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Youth leaders from Benin, Burkina Faso, Republic of Congo, Gabon and Togo will visit Portland next month as part of a program to promote mutual understanding between cultures, increase leadership skills and prepare youth to make a difference in their communities.

## Youth Leaders Need Host Families

Youth and adult leaders from the Pan-Africa Youth Leadership Program will arrive in Portland next month as part of a program to promote mutual understanding and help is needed in placing participants in homes across the Portland metro community.

The program brings youth leaders and their adult mentors from Benin, Burkina Faso, Republic of Congo, Gabon, and Togo to our

community. Local residents can serve as an ambassador for the program by hosting either an adult mentor or high school participant in the program. You can also provide transportation support.

Participants in this U.S. Department of State program, coordinated locally through the World Affairs Council of Oregon, are between the ages 15 and 18 and are recruited based on their outstand-

ing academic performance and leadership potential.

During their time in Portland, the students engage in workshops on leadership and service, community site visits, local cultural activities, and more. On evenings and weekends, they are spending time with their host families.

To fill out a hosting application or for more information about the program, email [lauara@worldoreg.org](mailto:lauara@worldoreg.org).

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## Strike Possible

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expired in June of 2017, many drivers have held protests, school board testimonials, and other pleas for receiving a livable wage as mediated negotiations between the two sides took place.

Union representative and driver Jimmy Appelhanz laid out some of the issues during a school board meeting last week, telling board members that the district has, through either indifference or incompetence, failed to meet the union's reasonable demands for an equitable contract.

"A strike is an action of last resort. But after a year of negotiation and mediation this is a step we are prepared to take," Appelhanz said. "The lack of respect being shown to your employees is galling and our patience has long since wore thin."

The union is within its right to strike, according to Oregon labor laws and the union's own regulations.

Back in late April, Local 757 declared an impasse after mediated negotiations failed to appease all parties. Around the same time, the union also asked PPS to enter arbitration, which the district declined. Merely asking to arbitrate fulfilled a needed step before the right to strike is allowed, according to union rules.

In early May, the district gave their final offer of \$17.96 starting pay, which they're now implementing, and within their right to do so. Protesters around that time were vocal then that \$17.96 would be an inadequate pay raise.

Blumklotz said they will be standing by their mediation date of August 16 to continue nego-

tiations, despite the final offer implementation and will vote on whether to strike or accept the new wages then.

"They are implementing in hopes to attract new drivers and in hopes that the current drivers will say it's enough, when the drivers already said it is not," she wrote in an email representing the Portland Public Schools Special Education School Bus Drivers' negotiating team.

Blumklotz and Appelhanz are two of over 100 special education bus drivers that work directly for PPS. Other bus drivers used by the school are contracted out to a private company, First Student, the employees of which get paid \$18.25 to start.

Implementing the final offer for the special education drivers while mediation is still ongoing will help the district recruit new drivers for the upcoming school year, according to the resolution before the school board. Current drivers have reported understaffing and stressful days as a workforce is stretched thin.

The wage increases will also apply to current employees, district spokesperson Harry Esteve told the Portland Observer.

Blumklotz said higher wages attract quality drivers who can handle the use of CPR, first aid, and adequately deal with special needs children to apply. For a job that drivers often take home with them, proper wages are important to ensure the support of the kids, she added.

"We put the kids into positions to fail when we don't meet their needs. And we are a public school system. We are here to meet the students' needs," Blumklotz said.



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