

Vote “No” on the OEA’s tentative agreement! Fight for what Oakland educators and students need!

Oakland Educators Rank-and-File Committee

17 May 2023

The tentative agreement (TA) released just after 3am Monday morning by the Oakland Education Association (OEA) leadership is a complete betrayal of our seven-day strike and must be voted down. The Oakland Educators Rank-and-File Committee, which is independent of the OEA-CTA bureaucracy, calls for a “No” vote on the agreement and for the broadest expansion of our strike among educators and all workers throughout the Bay Area, across the US and internationally.

The TA throws out the basic demands that rank-and-file educators have fought for and lays the groundwork for further school closures, layoffs and budget cuts across Oakland Unified School District (OUSD). Despite the union’s lie that the TA is a “historic victory” the truth is much more grim:

- The 15 percent pay raise keeps Oakland educators among the lowest-paid in the Bay Area. Taking inflation into account, real pay for Oakland teachers dropped over the last contract by 12 percent, and the immediate 10 percent raise and additional changes in the salary schedule barely bring teachers back to 2016 in real wages.

- Starting salaries have not changed and the district’s atrocious 20 percent annual attrition rate will continue, meaning that collapsed salary schedules will not increase most educators’ earnings.

- Regarding school closures, the TA explicitly states that it “in no way abrogates the ability or authority of OUSD to close or merge schools.”

- The “Common Good” agreements involve nothing more than the formation of joint union-district committees, which will serve as bureaucratic agencies for the union and district to oversee further austerity in our schools.

- Staffing increases are an insult. The TA provides only two additional nurse positions while the nurse caseload

has an unenforceable “soft cap” of 1,350 students. It also provides only four more librarians, under conditions in which the district announced large layoffs of support staff in March, including over a dozen early language literacy tutors.

- There are no guarantees of future job security, under conditions in which OUSD is planning savage budget cuts as one-time pandemic funding dries up next year.

- There is no reference to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic which, despite the propaganda of the capitalist politicians and media, continues to infect, debilitate and kill masses of people globally each day. The TA contains no provisions that all classrooms be provided with adequate ventilation to stop the spread of airborne viruses like COVID-19.

In violation of the basic democratic rights of striking educators, the OEA disbanded pickets upon releasing the TA, without even announcing when a vote of the membership would take place. They proclaimed Monday a “transition day,” before teachers and students were told to return to school on Tuesday.

The capitulation of the OEA leadership—which repeats at a higher stage of the global class struggle their betrayal of our 2019 strike—is not the product of the subjective spinelessness of the union leaders. Rather, it is an expression of their integration with the Democratic Party which controls the entire political system in Oakland and California. The OEA’s parent unions, the California Teachers Association (CTA) and National Education Association (NEA), are among the largest donors to the Democrats.

The crisis in public education in Oakland is part of a national and indeed international crisis, which has been profoundly deepened by three years of the COVID-19 pandemic and one year of the war in Ukraine. As a result

of the cutoff of one-time pandemic funds, OUSD faces a \$79 million budget deficit next year and the school board is planning mass layoffs and school closures.

The same process is unfolding in districts across the country, including Detroit, New York, and Sweetwater, as both the Democrats and Republicans aim to use the budget crisis to fundamentally restructure public education.

The OEA and other teachers' unions are not capitulating to the Democrats, but rather enforcing their austerity agenda in the working class. OEA President Ismael Armendariz exemplifies this process, as he campaigned for the current Democratic school board president, county superintendent, and state superintendent even as these figures slash funding and demand layoffs and school closures. In collusion with our class enemies, Armendariz seeks to ram through this sellout TA before our strike breaks out of their control.

While Democrats and Republicans across the country claim there is no money for education, the Biden administration is demanding a \$1 trillion military budget to push for war with Russia and China. When Silicon Valley Bank collapsed in March, the White House wasted no time to pledge "whatever is needed" to protect venture capitalists, while teachers and students are expected to deal with rats and mold in overcrowded classrooms. California, the richest state in the richest country in the world, refuses to fund such a basic right as education.

The role of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) must also be stressed, as Armendariz and other OEA leaders are affiliated with this faction of the Democratic Party. Over the past year, the DSA leadership played the critical role of supporting the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine and suppressing the class struggle in the US. Their conception of "building rank-and-file power" is a smoke screen to provide cover for their betrayals of workers' struggles, as their sellout TA in Oakland proves once again.

In calling for a "No" vote on the TA, the Oakland Educators Rank-and-File Committee aims to rally workers across the region in the fight to defend public education. Our demands are not based on what the school board says they can afford with the starvation budget set by Sacramento and Washington, but on what teachers need to guarantee every student's social right to a high quality public education. These include:

- **For an immediate 50 percent raise!** All educators, no matter where they stand on the salary schedule, must be able to afford housing and living costs in the Bay Area,

one of the most expensive regions of the world.

- **For a massive increase in staffing!** School staff, from janitors to psychologists to counselors, are essential for a safe and effective education. The March layoffs must be reversed, and large numbers of new staff hired to ensure that every school has a nurse and every student has access to the support they need.

- **Stop all school closures and expand funding!** School closures are immensely disruptive to students and families, and drive students and educators out of the district. Instead of cuts, schools need a significant increase in funding to adequately serve students.

- **Every student deserves a safe and modern classroom!** As COVID-19 continues to wreak havoc, teachers also confront sewage leaks, vermin infestations and insufficient ventilation. In order to combat the ongoing pandemic, air filtration and far UV technology must be deployed to minimize the spread of infectious diseases.

These demands, so basic and essential to reversing the decades-long assault on public education, require a political fight in unity with workers throughout the world. Our struggle is part of a global upsurge of the working class against war and austerity, from France, the UK and across Europe, to Canada, Bolivia, South Africa, India, Australia and internationally.

To win the conditions teachers and students have a right to, we must reject austerity budgets, break out of the union-imposed straitjacket of separating us district-by-district, and build towards a statewide and nationwide fight in defense of public education.

We formed the Oakland Educators Rank-and-File Committee to fight for a "No" vote on this sellout agreement and organize teachers, staff, parents and students independently of the union and both big business parties to fight for the social right to public education. Fill out the form below to join us in this fight today.



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