

Sacramento teachers' strike called off

Our reporters
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Late Sunday night the Sacramento City Teachers Association (SCTA) and Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 1021 announced an end to the eight-day strike of teachers and school employees, having reached tentative agreements with pay raises far below the rate of inflation and without even waiting until teachers voted on the contract.

The *World Socialist Web Site* rejects the back-to-school order. Teachers and support staff have a right to know what is in the contract and to vote on the deal before they return to work!

At 8:45 p.m. PDT Sunday night, the Sacramento City Unified School District posted a press release statement announcing the district had reached agreements with the SCTA and SEIU. Teachers, school employees and students were all expected to report to schools the next morning. Students from multiple schools reported that substitutes were much more present than usual on Monday morning, an indication that many teachers refused to return to work. The WSWS also received a report that a group of school bus drivers conducted an unauthorized sickout Monday.

In blatant anti-democratic fashion, the unions have called off the strike well before members have had a chance to view and vote on the tentative agreements and are attempting to rush through a vote. As of this writing, teachers and school employees have yet to be sent the full details of their contracts and are expected to vote on it before Thursday's school board meeting.

The highlights from the agreements shared by the district in its press release meet none of the demands for better working conditions. Significantly, teachers and school employees, who are demanding a living wage, are being asked to take a pay cut given the rate of inflation and rising cost of living.

Teachers and school employees have been offered a one-year contract for the 2022-2023 school year with a 4 percent raise plus three one-time payments to account for the past three school years worked without a contract. It must be noted that these bonuses are based on employment in those years and the salary schedule, which means that some new employees will not qualify for bonuses, and stipends will vary in amount.

Entry-level pay for a new teacher is \$47,000 in the district, and the average teacher is paid a salary of \$83,000. Taking into account the eight days of lost wages from the strike, teachers and school workers will be given a one-time taxable stipend in

the range of \$2,000 to \$3,000 in addition to a monthly raise of just \$157 to \$334 depending on seniority.

According to a recent report from Bloomberg Economics, the rising cost of living will amount to an increase of \$5,200 more a year, or \$433 per month, in expenses for the average US household. Inflation has risen 11 percent since the last SCTA contract ended in 2019, and the proposals for pay raises in these agreements are an open betrayal and accept austerity.

The SCTA, SEIU, as well as local and state Democratic politicians have hailed this tentative agreement as a significant victory. Sacramento City Council member and Democratic Socialists of America supporter Katie Valenzuela issued her support on twitter Monday calling the tentative agreements "excellent resolutions."

Teachers and support staff must reject both sellout deals, which meet none of the demands put forward for a living wage, adequate health care, full COVID-19 safety protections and the means to address the severe staffing crisis in the district.

Reporters with the *World Socialist Web Site* spoke with students, teachers and school employees in the district and workers in the region who called for workers to back the striking Sacramento teachers and support staff and raised concerns about the impact of the rising cost of living.

A Sacramento teacher, who wished to remain anonymous, expressed opposition to the union's attempt to call off the strike, saying, "Although I'm happy to be going back to work with my children in my class, it's a bit disheartening that we as staff were not given all the details before we heard schools were open. Don't get me wrong. I love my job, but we were on that line daily and didn't even get that respect from the union."

Stephanie, a student at C.K. McClatchy High School in northwest Sacramento, voiced her support for the striking teachers and support staff, telling the WSWS, "I fully support them in what they are doing because I know they worked very hard to where they are right now, and I do believe that they deserve more attention and support from the district. We have all heard that the district leader [Superintendent Jorge Aguilar] is making more money than Governor Gavin Newsom, which I find hard to believe and should not be okay right now. Our teachers are the best, and they do their best for us. It's incredible to see that things like this are still happening in 2022; one would expect that things would get better during these times."

Reacting to the minimal pay raise offered to teachers and support staff which will amount to a pay cut given the cost of inflation, Stephanie responded, “I think in general right now with inflation, nobody is making enough money to even live on. \$30,000 is the average amount someone would get with a \$15 or \$14 pay, which would be low-key impossible right now. If you don’t own a house and you are paying rent, you’re going to struggle with your bills. And especially with gas prices, and the cheaper prices for food has to be fast food, which is very unhealthy, and your life span will most likely decrease and your health will deteriorate as well. If you want to live a good life, you have to have good pay. Good pay is hard to find right now, and we’re all going to struggle, that’s a fact right now.”

Inayah, a SCUSD high school senior, also gave her support for the strike and mentioned many students were not in attendance today given the short notice for a return to school. “There were probably only 10-15 students in my classes today. There are usually 30 kids per classroom. This is a big school, around 2,800 kids.” This would imply that many teachers did not return to school yesterday.

Responding to the recent war budget proposed by the Biden administration which included a record \$813 billion for the military, Inayah said, “I think that’s stupid, honestly. We need money in the schools for the students and teachers. Teachers try their hardest every day to give us our education and for them not to be paid equally is just unfair and not right.”

Inayah also described the rapid spread of the coronavirus at her school at the beginning of the year. COVID-19 safety protections have been a major concern of teachers and school workers in the district.

Inayah said, “At one point I was getting at least five emails per day about a kid who had COVID in one of my classes. I actually remember being in my 2nd period class, and there were two students who got the email that they had tested positive for COVID, but they were in the classroom. And that’s because once you took the COVID test at school, they would send you back to class. After that incident I remember they had students wait until they got their results. But I remember I caught COVID right after that happened in my classroom. It was bad. There were a lot of kids that were getting COVID at the beginning of the year.”

She also spoke about the impact of the rise in cost of living on her family. “Everything is going up, food, gas—it’s \$6 for gas! I wouldn’t be surprised if it goes up to \$7, especially with what’s happening with the war with Russia and Ukraine.”

She also described the difficulties that her mother, a recently retired state employee, faces with budgeting expenses. “It’s definitely a problem. My mom owns her house, so she pays her mortgage, and everything has gone up, she’s had to budget and cut some things. With gas prices so high we have been struggling how to best use the car. \$65 does not give even half a tank. It takes over \$100 for my mom to fill up her tank.

Especially with the way people are paid, which many are paid minimum wage, it’s really hard.”

Simon and Jose, who are high school students in the district, expressed their support to their teachers. Simon said, “Honestly it’s the moral and right thing for them to get paid more because it’s for living, and the only thing they are trying to do is to help students be successful.” Jose also said, “We support them in getting higher pay because they help us in school and do more than they should be.”

Severe staffing shortages have been a major concern for educators and staff in the district. Simon described what it has been like without adequate staffing in his school. He said, “At the beginning of the year students had to go to the cafeteria one to three times a day. It would depend on the number of teachers out, but anywhere from three to four classes, maybe more would be in the cafeteria at once. It’s not great for the school system because we should be learning every day, not just sitting. It’s just babysitting.

“The situation is bad in general [in the district]. I understand the superintendent gets paid a lot more than the teachers. ... At the same time, you should have empathy and think about other workers because they work to earn money and to live. Poverty is a huge problem. If there are billionaires in this country and there is poverty, that doesn’t make sense,” he said.

Teachers have a right to view the contract details and to have ample time before voting on a return to work! They can win their demands if they organize rank-and-file committees to share information among themselves, link Sacramento teachers with teachers across the region and the country to harness the power of the entire working class and reach out to workers in other industries to explain their strike and win public support.

Sacramento teachers interested in joining a rank-and-file strike committee should contact us today.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact