

# Diary of a Sub On Strike: A Week on the Picket Line with the Portland Association of Teachers

Sara Appel

Greetings, fellow gig workers and allies of relative employment stability!

Below I am sharing the photo-diary I kept while striking with the Portland Association of Teachers (PAT) union from November 1-13, 2023.

For more than three weeks in November, public school teachers in Portland, Oregon held their [first-ever strike](#), bringing classes to halt throughout the Portland Public Schools (PPS) district. In near-daily bargaining sessions, the union pressed the PPS administration for a contract that would guarantee smaller class sizes, more funding for Special Education, facilities improvements, and a Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) raise to keep pace with inflation, among other demands. By the time the strike was called, PPS had been refusing to good-faith bargain with PAT for the better part of a year.

Though I have been self-employed as an academic editor for five years now, I have also worked as a substitute teacher in the PPS system for more than two years—a job I took to supplement my editing income during the ‘thin’ times, of which there are many. Historically, substitute teachers working in Oregon public schools have been required to hold a state-issued teaching license, just like regular teachers. But I was hired on the Emergency Restricted Substitute Teaching License line, a program implemented in late 2021 to deal with a COVID-related substitute teacher shortage.

Substitute teachers are eligible to join the PAT union, and I am a dues-paying member. However, since subs negotiate a separate labor contract with PPS, our role during this strike was primarily one of support—though we also received the daily \$120 strike stipend granted to any PAT member willing to join the picket line for three hours each morning. All the more reason to show up for my union, ready to stand strong.

I also kept this diary as a window into how a freelance or ‘gig’ worker like me goes on strike. You’ll notice that I took a couple mornings off, for instance, and that I wasn’t able to attend most of the union’s afternoon rallies; I had to get home for my ‘second shift’ as an editor, often followed by an evening ‘third shift’ in my current role as Communications Coordinator for the Working-Class Studies Association. Still, I did the best I could to make time for the strike (read on to find out why I wasn’t able to continue striking past November 13—my diary’s dramatic conclusion).

My experience on the PAT picket line was, moreover, my first time striking as a member of a labor union. So even though I’ve been a longtime scholar of working-class studies, I welcomed the chance to become as much a participant in the struggle for worker power as an observer and documenter of it.

Finally, a citational note: Throughout my diary, I refer to the [PAT Bargaining Brief](#), a daily update on the state of negotiations from union President Angela Bonilla and the rest of the Bargaining Team. Though the Brief was e-mailed to all union members each day of the strike, it is also available as a public document on the PAT website. The Brief is organized into click-through web pages, each of which contains a running, chronological list of several weeks' worth of updates. Therefore, to keep things simple, I'll identify separate daily Briefs in parentheses with the abbreviation 'BB' followed by the date (e.g., BB 11/2).

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### **Day 1: Wed. 11/1**

Today I got up around 7am, made coffee, threw on leggings and my waterproof jacket (this is Oregon), and headed to Roosevelt High School. Though salaried PPS teachers were instructed by the Portland Association of Teachers (PAT) union to report to and strike in front of their own schools, substitutes could strike at any school, since we work at various K-12 schools in the district and therefore don't have a 'home base.' Being a quick few minutes' drive from my north Portland apartment, Roosevelt was my clear choice.

I was shy when approaching the hub of canopy tents under which donuts, mini muffins, and a QR-code sign-in station awaited us. I'd subbed at Roosevelt many times, but didn't really know any of the teachers. You don't usually meet the teachers you're subbing for, is the thing, and when you bounce around between several schools, filling in for classes as different as Media Studies and PE, you're not around enough to make friends during prep periods. I did, however, exchange smiles with several students—who, quite valiantly, hauled their sleepy adolescent selves out of bed on a day when they could have easily stayed home, just to support their teachers.

I was put further at ease when a wide-awake young woman—Abby Pasion, an Ethnic Studies teacher and one of Roosevelt's strike captains—pointed me toward a stack of cardboard signs on sticks. I held one up and gave it a twirl: "On Strike for Our Students" on one side, "PAT Demands Great Public Schools for All" on the other. "Are you ready to fight for a fair contract?" bellowed Abby through a megaphone. Taking this as our cue, we moved toward the school entrance, signs and coffee cups in hand. Abby then explained the basic flow of each day to come: 7:45-10:30am spent striking at your school, followed by a larger PAT-wide noon rally at a predetermined location. Today's rally, as it turned out, would be at Roosevelt.

