

# The Real Cost of a Strike

As the Torrance Teachers Association continues to negotiate with district leadership for a fair contract, covering the 2023/24 to 2025/26 school years, TTA leaders are being made aware of the frustration many of our members feel regarding the issue of compensation. This frustration has taken the form of comments such as, “the teachers at my school are ready to go on strike” and other such statements that indicate a willingness to walk off the job in attempt to force the district to offer higher salary increases.

While it is true that strikes are one of many options that bargaining units have in their efforts to earn fair contracts, it should be noted that they are typically the last option after all other attempts have been unsuccessful. In the absence of a clearly defined “unfair labor practice” on the part of the district, a legal strike can only happen after a contract impasse has been declared by one side or the other and a fact-finding report has been issued by a PERB appointed mediator.

To understand the “true cost” of a potential strike, the following points should be considered. For context, we will use information from the 2019 Los Angeles Unified and the 2023 Oakland Unified teachers’ strikes.

## Successful Strikes Take Time to Prepare.

- United Teachers of Los Angeles (UTLA) leadership began discussions and planning for a potential strike in 2019 as early as 2014-15. Even with that much planning time, UTLA was unable to build a large enough strike fund to provide “strike pay” for all members.
- The Oakland Education Association (OEA) took a more “ad-hoc” approach, notifying members of a potential strike vote in Spring 2023 and taking the actual vote on April 26<sup>th</sup>. This approach gave members much less time to prepare for the effects of a work stoppage.
- Successful strikes involve taking both time and resources to craft messages to parents and community members, create a clear message campaign, make picket signs, and plan for both childcare and meal stations for members in the event of a prolonged action.

## Strikes Are Not Solely About Money.

- While compensation is obviously an issue for all unit members, almost all teacher strikes involve other contractual issues.
- In 2019, UTLA members went on strike over several issues, including class sizes, inadequate support services, and the proliferation of charter schools in the district.
- OEA members sought a wide range of “common good” proposals, including facilities upgrades, increased social services programs for disadvantaged students, and increased funding for expanded learning programs.

## Strikes Cost School Districts Money.

- Shutting down all schools in a district results in a significant loss of ADA revenue. Even if districts can keep schools open, using administrators, subs, and teachers crossing picket lines, parents often keep students at home and the revenue loss is still substantial.
- The 6-day LA Unified strike is estimated to have cost the district over \$100 million. Oakland kept its schools open during its 7-day strike, but still lost approximately \$70 million in ADA.
- A full shutdown of Torrance Unified Schools would cost the district over \$700,000 per day in ADA.

## Strikes Cost Members Money (and more).

- Members receive no pay when on strike. On a 185-workday calendar, one day without pay represents a 0.54% loss of income. In addition, no STRS service credit is earned for any days members miss while on strike. Thus, a three-day strike in Torrance would cost members approximately 1.5% of their yearly salaries and also cost the district a similar amount in lost revenue—the combination potentially negating the impact of a 3% raise.

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- The 6-day UTLA strike cost members approximately 3% of their yearly salaries. While the ultimate settlement did include many important contract language features, the compensation (6% over two years) was basically the same amount the district had been offering before the strike.
- OEA was seeking a 23% increase across the board. The 7-day strike cost members approximately 3.5% of their annual salaries. The settlement provided increases of between 10% and 17%, with the average increase being 15.5%. (12% after the loss of income incurred by the strike). All members also received a \$5000 off-schedule bonus.

## Strikes Have Long-Lasting Impacts.

- School districts will often use the economic impact of strikes as rationale for cutting programs or delaying future salary increases.
  - UTLA's contract with LA Unified expired in 2021. It wasn't until 2023 that a new contract (including retroactive salary increases) was settled. During this time, UTLA teachers participated in another 3-day strike in support of the district's classified employees.
- Strikes often cause damage to the relationship between employers and employees. While it is easy to frame this relationship as being adversarial in nature, our unit members depend on both site and district administrators and the school board to both advocate for them and protect them from attacks on their profession.
- Strikes can be extremely stressful for members, resulting in both physical and psychological issues. Part of effective preparation for a strike involves making sure that members have ready access to mental health services.
- Strikes can lead to divisions among members. This is especially true if the strike does not have the support of a vast majority of members. Generally, 90% or higher of members who are willing to walk off the job and stay out as long as necessary is needed to ensure a successful strike. Members must also face the conflict of economic pressure due to lost income vs. solidarity with their fellow teachers. New teachers, particularly those who do not have permanent status, are among those most impacted by these issues.
- While parents are generally supportive of and appreciate the work done by teachers, strikes that leave them trying to find childcare can place an extreme burden on that relationship.

## Strikes Don't End in Total Victory.

- The current TTA bargain is being held up over a 3% difference in compensation. Equity gains on the district calendar and the professional day for many members may be lost if an impasse is declared and the district removes those items before they are agreed upon.
- Most strikes that involve compensation issues end with some type of negotiated settlement. While these often result in higher increases than were initially offered, they rarely involve unions receiving the full amounts they were seeking (see OEA above).

The information presented above is not meant to promote any particular agenda regarding the potential for a strike in Torrance, either this year or any time in the future. Rather, we hope that all members will apply it to the current situation faced by TTA as it attempts to gain a fair contract and use it to come to informed decisions about how and when they feel a strike may be necessary. TTA leadership remains committed to pursuing ALL possible means of resolving differences with district leadership in appropriate ways during our negotiations process. **TTA Leadership will consider a strike only as a last option.**