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# Clark College faculty vote to authorize strike

By Don McIntosh

Instructors at Clark College could go on strike next month if administration doesn't agree to long-overdue catch-up raises. In a Dec. 7 meeting attended by as many as 300 part-time and full-time faculty, the vote was unanimous to give the union executive committee authority to call a strike.

Clark College Association for Higher Education (CCAHE), an affiliate of the Washington Education Association teachers union, represents 550 faculty members at the college, including 188 who are full-time and 363 who are part-time. They've been in contract bargaining for 14 months, and the two sides have been in mediation since June.

The top two union priorities for the contract are salary increases that catch up after years of wage freezes, and linking part-time compensation to full-time.

Full-time professors at Clark make \$53,416 to \$76,339 a year for year-round work. That's the lowest of any community college in the area, and less than nearby K-12 public school teachers. Clark faculty haven't had more than cost-of-living raises in decades, and for six years in a



Photo courtesy of Washington Education Association

row didn't even get the cost-of-living increases. Now they say it's time to catch up — making up for those missed increases.

Clark also pays faculty who are classified as part-timers half as much — per class — as full-time faculty. That has given the college a big incentive to shift more and more classes to be taught by part-timers. To stop the

drift, CCAHE initially proposed that part-timers be paid the equivalent of 80% of full-time, but now says it would settle for 70%.

"This is about more than salary. It's about trying to get Clark back on track, and prioritizing teaching," CCAHE president Suzanne Southerland told the Labor Press.

**HOW TO HELP**

The Clark County faculty union is raising a strike fund at [gofundme.com/f/caahe-strike-fund](https://gofundme.com/f/caahe-strike-fund). Funds raised will be used for signs, food, and other essentials needed on the picket line in the winter. If there's no strike, the funds won't be used, and donations will automatically be returned to the donors in less than 90 days.

Clark College is proposing to raise wages 3% for full-timers and 5% for part-timers in addition to a state-provided cost-of-living increase of 3.2%. CCAHE's latest proposal is 9% above the cost-of-living increase over two years.

Whether a strike happens depends on Clark College administrators, "It's their turn in negotiations," Southerland said. "Our goal is to avoid a strike. We are willing to do what it takes to get a fair contract."

If a strike happens, it would be a first at Clark College. In Washington, public college faculty have only been allowed to bargain over salaries since 2018 under state law.

A mediated bargaining session is scheduled for Dec. 27. Winter term begins Jan. 6.

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