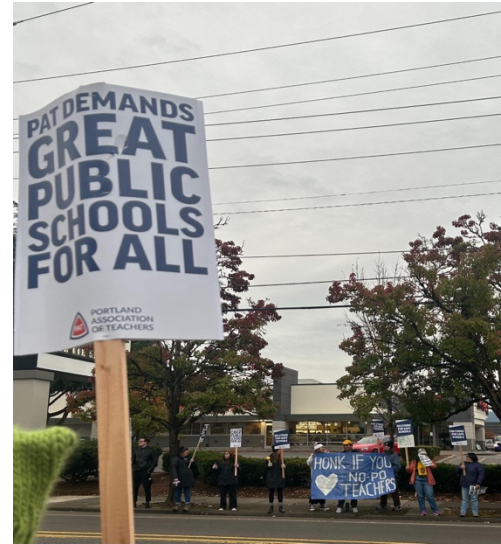
Logistics settled, our growing group began circling the sidewalk in front of the four Greek-style columns holding up the schoolfront. "We're all going to get our 10,000 steps today!" someone joked, and it's a fact: striking is good for your health. Abby, though, felt we needed a cheerleader: "Hey Shawn Swanson, where you at? Come and lead us in a chant!", she phoned through the crowd, and sure enough, Shawn—an enthusiastic young English teacher in New Balance sneakers—was happy to oblige.

The first of Shawn's chants captured a sentiment shared widely among the district's more than 4500 striking teachers: "Hot, cold, rats, mold! This is getting really old!" Though I had yet to encounter any of the rodents seen scurrying through PPS schools over the years (spotted, among other places, at [Koyoma-Lane Elementary](#) and [Martin Luther King Jr. Elementary](#)), I thought of my time subbing at north Portland's Jefferson High. Taking attendance in Ceramics, I had to yell over the relentless

clanging and banging of an ancient heating system—and that classroom never did get above 60 degrees in February, despite all the noise.

“You have left us no good choice, now we use our teacher voice!” we shouted together, our group of marchers having increased to about 30 teachers and students. I must admit, however, that a sidewalk set blocks from the nearest main road wasn’t the best location for our “teacher voices” to resonate. Someone wisely suggested that we take the strike to Lombard St., across from the large Fred Meyer grocery store.

Walking that direction, I got the chance to ask Science teacher Joe Hanawalt, 45, why he was out here striking. “A lot of the statements that have come from our central administration have been disrespectful [to teachers],” he said, mentioning, in particular “disingenuous statements made to the public at large” regarding the ‘hard cap’ on class sizes that teachers have asked for in their demands. “The district is claiming they need to hire 500 teachers” to meet the cap—but this hiring would take place “over three years, not *one* year” as insinuated in the media. Joe’s biggest problem with the administration’s statements, he said, is “the gaslighting. ‘We’ve been reasonable,’ is the tone of the district. ‘[So], if you strike, it’s really on *you*.’”



*Picketing on Lombard Street. Honk, honk!*



*I didn't get these cool kids' names, but they were eager to be pictured supporting their teachers.*

As expected, picketing on Lombard, the busiest street in north Portland, generated more attention. For sure, the PAT strike has the overwhelming support of the Portland community; according to [one national poll](#), between 86 and 91 percent of Portlanders support *all* of the strikers’ demands, including hiring more teachers and reducing class sizes to ensure that the ‘hard cap’ can be met. It was heartening, therefore, to know that the vast majority of the honking we heard on Lombard was coming from community members who had our backs.

With my own lower back beginning to smart from so much standing, and feeling eager to move forward with the rest of my work day as a freelance editor (subbing being my primary side hustle), I decided to skip the noon rally and head home after our 10:30 dismissal. The rent won’t pay itself, after all.

