

We Can't Wait to Change the Paradigm

Contract Settlement with Job Cuts - A Feature Not a Bug

On February 25, many OEA members were understandably glad to learn that a tentative agreement (TA) for our next contract had been reached without having to strike. The TA, which was soon ratified by 93% of voting members, included a 7% raise for most members through the 2026-27 school year—plus an additional 4% in Fall 2027—and many other gains. But the evidence suggests that this TA was inextricably linked to the layoff of hundreds of OUSD workers and cuts to OEA positions.

Did the school board—with four of seven members publicly aligned with OEA—“chop from the bottom,” sacrificing some District workers and programs to provide a raise and other improvements for the rest of us? Can we fight these cuts if we don’t strike? If so, how? And, moving forward, what will it take to win real victories for all school workers and students?

Some Historical Context

1996: OEA’s 26-day-long strike for fair pay and smaller classes called for the District to “chop from the top.” But OUSD classified workers’ unions—AFSCME and SEIU—publicly denounced the strike after hearing that OEA leaders and CTA staff had greenlighted layoffs of classified workers to help pay for OEA’s demands.

2009: A CTA-led “Essentials of Bargaining” workshop advised bargaining teams to demand that their school districts lay off members during tough times to avert cuts to real income for remaining members. CTA staff rejected considering a statewide teachers strike to tax corporate wealth despite growing public outrage at federal bank bailouts. They also revealed that union leaders sometimes privately come to an agreement with the district and then do it again in an official bargaining session “to make it look like it all happened in the open.” (bit.ly/ctastrategy2009)

2019: As striking OEA members and allies mass-picketed a school board meeting to block board directors from convening to approve layoffs of classified workers and student program cuts, OEA leadership announced a TA

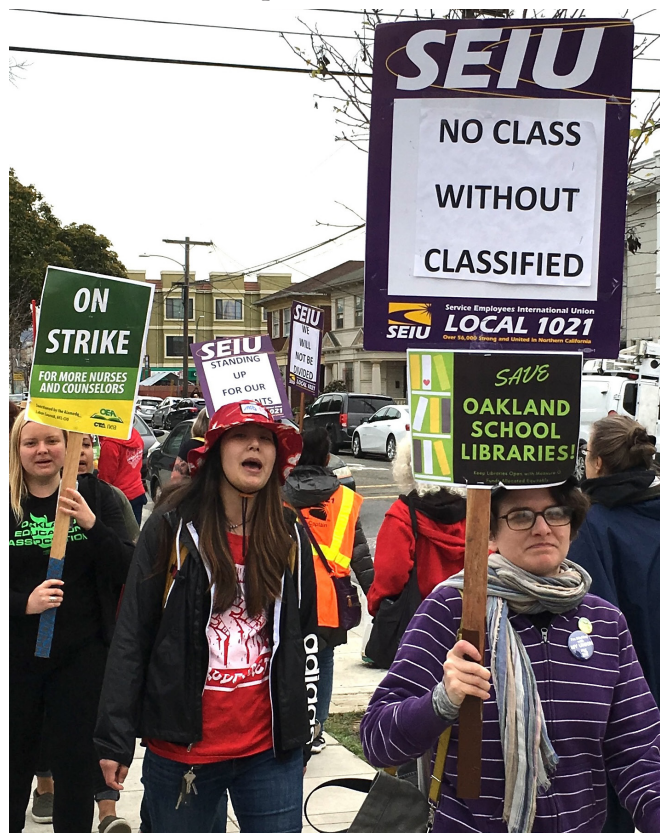
and called on members to immediately take down the picket. Membership anger at this move fueled an unusually large 42% vote opposing the TA.

February 2025: CTA launched the We Can’t Wait campaign, raising hopes that educators unions would join together in statewide strikes to force the world’s fourth largest economy to drastically increase funding for public schools. (We’re still waiting.)

February 2026: After a year and a half of bargaining, with no OUSD offer of a guaranteed pay raise and virtually none for improved working conditions, 90% of OEA members authorized a strike.

February 21: OEA leadership and CTA staff drastically pared down all bargaining proposals previously developed by OEA’s big bargaining team to offer a greatly reduced comprehensive package to OUSD that evening. OUSD said it would respond at our next session on February 24.

February 23: The “pro-OEA majority” school board voted to lay off 421 classified and certificated staff and cut more than 150 OEA positions.



OEA and SEIU picketing to stop cuts during OEA’s 2019 strike

February 24: OUSD's bargaining team presented its first-ever serious offers, which came close to meeting OEA's now sharply reduced proposals. The meeting ended with a TA.

What Does It All Mean? What Can We Do?

It is hard to dismiss the sharp turn in bargaining, hundreds of layoffs, and a TA all in the same week as a random coincidence. Or to forget that we've been here before. If you agree that this is not a viable path to win quality public schools for all students, let's consider how to change the paradigm and our strategy.

First, let's fight to reverse the cuts. The layoffs and position cuts are not final until May 15, so there is time to organize a fight to reverse them. The Rank and File Caucus is reaching out to OEA members and other OUSD workers. We plan to organize in OEA to unendorse any board director who does not vote to rescind the cuts. We will also work to coordinate public actions with union members in SF and West Contra Costa County to fight the cuts imposed in their districts after their strikes.

Make "We Can't Wait" real. (See our townhall slideshow: bit.ly/tbow-slides2025) Our local focus on "chop from the top" is necessary but not sufficient to win schools students deserve. With current funding, even the best-run school districts cannot afford the far-smaller class sizes and other conditions the research shows to be necessary for the highest-quality schools. A genuine fight for that goal requires We Can't Wait to follow through on its promise to coordinate statewide



OEA's Redistribute Corporate Wealth Campaign (2003)

strikes to redistribute billionaire wealth to fund public schools and services. Because such action would target state funding, we don't have to wait for the next contract cycle. Join us to start organizing now!

Please take our survey on the OEA bargaining process, the TA, and layoffs:

bit.ly/surveyOEATA26

Why do we need a rank-and-file caucus?

For decades, the official leadership of OEA has defined the scope, methods, and structure of how political action and education get disseminated to ordinary union members (the "rank and file"). We seek a "bottom-up union" in which rank and file members have real power through democratic processes. We are fighting for:

Union democracy: Union strength depends on analyses, tactics, and strategies that are developed, supported and carried out by rank-and-file members. We must commit to and uphold transparency in every area of our work: organizing, grievances, governance bodies, committees, bargaining, and all communications with the district and other entities. Committee chairs, cluster leads, and bargaining team members should be elected by members.

Class independence: A strong union leverages our power as workers and not only through lobbying. This means NEA and CTA (who receive the lion's share of our dues!) must cut their ties to the Democratic Party, which is allied with the capitalist class and thus supports austerity and privatization in education.

Worker solidarity: We oppose the division into separate unions for different workers in the same district (OEA, SEIU, AFSCME). Everyone who works for OUSD should be united in struggle, which means solidarity actions between unions, crafting demands collectively, and striking together when necessary.

Libertary politics: Our work is part of building the working-class struggle against all systems of oppression, including capitalism, racism, sexism, LGBTQ+phobia, ableism, and others. This is not a fight that can be limited to a school district. Therefore, participating in broader social movements is central to our mission.



Get involved!