

## Adult Ed Protest to Protect Classroom Instruction

Philip Leeman

Chapter Chair, Fremont Adult School

When was the last time in your Adult School teaching career that you've been surrounded by more than five hundred very vocal adult school students? Like me, probably never, especially since this unprecedented number of people was gathered at the Beaudry building to protest the unfair and cruel cuts being made by DACE to the classroom.

On Thursday, May 14, some 800 students backed up by their teachers turned out en masse to demonstrate support for their programs. This boisterous outpouring of students and teachers completely jammed the entire block of the Beaudry building's main entrance with enthusiastic chanting, a multitude of handmade signs, and a vibrant drum quartet that beat out an infectious rhythm. All my twenty students who made it to the protest from South LA agreed that in addition to the serious need to stop cuts to our classrooms, this demonstration was fun!

During the previous week, my students and I planned and prepared for the demonstration. We had a couple of ESL lessons focusing on maps and street directions, and specifically studied the best bus routes to get to the Beaudry building from South LA. We found that Bus 53 runs along Central Ave. near both my morning and afternoon classes at different sites, and then crosses through downtown to a bus stop on Beaudry, one block from LAUSD central headquarters. This bit of transportation luck made it possible for my lesser mobile students to attend, wheelchairs and all.

Our most important activity leading up to the protest was coming up with slogans and learning how to script them in large letters to make placards. Here are several that my students thought of:

- "Don't Cut My Education Because You Cut My Dreams"
- "We Need To Learn English! Don't Cut Adult Ed."
- "I Need My Adult Ed. I'm A Mom!"
- "Our Weapon To Fight For Our Kids Is Adult Ed!"
- "Adult Ed=Jobs"
- "The Community Needs Adult Ed"

I managed to take a lot of pictures that my students and I enjoyed looking at in class the following week, and should already be posted to our Adult Ed. facebook site. I also took some video that recorded the whistles, chanting, drumming and general good noise of a roused, yet peaceful protest. (The video itself, though, is not so easy to watch because I forgot to keep my hand from moving to the beat of the music.)

From the expressions and reactions of all those who participated in the protest, I would say that everyone got a nice strong dose of positive energy. But as many of us know, our battle to keep our Adult Ed classes going is likely to get tougher in the near future. Therefore, I've stored my students' protest signs in a safe place from where they can be quickly retrieved.