## Day 2: Thurs. 11/2

To change things up a bit, today I decided to picket at Cleveland High in southeast Portland—which I think of as my family school, since my youngest sister, Maggie, and brother-in-law, Matthew, have both worked there. I

looked forward to having Matthew nearby for some company and also, hopefully, getting the scoop on how my fellow strikers were feeling on Day 2.

As of this morning, the PPS District Bargaining Team still has not submitted an updated proposal for further bargaining with PAT, beyond the “lowlight”-filled proposal submitted hours later than the agreed-upon 11am deadline on Oct. 31, the day before the strike began (BB 10/31). Standing in line for the morning QR code check-in (very important, otherwise you’ll miss out on your \$120!), I also overheard some consternation about the lack of elected School Board members on the District Bargaining Team. It’s time for the School Board to do their job and “come to the table,” is the sentiment brewing.

Popping an Earl Grey-flavored donut hole in my mouth (in Portland, even the donated pastries are gourmet), I caught sight of Matthew—an English teacher and debate team coach known for his droll humor and height (he’s 6’5”)—waving at me from the other side of the crosswalk. In addition to its fine facilities (that’s sarcasm: Cleveland is among the schools that have not yet received the building renovations earmarked by the [2012 and 2020 PPS School Improvement bonds](#)), Cleveland has the distinction of being set on Powell Blvd., often the most gridlocked street in Portland. Though rush hour was over by now, the chorus of honks and horn blares as we rounded the corner toward Powell, strike signage held high, made fine musical accompaniment.

And the music didn’t stop there. As Matthew and I assumed our strike-duty posture marching up and down the sidewalk, a group of students, armed with a drumkit and stereo system, gathered under a nearby cedar tree. They launched into a doctored karaoke version of Taylor Swift’s “Shake it Off.” I couldn’t make out all the words, but the natural substitution of “teachers gonna strike, strike, strike, strike, strike!” in the chorus did catch my ear.



*Cleveland High students lead us in a strike-friendly rendition of Taylor Swift's "Shake it Off."*

In a lull between the music, I found a moment to ask these students what motivated them to show up that morning. A sampler of their answers:

- “Our teachers are the best... they have to teach a bunch of high-schoolers, you know what I mean? Whatever we can do, to support them!”—Mae, 16
- “I like classrooms that are more than 60 degrees— or less than 80, honestly!”—Ariah, 17
- “My mom is [a] teacher, and this year has been exceedingly hard for her... she has too many students. I have to see everything that goes on behind the scenes, and that’s been very impactful.”—Frances, 17
- “We all deserve education, and we can’t have education without teachers. They deserve all they need.”—Allesandra, 17
- “From what I’ve heard, teachers aren’t getting paid enough, and that sucks!”—Otto, 16

- “Because not only do I want to support my teachers, but I want to become a teacher myself!”—Emmett, 17

33-year-old Matthew, himself a one-time PPS student and a district teacher for more than six years, wanted to weigh in, too: “I’m [striking today] for better conditions for my students, so they receive the individualized support they need.”

Among the better conditions that the union is asking for, in addition to the ‘hard cap’ on class sizes necessary for all students to thrive, is a reduction in caseloads for Special Education teachers and those who support them, including psychologists, paraeducators, speech-language pathologists, and occupational therapists. In [a recent NEA Today article](#) about the PAT strike, one Special Ed teacher reported that the occupational therapist in her classroom “quit because she couldn’t manage and support the students she had. Another district offered her a lower caseload, higher pay, more planning time—all the things we need to do our job.” As a PPS substitute, I can report firsthand that untrained subs are often brought in as classroom support to make up for a lack of Special Education staff. I myself have taken such jobs; you take what’s available, and in my experience the Special Ed students are some of the most enjoyable to work with. But they deserve better than a parade of temporary faces.

Though Matthew and a couple of his teacher friends invited me to grab sandwiches before the day’s noon rally at the PPS District offices, I’ve been working toward a Manuscript Assessment deadline, so decided to head home again for my second shift. But I promise I’ll make time for a rally soon—assuming the strike doesn’t end by tonight!

