

"We just really wanted to make sure that students know that they can speak out, they can use their voices," Stover said to The Chronicle. "And it's so important, because every time I go to a protest, everyone is always saying, 'I'm so happy there's a young person here,' because we are the future."

Students emphasized the power of young people who are the future.

"When young people come out, especially, that's when the most change is made, because those are the new voters, and those are the future," junior Derrick Kerr said to The Chronicle.

Over 15 students stood atop the Town Hall stairs, sharing stories, leading chants and reminding everyone why they were there.

"You can kill a liberator, but not a liberation," first-year Jaya Smith-Tavaris chanted, as she shared stories of her family members protesting throughout the Civil Rights Movement.

Evoking a great deal of excitement and enthusiasm from the crowd, members of the walkout encouraged passersby to honk their horns in support of the cause, to which they received a great deal of — several Hamden residents joined the chants as well.

Students of Hamden High School were advised to use caution if they chose to attend Friday's walkout, with the potential presence of ICE.

After the ICE raid that occurred this past October at Optimo Car Wash, on Dixwell Ave., the Hamden community has been especially wary.

Hamden High students weren't the only people present. Members from the Citywide Youth Coalition (CWYD) and activists from Yale University were there in protest and to ensure safety while students walked from the school.

"I feel so blessed and incredible to have had this many people show up and show that this many people," sophomore and CWYD member Chloe Lawson told The Chronicle. "And I know there's a lot more that care and weren't able to make it, so the fact that we could have this many is truly such a blessing."

The CWYD's "aim is to strengthen young leaders and youth-serving staff personally and civically, with the belief that the New Haven area will undoubtedly benefit from an inclusive, united, and supported youth network whose voice will usher forth positive changes for all," according to their website.

Chanting alongside Lawson was her mom and CWYD Executive Director Ta'LannaMonique "T'Mo" Lawson-Dickerson. Lawson was one of the many students to speak out to the crowd.

"It was beautiful, I had a proud mom moment, tearing up a little bit on the side," Lawson-Dickerson said to The Chronicle. "But everything she said was true and straight from the heart."

As the last of the student speeches were made, junior history and education studies major at Yale, Sammy Albright, led a chant among walkout participants.

"Fuck ICE, shut it down, every city, every town," Albright chanted with the crowd.

Albright accompanied members of the CWYD in passing out flyers to attendees with details regarding how students can organize their own student walkouts and a QR code detailing upcoming events in the area.

While music played, the walkout concluded with tears, smiles and pride.

"Just because there's so much going on in the world and just because there's so much hopelessness, we shouldn't lose sight of the end goal," Kerr said.



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Hamden High School senior Charlotte Stover helps lead students through the walk out alongside other peers Friday, March 27.