



Reduce harmful work stressors.
Improve job quality and health.

Healthy Work Strategies

New contract for Los Angeles teachers includes important features designed to reduce teachers' job stress

The United Teachers of Los Angeles (UTLA) and the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) reached a tentative agreement on January 22, 2019 on a new contract. Following a six-day strike, UTLA members voted 81% to ratify the three-year agreement on January 23, 2019. The new contract is effective July 1, 2019.

Reductions in teachers' workload demands and increases in job control

The major change that may help to reduce teachers' job stress is a reduction in class size. Class size caps are now enforceable, and will continuously be reduced over the next three years:

- 2019-2020 – reduction of one student per grade level, and an immediate reduction in high schools from an unenforceable 46 students to a now enforceable 39 students for English and Math.
- 2020-2021 – reduction of one additional student per grade level
- 2021-2022 – reduction of one additional students per grade level

In addition, all Early Educators will now have an eight-hour workday inclusive of a 30-minute duty-free lunch. Special Education teachers will now have two release days for testing, access to regular caseload reports, improved language on caseload caps, and improved rights.¹⁻⁴

The contract also provides for greater say by the teachers in a school. For example, UTLA members at a school site will have a vote prior to conversion to a “magnet” school. The UTLA chapter chair will be able to sign off on local school budgets and waivers, will have greater rights in discussions about substitute teachers, and have the right to speak about UTLA issues at district-wide and local district meetings.¹⁻⁴

Other aspects of the contract designed to meet students' needs

Reduced class size also benefits students.⁵ In addition, many other contract features were designed to meet students' needs, including reducing the amount of standardized testing and random police searches of students; increases in the number of nurses, counselors, librarians, and mental health professionals; funding for 30 community schools; creation of an immigrant defense fund; more green space; and the agreement of UTLA, LAUSD and the Mayor's office to jointly advocate for increased county and state funding for education.¹⁻⁴

Enforcing the contract

In order to ensure that the contract is followed the union intends to use the: "Contract Action Team structure for implementation and site-based organizing, holding webinars on specific contract provisions, conducting districtwide class-size surveys post-norm day, and forming educator-parent committees to organize, including collective actions, in support of the contract."³

The process of achieving the contract

How was such a contract achieved? Journalists' reports point to a number of factors:

- New leadership of UTLA, elected in 2014, had run on a vision of improving schools and joining forces with parents and community groups to resist school privatization. They spent four years building rank-and-file leaders at every school and worksite, resulting in widespread support for the strike—1,000 members attended a strike preparation meeting; 50,000 people rallied downtown daily; and teams from each school organized their own picket lines.⁶
- The contract fight was not just about wages, benefits and working conditions, but also about a wide-ranging economic, racial and social justice agenda, including saving public education, which helped to build community support for the strike.⁷
- Thousands of parents and students and members of community organizations participated in picketing and rallies.^{7,8}

Evaluation

It is too soon, of course, to evaluate the impact of the new contract on teachers' job characteristics or their health. However, at the very least, the new contract appears to provide improvements in job characteristics. And, those improvements are legally enforceable, which is not the case for voluntary employer programs or policies.

References:

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