### Day 3: Friday 11/3

Well, the strike did not in fact end last night—and as yesterday’s Bargaining Brief (11/2) from the PAT negotiators makes clear, the union has “lost any confidence that the current PPS negotiating team will bargain in good faith.” The “gaslighting” that Joe Hanawalt mentioned on Wednesday is evident here; instead of hearing the union’s demands, Superintendent Guadalupe Guerrero chose to [pen a letter](#) insinuating that PAT would be to blame for the “detrimental effect” of school closures. Moreover, with the District continuing to give an “unequivocal ‘no’” response to the union’s reasonable ask that School Board members be brought to the bargaining table (BB 11/2), the stonewalling by PPS continues.

I decided not to strike today, too, since the editing deadline is still looming large. I’ve also just added to my job-juggling act by throwing another ball in the mix, a part-time gig as Communications Coordinator for the [Working-Class Studies Association](#). So goes the hustle. Today’s noon rally and march through downtown Portland, I’m hearing, starts at Lincoln High School.

### Day 4: Mon. 11/6

“Rain or shine, we hold the line!” was the opening chant this morning at Roosevelt, where another large group gathered at the school front, rain ponchos flapping in the wind. As Shawn



*On the work-from-home grind with Louie!*

choreographed our marching into inner and outer circles rotating opposite directions, I sensed a more confrontational vibe taking hold.

The weekend's mediation session with the District was apparently a disaster. "They actually brought a *worse* deal to the table!" scoffed a woman marching behind me. The union's 11/5 Bargaining Brief sheds further light. Warily hopeful to hear that the "district team had a proposal for planning time"—an increase of which remains a major PAT demand—the union was therefore "enraged" that the District's proposal would, instead of offering the teachers more planning days within the regular calendar year, both increase the length of the workday *and* add an additional "District-directed" planning day to the school year. "Then they had the *audacity* to ask us to pause the strike." As if!

Moreover, despite being *spotted in the hallway* at the District office during the weekend's mediations (BB 11/5), School Board members are still not actively participating in the bargaining. Our chants therefore became direct call-ins. "Andrew Scott, come to the table! Patte Sullivan, come to the table!", we hollered, with Julia Brim-Edwards, Eddie Wang, Herman Greene, and eventually, the full slate of School Board members being summoned to do their job, and show up at the negotiating table! The music this morning was also notably *lit*. "It's like a Mardi Gras parade!" one striker remarked as New Orleans jazz blared from a large speaker. Twisted Sister's "We're Not Gonna Take It" and The Talking Heads' "Burning Down the House" ratcheted up the energy another notch.

After about an hour of dance-marching, we walked few blocks to the Charles Jordan Community Center, a recreation center named after Portland's [first Black City Commissioner](#). By the time we arrived, the crowd had grown to more than 200, with strikers from other north Portland schools, including Cesar Chavez K-8, George Middle School, and James John Elementary, joining us.

As we mulled around before starting our street march, I found a moment to chat with Abby Pasion, 27, our enthusiastic strike captain and a 2014 Roosevelt-grad-turned Ethnic Studies teacher. Abby's



Abby Pasion, Ethnic Studies teacher and Roosevelt High grad.

big hope for the PPS strike is that it could "really set a precedent for a transformation of higher ed in the US," riding the tailwind of [the 2018 #RedforEd movement](#) of "red state" walk-outs and the [2022 wave of early-fall teacher strikes](#) in large cities like Columbus, Ohio and Seattle, Washington. "The entire country is going to look to us to see what's going to happen with this contract." We also talked about issues with school facilities. "We can't even control the thermostat in our own buildings!" Abby exclaimed, a nod to how the District keeps the heat throughout PPS schools set at 68 degrees, even though ancient school buildings—[38 date back to the Hoover Administration](#)—can produce classroom temperatures radically higher or lower than this. Most schools also [still lack central air conditioning](#), making the recent climate-change related heat waves that much harder to bear.

PPS's [warped budget priorities](#) were a theme of today's march chants, my favorite being the simple yet elegant "Beep beep, toot toot! Get up off of that loot!" The march dispersed right at

10:30, and I headed home for my editing shift. Today’s noon rally will be broken up into seven different regional sites, to keep spreading the strike momentum throughout the city.

