



NEWS

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For Immediate Release

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Pittsburgh Public Schools Responds to Teachers Union Decision to Strike Based on Lone Remaining Issue – Principals’ Ability to Make the Best Decisions for Students

After Hours of Negotiations, but the Parties Resolve All But One Issue, The PFT Refuses to Allow Principals to Assign Teachers to Classes to Maximize Student Achievement

District Asks Union to Submit to Arbitration to Keep Kids in School

PITTSBURGH PA – February 26, 2018 – According to the Council of the Great City Schools, Pittsburgh Public Schools is one of the only major urban school districts in the nation that doesn’t give principals authority to assign teacher schedules to best meet the needs of students, yet this remained the only unresolved issue that led The Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers to notify the District of its intention to strike March 2, 2018.

“We recognize the very significant disruption that a strike represents for our families, our District, and most importantly, our students,” said Superintendent Dr. Anthony Hamlet. “It is particularly disappointing, in light of the many long hours of negotiations and concessions that have been made in the months that we’ve been at the bargaining table, that such a disruption could happen, especially since we have come so far. There is only one issue on the bargaining table, and it is a simple one: this dispute is about getting the best teachers in front of the students who need them most -- period.”

The strike would become effective March 2, 2018. In order to encourage the matter to be settled with the least amount of strike days possible, the District immediately responded by requesting that the PFT agree to submit to its final best-offer immediately, pursuant to the provision provided in Act 88, which governs such disputes.

“Now that the union has called for a strike, they will be mandated to submit to final arbitration should they stay on strike for the maximum time permitted by law. We’re simply asking for the union to go through this process now, rather than later, to minimize disruption to children and families,” said District Solicitor Ira Weiss.

The decision impacts approximately 24,000 children ranging from PreK through 12th grade. The length of the strike will be determined by the Pennsylvania Department of Education to meet state requirements mandating 180 days of instruction for students between July 1 and June 15 each school year.

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The lone remaining issue at impasse in negotiations concerns the ability of principals to build their master schedule with the best interest of students at the forefront – through assigning teacher class schedules and teaching assignments after input from the teacher.

Currently, unlike most of other school districts, PPS principals do not have the final say over teacher class schedules and teaching assignments.

It is the District’s position that principals require this basic management tool if they are to be expected to improve student performance. Principals would seek input from teachers and the instructional cabinet at the school before making assignments, and the District is willing to put procedures in place to make sure the assignments are appropriate, and there is a process for appeal if they are not. A neutral third-party fact-finder appointed by the Pennsylvania Labor Relations Board agreed with the district’s stance on this issue.

"Principal assignment is a management prerogative that is consistent across school districts affiliated with both the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association. In a survey we conducted, Pittsburgh’s outdated practice was an outlier," said Michael Casserly, Executive Director of the Council of the Great City Schools, the nation’s primary coalition of large urban public school systems. "This is not about individual rights. It’s not about collective bargaining or union prerogatives. It’s about ensuring each student is being taught with the most effective teacher, which is exactly what the public should expect."

The PFT represents 2,400 teachers, 565 paraprofessionals and 20 technical-clerical employees. Its most recent contract expired in 2015, and an extension expired in June 2017.

District Partners with Citiparks to Provide Healthy Meals to PPS students During PFT Strike

Pittsburgh Public Schools Food Services will partner with Citiparks to ensure students have access to healthy meals during the teachers’ union strike. Throughout the duration off the strike, students can get a healthy breakfast, lunch, or snack at local recreation centers and locations across the city. For a complete listing of locations, as well as answers to Frequently Asked Questions related to childcare availability, enrichment activities for students, and general strike information visit www.pghschools.org/collectivebargaining.

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