

“We are concerned with class sizes and the health and safety of our students”

Teachers and support staff in Streetsboro, Ohio file 10-day strike notice

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After nearly a year of contract negotiations, teachers and support staff in Streetsboro, Ohio voted to file a 10-day strike notice with plans to strike on November 18 unless a labor contract deal is reached.

Streetsboro teachers have been working under a contract that expired in June 2019. The Streetsboro Education Association (SEA) union began negotiations for a new contract in November 2019 and the Streetsboro Support Staff Personnel Association (SSSPA) union began in January 2020.

The SEA, SSPA and the district’s Board of Education have filed unfair labor practice charges against one another with the State Employment Relations Board. While neither party has released a full statement on the charges, it appears that the Board of Education filed these charges after both unions released information in a press release that was not yet public.

The SEA and SSPA are filing unfair labor charges due to the significant delay in contract negotiations as well as reports that members of the Board of Education have refused to meet in-person for contract negotiations, citing COVID-19 safety concerns while teachers and staff have been forced to carry out in person schooling since August.

Board President Kevin Grimm reported that they have met a collective 17 times with both unions. In a recent press release Superintendent Mike Daulbaugh stated, “I am extremely disappointed that the [teachers and support staff unions] have decided to burden the community with a strike, rather than resolve this contract at the bargaining table.” Daulbaugh has also threatened that in the event of a strike students would

be moved to remote learning without saying who would teach them.

There are 278 teachers and support staff in the two unions. The Streetsboro City School district has 2,169 students in grades pre-K, K-12. Streetsboro is located in Portage County, about 26 miles from Cleveland. Streetsboro district schools opened in August with limited safety measures. Students were able to choose in-person or remote learning for the semester and teachers were required to teach from school five days a week.

With the onset of the pandemic, safety for students and staff became many educators’ top concern. Teachers and support staff in Streetsboro report they were not consulted by the superintendent in the formulation of the district return-to-school plan developed over the summer.

At an October 8 school board meeting, teachers spoke on the conditions in the schools during COVID-19 as well as the declining salaries, funding and classroom conditions over the last decade.

Linda, a teacher who has worked in the Streetsboro schools for 25 years, said, “When the doors opened in August and many staff were afraid for their safety, we returned. And when our students entered the doors scared and unsure of what would happen next, we were there. ... This is more than negotiations over money. We are concerned with class sizes, health and safety of our students and staff and our working conditions as they directly impact the learning conditions of our children.”

High school English teacher, Molly, armed herself

with statistics of wage cuts in the past decade. “Teachers and staff continue to go above and beyond and we have not received compensation for that labor. Over the last 11 years, teachers have taken zero percent raises in six of those years. Two years in that span we took a 1 percent raise. Another two years we took a 1.75 percent raise. One year we took a 2 percent raise.”

Molly also noted that the inflation rate average over those 11 years was 1.9 percent and health insurance costs increased significantly, cancelling out any meager raise. She added, “This means we haven’t been compensated at all.”

Rhonda, a fourth-grade teacher for the past 28 years, spoke to the fact that COVID-19 did not create these conditions but exacerbated them. “Class size has always been an issue. Special ed teachers are now directed to work their regular caseloads as well as servicing remote students. There is no additional time or pay for this. Our working conditions, which are the students’ learning conditions, aren’t being addressed. There isn’t anything we have asked for in this contract that isn’t already negatively impacting our students.”

The statements by teachers reflect widespread anger over deteriorating conditions in the schools, which are a product of the continued bipartisan attacks on public education. For decades, teachers unions across the country have pushed through concessions contracts and more recently have allowed schools across the country to reopen amidst the deadly COVID-19 pandemic, while blocking any serious and unified struggle by educators.

According to the most recent Ohio Department of Health COVID-19 update, the state is reaching record cases and hospitalizations. November 4 to 5 saw 4,961 daily cases, a new record for the state. Hospitalizations—which are a more reliable metric for the state of community transmissions—were also up to 2,075 at the time of the press release, a 55 percent increase from two weeks prior to the release. Of the hospitalized patients, the Ohio Department of Health reports 541 were in the intensive care unit, breaking the previous record from April of 533 patients.

Fifty-six of Ohio’s 88 counties are in Red Level 3—including Portage country—indicating there is a high risk of exposure and spread. This number is expected to rise.

Hospitalization rates for COVID-19 are rising quickly

across the US. There are currently 55,817 hospitalized patients in the US, up from a low of 28,608 on September 20. The previous peaks in hospitalization in April and July reached close to 60,000. The CDC is expecting the daily rate of hospitalizations to climb two to 10 times in the next three to four weeks from the current daily rate of 1,200 per day to 2,600–13,000 per day.

There is no doubt that the reopening of schools across the country has contributed to the current surge of cases and hospitalizations. It has been comprehensively documented that schools and daycare centers act as breeding grounds for the virus. In late October, researchers from the University of Edinburgh demonstrated that opening up schools has been accompanied by a 24 percent increase in the transmission of infections within a month. The study analyzed data from 131 countries and was published in the *Lancet Infectious Diseases* journal.

Teachers and other school workers across the country are speaking out against the unsafe drive to reopen schools that forces students and teachers to put their lives on the line. Streetsboro teachers should take their struggle outside of the confines of the union and join the nationally coordinated Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committees where they can base their demands not on what the corporations and politicians claim is affordable, but what is required to keep students and educators safe.



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