### Day 5: Tues. 11/7

I took the morning off from striking again today—but I did manage to make the 5pm union-wide rally in front of the School District office, a location chosen to keep the community pressure on before the School Board meeting at 6. As a downpour rolled in, I scanned the packed crowd Where’s Waldo-style, finally spotting my sister Chelsea’s red Carhart beanie and the stroller containing my 1-year-old niece and future PPS student, Fiona. The whole family came out tonight, to give Matthew and rest of the PAT crew our support.



*Shining a light on the District office.*



*Future PPS student Fiona and her mom, Chelsea Appel.*

Weaving my way toward them, I stopped in the middle of the crowd to take in Desmond Spann, aka DLux the Light, a Franklin High English teacher who is also [an acclaimed local poet and hip-hop artist](#). Standing on a flatbed truck stage, he began his performance with “The Gift,” a spoken-word poem addressed to the Fionas among us: “Children—you are not the future. You’re not the hope nor the promise of a better tomorrow.” As I listened to his poem—a call-out, as I took it, of how turning children into a symbol of future potential does violence to the “now” that childhood should rightfully be—one line struck me: “If I must live in your tomorrows, you will surely suffer, today.”

In the context of the teacher’s strike, the “you” being addressed here could be the District and their lack of willingness to prioritize *now* for PPS children. The union is fighting to provide children with the education that they need to thrive, right now, so they won’t be punished later for being ill-prepared to

succeed on the playing field of a grossly unequal, hyper-individualistic society that will likely still blame them for failing to “make good” on their futures. If that is the result of public education in the US—a continual deferral of resources and care to the sentimentality of “tomorrow’s” children as an empty symbol of future promise—the “you” who “will surely suffer, today,” will be all of us.

I also cannot help but zoom out further, at this especially bleak moment in history, and think of Palestine. [More than 4,000 precious Gazan children](#), over the past month, have sacrificed all of their todays and tomorrows at the altar of “your tomorrows,” or the continuing conquest of more land, resources, and ultimately, *futures* by the world’s elite. We must begin to see our struggles as connected.

Locating my family at last, I bent down to kiss my niece, who was by this time staging a protest of her own against the confines of her stroller. Tomorrow's child, today, would rather be crawling. As twilight gave way to darkness, softened by the moon-like light of an emblem projected on the side of the District office—"Public schools, the heart of the community," it read—we decided to pack it up and head home. It's getting close to bedtime, after all.

### Day 6: Wed. 11/8

I arrive at Cleveland this morning, and what do I hear? Members of the high-school band leading a wind-section heavy rendition of "Solidarity Forever," with saxophones, flutes, percussion, and an amped electric guitar! I'm definitely here for the "now" that these children are serving.

And maybe it's the solidarity going to my head, but it feels like PAT is getting a *bit* closer to a resolution with the District. Matthew agrees, and last night's School Board meeting seems to bear out some of our optimism. For one thing, Oregon Governor Tina Kotek, who was discouraging teachers from striking just last week, has now [called on School Board members to come to the bargaining table](#), and has also brought in a state financial officer to make sure PAT and the District "are working from the same set of numbers," according to a [Governor's office statement](#). Moreover,



"Solidarity Forever" at Cleveland High.

School Board Chair Gary Hollands told the feisty Board meeting crowd that both he and Superintendent Guerrero, along with other Board members, were, in fact, [part of yesterday's bargaining sessions](#)—so that is certainly progress!

But, as Matthew explained and [media coverage of last night's meeting](#) backs up, there's a shady 'scab' situation underway right now that paraeducators—those who, as I mentioned above, staff Special Education classrooms—are not happy about. Since paraeducators are represented not by PAT, but by the Portland Federation of School Professionals (PSFP) union (which, by the way, has its own separate contract negotiations underway with PPS), apparently the District thinks it's ok to require these crucial staff members to serve as online "reading coaches" during the strike, after being given only *one day* of training—a training, Matthew adds, that paraeducators have been asking for "for years," and have suddenly been given during the strike. Indeed, PPS appears to be treating the strike "like an inclement weather day or an emergency closure," [said Amaru Moon](#), paraeducator in the Intensive Skills Center at Grant High School, at last night's Board meeting. "Why are our staff expected to work during a school closure? Are you afraid of us unifying with teachers on the picket line?" Hmm. She may be onto something.



