



# NEWS

OFFICE OF PUBLIC INFORMATION

341 S. Bellefield Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15213

**For Immediate Release**

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## **District Provides Further Insight into Contract Talks; Superintendent Readies District to Prepare Families While Negotiations Continue**

*After failure to accept neutral third-party fact-finding report, PFT authorizes ability to strike within 48 hours of district notice*

PITTSBURGH, PA February 13, 2018 – The Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers has authorized the possibility of a strike to occur in the Pittsburgh Public Schools, an action that allows the PFT leadership to call a strike with 48 hours advanced notice to the District and is the latest development in ongoing negotiations between the union and the PPS Board and administration. An interim two-year agreement expired in June 2017. Negotiations continued through June 30, 2017. When no agreement was reached, the Pennsylvania Labor Relations Board appointed a neutral third-party fact finder, whose report, which sided with the District in the two main unresolved issues listed below, was released in October 2017 and is available online at <https://www.pghschools.org>.

“The neutral fact-finding report sided squarely with the District’s positions to put student instruction first. If this objective report was accepted by the PFT, we wouldn’t be in this situation,” said PPS District Solicitor Ira Weiss. “As someone who has guided several dozen school districts in negotiations, I want to ensure parents and stakeholders that Dr. Hamlet and the bargaining team have done everything in their power to be more than reasonable while holding the line on matters that directly affect student achievement.”

The District recognizes that the possibility of a strike represents a significant disruption for our students and their families and has prepared answers to some of the most frequently asked questions as well as continuous updates on negotiations on its website <https://www.pghschools.org/collectivebargaining>.

“We will continue to work diligently with PFT leadership toward a resolution that reflects our deep respect for our outstanding teachers while also prioritizing our mission of providing the highest quality education possible for every student,” said Superintendent Dr. Anthony Hamlet. “The supports we have implemented to help our teachers and school leaders are designed to further their professional development so we can better meet our students’ needs. Real change results from difficult work. If it were easy, it would have happened by now. This is the commitment I made when I accepted this position, and it is one I intend to see through to fruition.”

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In less than two years, Dr. Hamlet has made several strides to prioritize the needs of students including:

- Launching the five-year strategic plan Expect Great Things to guide the future of PPS which sets forth four desired long-term outcomes for student achievement, with four strategic themes and 19 initiatives to achieve those results;
- Designating five Community Schools in year one of the phased program, combining traditional approaches with community-based resources in a smarter way;
- Adopting new curriculum in PreK-5 English Language Arts curriculum, supplemental Science resources, along with supporting technology to align curriculum to the PA Core Standards; and
- Implementing a full-court press in PSAT/SAT test preparation, with funding of all exams by the school district, and administration of the exams during school hours to increase student access.

From the outset of negotiations, PPS has been clear: the needs of our students must be top of mind. Everything else, while important, is secondary. Toward that end, two unresolved issues are responsible for the bulk of the impasse. Those include:

- **Principals' autonomy.** PPS holds principals accountable for the progress they're making with their students. To do that, they need to have the power to assign teachers in a way that moves student achievement levels within their building. Currently, PPS is one of the only urban school districts in the nation that allows teachers to override the principal on class schedules and teaching assignments. This is an outdated practice that prioritizes the wishes of adults above the needs of the students. It is not sustainable for a District that seeks to make a palpable, measurable improvement in student outcomes. Furthermore, the fact-finder agreed with the District's stance on this fundamental managerial prerogative, yet the union remains squarely opposed.
- **Teacher churn.** A loophole in the human resources process is creating far too much teacher turnover in our most challenged schools. Today, if a teacher is hired after August 1, the personnel system considers the job vacant and posts the job. In the 2016-17 school year, nearly 100 staff moved as a result. In schools where need is highest – with poverty rates as high as 90% -- the staff turnover is nearly 30%. This loophole means our most vulnerable children are repeatedly exposed to a revolving door of teachers.

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Unlike typical contract disputes, teacher compensation and benefits are not the primary sticking points. The District and PFT have largely agreed on the framework for salary and benefits. Under Dr. Hamlet’s tenure, teachers now have more time for job-embedded professional development, a multi-tiered system of support that includes tools to improve school culture, and an updated data system so teachers can access student information quickly.

“We fully recognize the hardship that a strike poses to our families and to the city that we call home. That is why the District continues to work so hard to reach a resolution that will be acceptable to all parties. Nonetheless, a strike vote is out of our hands – it is the decision of the PFT and its membership. Ultimately, the ongoing negotiations between the PFT and the District will arrive at a resolution. When they do, I am confident that we will move forward together – teachers, administrators, parents, and community leaders – to work toward our common goal of the best possible education for our students. There is no greater opportunity, and no greater responsibility, than preparing our children for the future that we will leave for them. It is my sincerest wish that whatever our differences may be, we embrace that responsibility together, always keeping the best interest of our students the top priority.”

A strike vote requires 48 hours’ notice. The length of a strike would be determined by the Pennsylvania Department of Education based on the district’s ability to meet the requirement of a minimum of 180 days of instruction between July 1 and June 15 of this school year.

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