



DFTA Negotiations

Frequently Asked Questions

Last updated 10.30.2019

Q: Why is there a TA strike?

A: The Decatur Federation of Teaching Assistants (DFTA) is currently in negotiations for a new contract. The Board of Education and DFTA members have engaged in the negotiation process since April 2019. The DFTA contract expired June 30, 2019.

DFTA released their intention to strike effective October 29, 2019, if an agreement had not been reached. DFTA members then went on strike starting October 29.

Q: How does the strike affect our schools?

A: Teaching Assistants work with more than 500 students in prekindergarten classes at Pershing Early Learning Center and Macon Piatt Special Education Programs housed in nine DPS schools. These programs are currently suspended -- see our homepage for a complete list of impacted programs.

The district employs 275 teaching assistants. We continue to welcome any teaching assistants back to programs that remain open.

Q: Will schools still be open during the strike for general education?

A: Yes. Students enrolled in general education can continue to attend school.

Q: Can I still send my student to school if his/her program is suspended?

A: No. Until teaching assistants return to work, we are unable to maintain state- and federally-mandated learning environments for students in these programs.

Q: What is the biggest obstacle in negotiations with teaching assistants?

A: Health insurance costs.

Q: Why can't the district accommodate the health insurance plan requested by TAs?

A: The health insurance plan offered to DFTA is the exact same plan and same cost that teachers, maintenance, teamsters, custodians, security, admin support, ancillary employees, and administration all receive.

Q: What is the average salary of a TA in District 61?

A: The district's TAs earn an average salary of \$26,850, with some earning as high as \$36,000.

Q: When will negotiations continue with teaching assistants?

A: Decatur Public Schools has been and continues to be willing to negotiate with DFTA. As of October 30, 2019, there is not a negotiation session scheduled with the federal mediator.

Q: How will schools handle their vacant TA positions?

A: District #61 and school leaders are examining the daily needs in programs that remain open and offering assistance as needed. DPS will continue to assess the situation in our schools throughout the duration of the strike.

Q: How long will programs be suspended?

A: Programs impacted by the DFTA strike will remain suspended until an agreement has been ratified between Decatur Public Schools and DFTA. Announcement of any movement toward an agreement will be communicated using the district's regular communication platforms.

Q: Can teaching assistants return to work during the strike?

A: Teaching Assistants are welcome to work in programs that remain open.

Q: Can parents volunteer in classrooms to help fill TA positions?

A: No, a parent cannot volunteer to fill the role of a TA during the strike, per existing contract language. Additionally, all community volunteers must follow the HR volunteer approval process.

Q: Will teaching assistants still receive salary and health insurance during the strike?

A: Under federal law, teaching assistants' participation in the strike equates to a reduction in work hours. The employee is not considered to be in "pay status" with the district, which triggers a COBRA notification. Employees will then be 100% responsible for health insurance benefits.

Q: Is DPS legally allowed to suspend IEP and SED programs?

A: The district is required to provide a free and appropriate public education to all students. Unfortunately, during the TA strike we're not able to do that and programs are suspended as a result. Once the strike has concluded, parents can request a meeting to discuss compensatory education. Parents can schedule individual meetings to evaluate their child's IEP progress and determine the amount of compensatory education as warranted in that evaluation. These meetings will most likely take place in the Spring. Contact the Macon Piatt Special Education Administrator of your student to schedule a meeting or call MPSED at 217.362.3055 for more information.

Q: Can I ask the board members questions about the TA strike at board meetings?

A: As part of the [Open Meetings Act \(5 ILCS 120/\)](#), the public participation portion of the meeting agenda is an opportunity for community members to speak during a Board of Education Meeting. Those wishing to speak are limited to three (3) minutes. Board members do not respond to comments made during public participation, verbally or nonverbally.