

# Still no deal for teachers at Portland Public Schools

By **DON McINTOSH**  
Associate Editor

After marathon mediated bargaining sessions Nov. 5 and 6, Portland Association of Teachers (PAT) and Portland Public Schools (PPS) weren't demonstrably closer to a deal. The two sides are undertaking mediator-assisted "shuttle diplomacy" because PPS refused to continue normal face-to-face bargaining after Oct. 9.

Day 1 of mediation lasted 15 hours, and Day 2 was almost 12. In that time, PPS improved its cost-of-living wage increase offer, but also spent time introducing what PAT President Gwen Sullivan called "frivolous" proposals, like wording changes. For example, where the contract gives the union the right to post materials in the workplace, PPS wants to change "teacher bulletin board" to "designated bulletin board."

Teachers aren't going to go on strike over what to call a bulletin board, but they may strike if the district moves to unilaterally impose its overall offer. In particular, teachers object to a PPS proposal to eliminate a contract clause that limits work load and class size. Since bargaining began in April, teachers have pushed the district to address over-

crowded classes, but the district said legally it doesn't have to discuss that, and therefore it won't. In mediation, the district offered a new plan: It still wants to eliminate the limit on workload, but it proposes to form a committee with representatives of both sides to develop a definition of workload — a "collaborative workgroup" that "would examine all of the elements of workload including class size to make proposals that would best meet student needs."

Sullivan says the two sides already had a collaborative work group. The district ignored its recommendations when it imposed a high school schedule that added to teacher workload.

Another key sticking point for teachers is the district's insistence that teachers bear all the economic risk of health insurance increases. PPS wants to cap its premium contribution and have teachers paying 100 percent of the increase over that amount. Currently teachers pay 7 percent of whatever the premium is for family coverage offered by the district. PPS offered no change to its health care proposal in mediation.

On the other hand, the district did improve its pay offer. Previously, it proposed 1 percent annual increases for

four years. Because those cost-of-living increases wouldn't keep up with the cost of living, the union called it a "takeback." Now the district is offering a 2 percent increase delayed to Dec. 16, 2013, followed by 1.5 percent increases July 1, 2014, and July 1, 2015. The Portland-area cost of living has risen 7.16 percent since teachers had their last cost-of-living increase July 1, 2010. PAT is proposing a two-year contract with raises of 5.8 and 3.75 percent.

The district, meanwhile, is also proposing to eliminate pay ladders that reward incremental progress toward further training. Teachers currently bump up to a higher pay ladder each time they earn an additional 15 postgraduate credits, giving them a one-time pay boost of about 4.5 percent when they do so. Under the district's proposal, teachers currently in those pay ladders could continue to climb in them until they top out after 12 years with the district, but in the future, teachers would no longer bump up to a higher ladder when they earn 15 and 30 credits. That's a big problem for younger and newer teachers, Sullivan said, because it removes an incentive for them to continue their education and get better at

their craft.

PPS bargainers broke off mediation just before a closed-to-the-public executive session of the Portland Public Schools board.

"PPS continued to make meaningful proposals in order to reach a negotiated settlement that is in the best interests of Portland's students," said PPS' Chief Human Resources Officer Sean Murray in a midnight press release. Neither Murray, nor the district's \$15,000-a-month consultant Yvonne Deckert, nor PPS superintendent Carole Smith ever appeared at the PPS bargaining table during five months of direct negotiation; instead bargaining was led by Labor Relations Director Brock Logan. During mediation, the three have been present. But they declined a suggestion by the mediator to meet face-to-face at the beginning.

The mediator's schedule was full for the rest of November, but she said was available Dec. 2-5. PAT said it could meet any or all of those days. PPS agreed to further mediation Dec. 5.

Sullivan said she's pleased district leaders didn't declare impasse after the latest mediation, though they could still declare impasse prior to the next one. If

the district does declare impasse, both sides would have seven days to submit a final offer, followed by a 30-day cooling off period. At that point, the district could unilaterally implement its offer over teachers' objections with five days notice, and the union could strike with 10 days notice.

"Teachers are saying, 'I don't want to strike, but it looks like we might have to,'" Sullivan said. "It's gonna be up to them [the district]."

"As they continue this aggressive stance, it only unites us," Sullivan said.

On Nov. 3, teachers hand-delivered to board members and the superintendent copies of a petition; Sullivan says it was signed by about 95 percent of PAT members.

"Do not rush to call impasse," the petition urged. "Calling for impasse will force educators to choose between two unacceptable choices: having a contract imposed on us or a strike. We are not seeking a strike. However, the proposals you have put forth are unacceptable to us. It is for this reason that we implore you to reconsider your aggressive strategy. If you don't want a strike to be on the table, then stay at the table."

## TRUST AND EXPERIENCE MAKE A STRONG UNION.

Administering labor management funds is a complex process. At Union Bank<sup>®</sup>, we've made it more efficient for Taft-Hartley clients for over 50 years.

We offer specialized collection and disbursement services that are tailored to serve the needs of benefit administrators—from a customized lockbox that improves the employer remittance process, to state-of-the-art electronic receivables. Our experienced deposit specialists will help you identify your specific commercial banking needs and design a plan to streamline your banking experience, increase efficiency, and reduce costs. Union Bank is proud to provide commercial banking services to nearly 250 labor management clients of every size, representing over \$525 million in deposits.

Please contact us today for more information.

[unionbank.com/labor](http://unionbank.com/labor)   



Collette Witting  
Labor Industry Manager  
949-553-4302

Armand Antonian  
Sr. Relationship Manager  
213-236-5046  
Southern California, Southwest, Midwest

John Mendoza  
Sr. Relationship Manager  
415-705-7112  
Northern California, Pacific Northwest, East Coast

 ©2013 Union Bank, N.A. All rights reserved. [unionbank.com](http://unionbank.com)

