

Euclid Teachers Association files 10-day strike notice in Cleveland, Ohio suburb

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On January 21, the Euclid Teachers Association (ETA), which negotiates on behalf of roughly 420 teaching staff in the Cleveland, Ohio suburb, filed a 10-day strike notice with the Euclid Board of Education. The ETA will now have to hold a membership vote to approve strike action.

The teachers have been working without a contract since the school year started. The ETA and board began negotiations on the contract last spring, with the most recent round of negotiations taking place the day before the strike notice was filed. This is the second time the union has issued a strike notice in the last three months.

The ETA says the main sticking point in negotiations is the board's demand that administrators be able to reassign teachers to other classes mid-school year. "The Board demands that administrators have the power to remove teachers from their classrooms and reassign them at any point in the school year to any classroom of the Board's choosing," the union said in a recent statement. These changes in classes "would destroy the teacher-student relationship which is an important foundation for learning," the statement said.

The Euclid Board of Education in recent statements have confirmed that negotiations reached an impasse due to the board's demand. The board has also claimed they are offering "one of the biggest salary increases among any school district in Ohio" in response to the current economic instability during the pandemic.

The board has also claimed that if a strike takes place, classes "must and will continue." It is currently unclear who will be teaching the roughly 4,700 students in the event of a strike.

The next round of negotiations between the board and ETA is scheduled to take place on January 26.

While the ETA has claimed that in the event of a strike teachers would be out until a contract is reached,

it is entirely possible a strike will be averted by the board and the union.

Throughout the negotiations, ETA officials have stated that a strike action is a last resort. In November, the union went so far as to file a 10-day strike notice and held a strike authorization vote. Despite educators voting in favor of the strike, the ETA did not have teachers walk off the job and instead opted to call limited protests.

The contract dispute at Euclid City Schools is representative of the larger crisis of public education in Ohio and across the US. Administrators hope to continue the decades-long attack on conditions for teachers but are curbed out of fear that their actions could further exacerbate a teacher shortage during the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, the official teachers unions—the National Education Association (NEA) and American Federation of Teachers (AFT) hope to dissipate mass anger among educators and other school workers and avoid a rebellion against the unsafe conditions in schools.

The board and ETA have focused the discussion on the ability of administrators to reassign teachers to different classrooms as it regards its impact on academic success. Despite multiple months of negotiations overlapping with the spread of the Omicron variant, which has resulted in numerous hospitalizations and deaths of children in the US, neither side has taken issue with the danger in-person learning poses to the students and teachers.

The spread of COVID-19 among teachers had a direct impact on the district. Both Euclid Middle School and Shoreview Elementary School had to shift to remote learning in early December due to the number of school employees calling in sick. A number of other school districts in northeast Ohio, including Akron Public

Schools and Lakewood City Schools reported large numbers of teachers, custodians and bus drivers calling in sick.

Several Euclid elementary and middle schools had previously switched to remote learning in September because of a COVID-19 related shortage of bus drivers.

The developments at the Euclid school district are by no means unique. Since the start of the pandemic, there have been teacher strikes in Gahanna, Ohio; Scranton, Pennsylvania; and Chicago, Illinois. In every case, union officials attempted to prevent these strikes or end them as quickly as possible and block a nationwide movement to demand the closure of unsafe schools. Both the AFT and NEA, with which the ETA is affiliated, have fully backed the unsafe reopening of schools.

The AFT and NEA's support for the Biden administration's reopening of schools has been in sharp contrast to the position of numerous rank-and-file teachers and students. Over the last few weeks, students have organized walkouts in California, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, Maryland, New York, Texas and Utah. In virtually every case, students are demanding stricter COVID-19 safety measures, including N95 masks and regular COVID-19 testing.

Any fight by teachers to address the pandemic's impact in schools requires breaking out of the narrow confines imposed by the unions, and the broadest unity between teachers, students and larger sections of the working class. Euclid teachers who are interested in expanding their struggle should join the Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee as the first step in building a committee in their district.



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