

The Baltimore Teachers Union



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Baltimore Teachers Union Files Grievance Against School District for Extending the School Year

Baltimore, MD (June 24, 2020) — Today, the Baltimore Teachers Union (BTU) filed a grievance against Baltimore City Public Schools for the school system's requirement that teachers, Paraprofessionals and School Related Personnel (PSRPs) work an additional 4 unpaid days beyond what their negotiated contract allows. While the BTU is not able to negotiate the school calendar, the union and the school system have a negotiated contract that establishes that teachers and PSRPs will work a maximum of 190 days each year. According to the union, teachers and PSRPs were forced to work 194 days this year, the final 4 uncompensated. The Baltimore Teachers Union is seeking 4 days of back pay for the extra days worked beyond their contract.

At issue between educators and their employer are the earliest days of COVID-19 school closure. Schools buildings were closed for students beginning March 16th, and teachers and PSRPs spent the early days of the closure preparing work packets, setting up online communication systems and distance schooling classrooms, and answering questions for confused families and students.

During the hectic first week of school closure, BTU and the school district were in regular communication. Teachers and PSRPs were doing so much work to establish distance schooling that BTU had to explicitly request that district leadership reiterate to school principals that Spring Break (March 20-27) needed to be duty free. When this message was not adequately communicated, President Brown took the rare step of drafting a letter directly to Baltimore's principals, which ultimately spurred district leadership to make a clearer statement to school leaders ensuring that Spring Break was to be a work-free time.

The school district applied to the Maryland State Department of Education for a waiver of the 180-day requirement for students, and the CEO chose not to extend that same waiver to employees. While the last day for students would be June 15th, employees would be obligated to report to work until June 23rd, which would create a school year of 194 days for educators, the final four, unpaid.

During April and May, the Union made repeated public comments at school board meetings, asking for the work they had done during an uncertain time to be respected and counted. The CEO and the Chief of Schools acknowledged educators' essential work during the first week of school closure in emails to staff, and thanked them for their continual efforts in support of students. However, the district shared with the BTU that while they recognized the hard work educators put in during the initial weeks of school closure, they felt it did not meet contractual obligations. During the union and district's regular communication to manage issues related to school closure, the district suggested that days from this year be moved to the beginning of the following year, a move that Baltimore teachers and PSRPs overwhelmingly disapproved.

BTU leadership crafted a survey for membership to guide negotiations. While clear majorities of nearly 3,000 respondents rejected the district's proposals, the comments in the survey led the BTU to engage in further discussions with district leadership. The BTU offered proposals that attempted to craft paid, asynchronous professional development options to take place during the month of August, which the district had indicated an interest in at one point in time. Unfortunately, the BTU learned that the district rejected these proposals at the same time as employees, when the CEO sent the letter to all staff indicating that the last day of the year would be June 23rd.

“Teachers and PSRPs have gone above and beyond in the midst of a pandemic and have served students and families in a time of fear and uncertainty,” said BTU President Diamonté Brown. “Our educators do excellent work every day in the most challenging circumstances in the state, and are at the heart of everything that’s going right in the district. For their work and their voices to be disrespected during a pandemic is a shocking repudiation of their service.”

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