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Portland Observer

Volume XLVII • Number 29



www.portlandobserver.com
Wednesday • July 25, 2018



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PHOTO BY DANNY PETERSON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Beth Blumklotz (left) and Jimmy Appelhanz are on the front lines of a wage dispute with Portland Public Schools. The Local 757 representatives of the Amalgamated Transit Union say the school district's final offer in wages for 100 special education bus drivers are not high enough to meet the high cost of living in Portland's tight housing market. A strike is possible.

By DANNY PETERSON
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Portland Public School special education bus drivers may go on strike if they don't accept the latest offer from Oregon's largest school district to implement their final offer for a pay raise, end the negotiations, and finally settle on a long overdue employment contract.

PPS announced that it will implement its offering of wage increases as part of Tuesday's school board meeting; an amount that negotiators of the contract and other drivers have been saying is unac-

Strike Possible

Final offer for school bus drivers falls short

ceptable since it was first proposed in May. The drivers' union will vote in two weeks whether to accept the district's offer or go on strike.

A proposed resolution released by the district Friday ahead of the school board meeting, calls for a special education bus drivers'

starting wage to increase from \$16.25 per hour to \$17.96 per hour starting July 25 — but that's still \$1.04 lower than what the drivers asked for.

"The positive is this was not on the [school board] agenda before. The downside is, it's still below

what others are being paid," driver and union organizer Beth Blumklotz told the Portland Observer.

Organizers have frequently referenced a statistic from the National Low Income Housing Coalition that a Portlander needs to make more than \$23 per hour to

afford a two bedroom rental. The drivers are asking for a \$19 per hour starting wage, with yearly step increases.

The drivers originally asked for over \$21 per hour, which was parallel to what other PPS drivers, who transport things like warehousing equipment, landscaping tools, and food items, made. Unlike those drivers, the special ed bus drivers must get trained in emergency response techniques for children.

Since their previous contract

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