Self-explanatory.

Still fired up after last night’s poetic inspiration, today I also made it to the noon rally on the Blumenauer Bridge— a northeast Portland pedestrian crossing named after our longtime-serving,



*Trolling at the Oregon Convention Center.*

bowtie-wearing US Representative, [Earl Blumenauer](#). The objective of today’s rally is specific: to troll School Board member Andrew Scott on our way to the bridge by stopping at the Oregon Convention Center, where he’s attending some kind of retreat with mucky-mucks as Deputy Chief Operating Officer with Metro (a regional government agency that oversees public works projects). And troll we did, shouting “Andrew Scott, you’re no good, listen to teachers like you should!”, among other incendiary rhymes, at the Convention Center’s green glass façade. Hopefully, he hears us.

### Day 7: Thurs. 11/9

Now I know we’re still weeks away from the official start of the holiday season, but something magical happened this morning at Roosevelt: the first appearance of Mariah Carey on a PAT protest sign, declaring, “All I Want for Christmas Is a Fair Contract.” When I asked the bearer of such tidings, Roosevelt English teacher Courtney Palmer, 45, why she thought the [Queen of Christmas](#) chose today to bless us, she said, “Well, we’re in it for the long haul. And we’re not afraid of the long haul.”

And continue to haul we will. As Abby shouted through her megaphone, not only have “our District leaders still [refused] to reallocate the money” that even [the Oregon legislature has made clear](#) needs to be moved from administrative to classroom-centered spending, but, as yesterday’s Bargaining Brief (11/8) documents, the District is still giving a hard “no” on reducing class sizes, which remains one of PAT’s “top priorities.” The union feels that “genuine progress” won’t be possible until the District agrees to bargain over class sizes— so until then, at least, we carry on. We don’t want a lot for Christmas, PPS. Don’t be a Scrooge.



*Roosevelt English teacher Courtney Palmer, with the Queen of Christmas!*

At the moment, however, PPS could use a visit by a chastising ghost. As I'm hearing an earful about during our walk to the corner of Lombard St., the District is on the verge of deploying an especially petty, underhanded move to attempt to break the strike: [canceling teachers' health insurance](#). If the strike isn't over by Nov. 16, the District will start mailing teachers packets with instructions on how to enroll in COBRA plans—which, as anyone who has ever been sent information about [this insulting excuse for health insurance](#) knows, is just a middle finger to the union. Well played, Ebenezer.



*Future teacher Landon Downes.*

Standing on the corner next to Fred Meyer, I smiled at Landon Downes, 16, a Roosevelt student who has, impressively, not missed a single day of striking so far. “At a basic level, it’s my teachers out here, I should be out here with them,” he said when I asked him about his devotion to the cause. “And on a secondary level,” he continued, “my goal is to become a teacher. So I should be out here fighting for my future. Teachers are always getting sh\*\* on... so we need to see that there is a positive future for this.” I’ll have to make sure that Fiona behaves in his classroom if she’s lucky enough to have Landon as a teacher someday.

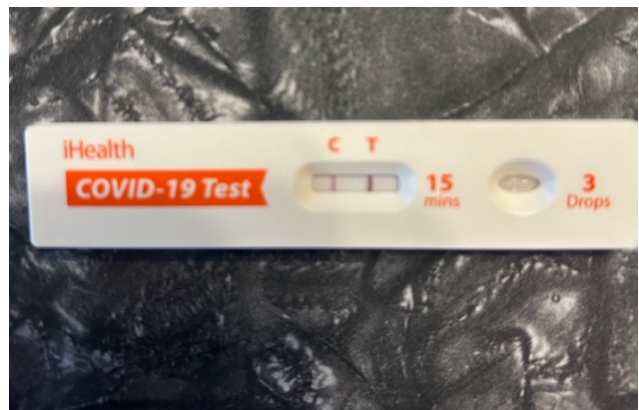
### **Day 8: Monday 11/13**

(Friday was Veteran’s Day)

Well folks, it’s finally happened. Until this morning I’ve liked to think I remained a vax card-carrying member of the Never COVID Club. But I woke up with my throat on fire, took a home COVID test, and it came up bearing the darkest-of-dark-pink positive lines—which my best friend assures me means I “really, really have it.”

