

Teamsters announce last-minute agreement for 17,000 First Student school bus drivers

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On March 31, the Teamsters announced a tentative agreement (TA) with First Student covering more than 17,000 school bus drivers, thereby preventing a nationwide strike that had been scheduled to begin on April 1.

The union issued a statement praising a new “national foundation for economics” while withholding the full text of the agreement, leaving rank-and-file members to wonder what exactly had been agreed upon.

The Teamsters’ press release claims the deal will deliver “stronger retirement benefits, improved access to healthcare benefits, and robust contractual protections for all members,” and asserts these national minimums will “boost bargaining on important issues at the local level.”

The refusal to release concrete details is a typical sign that the deal is worse than the bureaucrats let on. If it was a major victory, they would be shouting the details from the rooftops.

This was the second strike the Teamsters blocked in two days. On March 30, the bureaucracy announced a new deal to block a strike by 6,000 DHL Express workers.

The formulation that a national minima will set the floor while leaving critical details to local collective bargaining agreements (CBAs), is one mechanism through which the Teamsters are attempting to break up workers’ unity.

Similar methods are being used by the United Steelworkers, which announced a national pattern bargaining framework for oil refinery workers this year, leaving actual contracts to be worked out from one local to the next. It is being used to isolate workers at the BP refinery in Whiting, Indiana, where management has locked workers out.

The drivers’ demands were straightforward and

urgent: guaranteed minimum hours, enforceable paid sick leave and additional paid holidays; overtime calculated fairly, guarantees against unpaid gaps between routes that are contractually binding; and pensions. Workers also pushed back against AI cameras and other surveillance tools that many see as a way to discipline and control drivers.

The diversion of key issues to local CBAs means drivers from chronically underfunded urban and rural districts will inevitably be pressured to accept worse terms than at other districts.

Budget crises are proliferating across the country.

In California, districts have warned of layoffs affecting thousands of classified employees, including bus drivers. In San Diego, more than 200 positions have already been cut, with routes consolidated and workloads increased. In San Francisco, school closures are being advanced as a cost-cutting measure due to funding shortfalls. In North Carolina, the state has yet to pass a budget for the 2025–2026 school year, leaving teachers and staff without raises amid rising costs.

On social media, drivers responded with distrust to the announcement. “Do we get to keep our guaranteed hours???” one wrote. “Two weeks ago, our union walked out of negotiations after First Student proposed doing away with the guarantee. All of a sudden after one day of negotiations, they have a tentative agreement. I want an answer to my question—Getting rid of the guarantee is a major deal breaker for me!”

Another driver asked, “So nothing about the AI cameras? Nothing about paid sick days? Nothing about more paid holidays? What about OT?”

When asked for specifics, a union official replied that members “will know prior to when you vote.” This would keep workers in the dark about key details until right before the vote, allowing the bureaucracy to

control the narrative.

Drivers should insist that the full text of the TA must be published immediately and distributed to every member. There must be a meaningful review period and open, democratic meetings in every depot and local to debate the terms. Any ratification vote must follow such democratic discussion.

More fundamentally, core conditions must be secured in binding national language. Guaranteed hours, overtime standards, paid sick leave and holidays, and protections against surveillance must not be left to local negotiation.

But legal language and demands are not enough. The only reliable safeguard against bureaucratic betrayals is organization from below. Drivers must build rank-and-file committees in every terminal that are: elected, recallable and accountable to the membership.

These committees must be empowered to coordinate strikes, document abuses, and link with drivers in other districts and internationally. Only by taking the initiative out of the hands of the Teamsters bureaucracy can workers defend their interests.



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