This bulletin is part of a series distributed by staff at your school to provide regular updates on our negotiations for the new contract that will succeed our current agreement, which expires on June 30, 2012.

Strikes: How Do They Affect Educators and Education?

It has been nearly 25 years since the Chicago Teachers Union last went on strike. For decades, the mere memory of past strikes was enough to make the Board bargain seriously at the table. The current round of negotiations—as well as the daily disrespect the Board shows educators—demonstrates that faded memories no longer suffice.

This year the law requires 75% of our entire membership to vote for a strike authorization. A strike authorization does not guarantee that we will walk the picket line. In fact, a strike authorization may lessen the possibility of a strike because simply demonstrating our level of unity may cause the Board to see reason. Striking is our option of last resort. Yet, in the past, when all teachers and paraprofessionals have banded together in solidarity, this has led to increased power, protections, and safeguards that are essential to the well-being of teachers and students in our schools.

Some key rights that we’ve gained as a result of the Strike:

1969: We put 750 new teachers in place to lower class size to a maximum of 30 in primary grades, 33 in intermediate grades, and 35 in upper grades. The Union also succeeded in pressuring the Board to include courses on African American history in the curriculum and guaranteed that there would be 900 teacher aides in the high school and 900 teacher aides in elementary schools.

1971: Recognition by the Board of Education of the Martin Luther King holiday. Further reductions in class size were achieved through a four day strike which resulted in the hire of 500 to 600 new teachers to relieve large classrooms and also produced an 8% salary increase, Board payment of 100% of family hospitalization, and teacher aides being added to the bargaining unit.

1973: For 12 working days members went on strike to win a restoration of 210 positions previously cut, implement maximum class size limits in all schools, and an increase in the emergency supply money for classroom teachers.

1975: CTU members took a strike authorization vote that enabled us to reduce elementary class size to 28 students from kindergarten through third grade and 32 for the upper grades, and added dental, hospitalization, and maternity benefits to our contract.

1980: A 10-day strike was waged over a series of payless paydays and threats to increase class size. The strike resulted in the preservation of our contract, class size limits, and payment of delayed salary.

1983: A 15-day strike won a 5% salary increase in addition to 2.5% bonus pay.

1984: A 10-day strike resulted in the elimination of payroll deductions for health care, a 4.5% salary increase, 2.5% bonus pay, Political Action Committee contribution deductions, and a medical plan that—for the first time—offers a Preferred Provider Organization (PPO).

1985: A two-day strike gained an increase in major medical coverage, including improved benefits for maternity and paternity leave, a 9% salary increase over 2 years, restoration of holidays that were lost in the strike, and the ability of members to accumulate up to 234 sick days.

1987: A 19-day strike, the longest in CTU history, permitted the lowest achieving schools to have class size in the primary grades reduced by two, provided an increase in major medical coverage, an 8% salary increase over 2 years, and the ability to accumulate 244 sick days.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Why might we have to strike?

We have a Board of Education that is on the rampage and trampling our rights. Beyond the wholesale privatization of the system and the rapid expansion of charters and turnarounds, CPS also wants to make you work 20 percent longer without a raise, take your accumulated sick time, diminish your defined pension plan, reduce our preparation and professional development time, eliminate class size restrictions, increase your health-care costs by 50%, and determine your value as a teacher through an evaluation system overly reliant on high-stakes testing.

Will we still get paid if we go on strike?

We will not be paid while we are on strike. That is why the union’s leadership is encouraging you to start saving now to help weather the storm. You can begin an account at the United Credit Union and/or forgo some of the big purchases or special vacations you had originally planned in order to prepare for a potential strike.

What happens to my health insurance?

Coverage under the CPS Employee Health Plan continues to the last day of the month in which your employment terminates or there is a reduction in hours. Our insurance has traditionally remained in place when the strike began and ended within the same month. However, if our strike continues past the end of the month, that will trigger a “qualifying event” that allows strikers (and their covered dependents) to elect continuation coverage under the COBRA laws. If you elect COBRA coverage, you will have to pay for it out of your own pocket. You can also shop around for an individual policy.

The CTU will attempt to assist striking teachers and paraprofessionals in securing health insurance during their participation in a strike. In the unlikely event that it would be needed, we are currently researching what kinds of stop-gaps the AFT can offer in the realm of health-care insurance and interest-free loans.

Can they replace us with strike-breakers?

Not likely. It is highly improbable that the Mayor and CEO Brizard could identify 24,000 qualified teachers and paraprofessionals to replace us. However, it can't hurt for you to speak with pre-service teachers at area universities to impress upon them the importance of solidarity in this critical moment.