So sadly, unless the long haul continues to roll straight into the holidays, this ends my time on the PAT picket line. I’ll miss the cool \$120 I was pulling in for marching around in the rain with a sign for three hours each morning. But more than that, I’ll miss being part of the “now” that this teacher’s union, by understanding our collective value and power as workers, has been creating.

As Landon reminded me last week, and the irony in Desmond Spann’s poem captures as well, there’s nothing inherently wrong with children being the ‘future.’ More are born every day, and these children will (knock on wood) continue to inherit tomorrows well beyond our lifetimes. But this future must be a collective one, envisioned and cultivated together. The gravest mistake we can make for our children—the way we will fail them—is if all we can offer them is a fantasy grounded in the personal ‘potential’ of each life as an island unto itself. We cannot keep placing the burden for society’s survival on individual children, regardless



*Ugh.*

of how few resources, and how little care, we have put into their thriving. We owe them, instead, a generous and loving social contract. And one way to do that is to ensure that their teachers—among those most responsible for stewarding them into adulthood—have the robust labor contract that they deserve.

### **Epilogue: A Tentative Win**

After 11 weekdays of teachers striking and more than three weeks of bargaining sessions, PAT and PPS reached a tentative contract agreement on Sunday, Nov. 26, 2023, with [94.7% of voting PAT union members](#) choosing to ratify the contract. Kids were already back in classrooms that Monday, after a two-hour late start.

Though PAT was overwhelmingly positive in their assessment of the new contract, calling it a “historical agreement” that “secured improvements on all our key issues,” the teachers did have to make some hard compromises with the District. They wound up receiving a cost of living (COLA) increase of [14.4% over three years](#), far down from their original ask of 23%. But, this was higher than the District’s best offer of 10.5%, which the teachers argued was so low it would “effectively lock in an 8% loss of buying power in educator salaries relative to the high rates of inflation experienced in the last few years” (from Article 12 of PAT/PPS Side-by-Side, see the 11/12 Bargaining Brief). Especially since the District had been refusing to budge on the COLA issue until a few days before the settlement was reached, we’ll call this a win.

The union also received [meaningful concessions](#) from the District on planning time and Special Education—the addition of a first-ever contract article focused on protecting Special Education staff from case overload, for one—as well as \$20 million to update heating and cooling systems throughout PPS schools. Teachers also, thankfully, didn’t have to bear the threatened ‘pause’ in their health insurance. Still, the union’s biggest loss came in the area of class sizes. They didn’t get their ‘hard cap’ on number of students per class, instead agreeing to a pay increase for teachers who wind up with jumbo-sized classes. Though extra pay is better than a pizza party, it does nothing to address the unsustainable workloads that PPS teachers, at least for now, will continue to face. Overworked teachers simply can’t give students the individualized attention that they need—and a loss of learning follows from there.

But regardless of how we might tally up ‘wins’ and ‘losses’ for this teacher’s strike, in a bigger-picture sense, every strike is a win. In *Slaying Goliath* (2020), Diane Ravitch writes that the greatest achievement of 2018’s Education Spring wave of “teacher revolt” throughout West Virginia, Arizona, and other states of notable hostility to public education, was the long-overdue respect teachers received by banding together to fight for themselves and their students. As Ravitch put it, #RedforEd won the “national discourse” battle over the value of public schools as a social good worth the people’s support and funding (266).

The PAT union could hardly have received greater public support for their cause—one buoyed, also, by a [2023 labor resurgence](#) that saw everyone from autoworkers and Hollywood writers to nurses and Amazon drivers striking and forming new unions. Give the teachers everything they need to do their job for our kids, was the message from Portland to PPS. And whether or not the District was listening, that message remains.

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### Author Bio

**Sara Appel** is a [freelance academic editor](#), substitute teacher, and writer living in Portland, Oregon. She also serves as Communications Coordinator for the Working-Class Studies Association.

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