

## SEIU Local 140 Newsletter 2.23.23

### Phone Banking Recap

On Monday a group of us gathered for an informal phone bank to call our fellow nutrition service and custodial workers within PPS. Our purpose was to share information about our union and the start of the bargaining process and to hear from members about their concerns and feedback. We hope to have more events like this one where we can do outreach at other schools. Building relationships with our fellow workers is crucial in winning a better contract. Whether within our school or at other sites across the district, the more friendships and connections we can create, the greater our chances of being able to effectively stand up to the district and assert our rights as workers.

### Hazard Pay

The last couple of years have seen various forms of disasters affecting workers including the pandemic and our continued effort to get COVID pay, forest fire smoke making Portland's air quality the worst on the planet, extreme heat, ice storms and unexpected snow. As climate change continues to become more severe this will only present more challenges as far as adverse weather.

Our [contract](#) has language that custodians get hazard pay, called "disaster time," in certain situations. In section G. it states that disaster time pay will be implemented when the city, county, state or federal government have declared a state of emergency and PPS has declared an "All PPS Closed day, which includes BESC/central operations." It goes on to note that custodians are expected to report for their regular shift unless they feel traveling to work would be a "substantial" risk in which case they can use paid or unpaid leave to cover it. Nutrition service workers have it even worse. They don't work and don't get paid and aren't even allowed to use their paid leave to cover it.

The district avoided paying their workers extra for working through the pandemic by claiming that while the PESC building was closed, the building was still open in an abstract sense because the people who normally work there were working from home. As of the time that this newsletter is going out, with cars and buses still stuck around the city, the district is using the same excuse. According to an email from PPS director of facilities Frank Leavitt in response to a worker's inquiry: "There is no Disaster Pay for today. Central Operations is still operating as are all employees on Hybrid or Remote work agreements."

According to this reasoning, there are essentially no situations where we get disaster pay since central operations, HR and other departments can still work from home—it may as well require an apocalypse to the scale of *The Last of Us*. This is an example of something that we must tackle with our new contract. Please document your experiences during this state of emergency so we can show the complete negligence of the district in situations like this. If we want, we can file a grievance to demand the hazard pay we rightfully deserve.

## Racism at PPS

Last month, a PPS middle school student was violently [attacked](#) by peers at school and forced face-down on the ground as his attackers threatened to “George Floyd” him. Rather than immediately speak out against the attack and alert the community to the persistence of racism within its schools, PPS leadership stayed quiet and tried to avoid publicizing the event. When the story finally broke in the news, the district was forced to [respond](#) with an email statement 3 weeks later which lacked any promises of substantive change. In their email, the superintendent and the board claimed that “wherever racism rears its head in PPS, it will be dealt with swiftly and decisively.” Unfortunately, this has not been the case. There is nothing new about this kind of racism at PPS nor about the district’s half-hearted response.

Not only are students facing racist threats and violence, but so are PPS [workers](#). However it is rare for the district to take concrete action to address the problem. In 2018, the district [settled](#) a lawsuit involving two maintenance workers who faced repeated racial threats, discrimination, and retaliation in the workplace. In response to the settlement, the newly hired superintendent Guadalupe Guerrero stated, “we value racial equity and inclusion and expect all of our work environments to be respectful and safe for all employees.”

If you have been affected by racism and racial discrimination in the workplace, know that you are not alone and that it is a violation of your rights as a worker and a human being. If possible, be sure to document the incident(s) in writing and get in touch with a union [steward](#) you trust. As union members, we must look out for one another and stand up against the district’s attempts to divide and weaken us through the persistence of racism and discrimination of all forms.

## Coming Up

- Sign our [petition](#) for higher wages to show our unity as we begin bargaining
- Bargaining team meets with management Monday 2/27 from 2-5 at 525 NE Oregon St. All are welcome to come observe meetings with management as long as it is not during your regular work shift.
- PPS labor coalition listening session Monday 2/27 from 6-7:30pm at 345 NE 8th Ave or online. Food provided. RSVP here: <https://bit.ly/3YJZBEf>
- PPS board meeting Tuesday 3/7 at 6pm at 501 N Dixon St.
- SEIU membership meeting Saturday 3/11 at 10am at 525 NE Oregon St or online.
- In person steward training Saturday 3/18 from 9-5 at 525 NE Oregon St. Register here: <https://seiu503.org/members/get-involved/event-calendar/>

## Useful Links

Union instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/seiulocal140/>

Our contract: [SEIU 140 union contract](#)

SEIU 140 webpage: <https://seiu503.org/pps/>

Local labor news: <https://nwlaborpress.org/>