

# Akron Beacon Journal

---

## EDUCATION

# Akron teachers reject recommendations for new labor contract, say 'schools are not safe'

**Katie Byard Carney** Special to Akron Beacon Journal

Published 7:48 a.m. ET Nov. 21, 2022

Akron Public Schools teachers voted overwhelmingly to reject a fact finder's recommendations for a new labor pact Sunday evening, with their union issuing a news release saying "the reality is our schools are not safe."

Now it will be up to a federal mediator to try to help resolve issues that are sticking points in contract talks.

Pat Shipe, president of the teachers union in the roughly 20,000 student district, said late Sunday night that she would have no immediate comment beyond the news release.

Akron school board members will vote on the recommendations that were rejected by the teachers union at a special board meeting called for 5:30 p.m. Monday, according to a statement released by the district late Sunday night.

**'Increasingly note safe':** Akron schools' staff members say student misbehavior on the rise

The union representing the roughly 2,900 teachers and other licensed — professional — staff members in the district had earlier agreed that a federal mediator would try to resolve the issues should either side reject the fact finder's report.

Shipe said in the union's news release that 99% of members rejected the fact finder's recommendations for a new agreement. The exact vote count wasn't released.

"Through their vote, Akron educators sent a strong and unified message that they will continue to put student and staff safety first," Shipe said in the news release.

"Teachers, administrators, students and parents know" schools are not safe, she said in the release. "We will not stay silent any longer."

Teachers and other staff members raised the issue of aggressive student misbehavior and school safety at a school board meeting earlier this month.

But Shipe, president of the Akron Education Association union, has declined to say whether student behavior and discipline has been a sticking point in contract talks, which hit an impasse earlier this year.

Akron Education Association union members have been working under terms of their old contract since it expired June 30.

With the rejection of the fact finder's agreement, the teachers and other licensed staff members — including school counselors — reserve the right to strike, which would require a 10-day notice. That notice has not been issued at this time.

Shipe has said she cannot publicly discuss the fact finder's recommendations. Shipe also declined to say whether the union trustees or the union's negotiating team recommended the fact finder's recommendations be rejected.

## **What Akron teachers are saying about school safety**

Six licensed staff members spoke out at the Nov. 7 school board meeting, saying district leaders are not listening to teachers regarding classroom safety. Their comments echoed comments reported in the Beacon Journal about a year ago, following the teachers union passing a no-confidence resolution in the then director of student services and security.

**School safety concerns:** Akron Public Schools teachers union sounding alarm over violent, disruptive student behavior

The speakers at the Nov. 7 school board meeting said while severe misbehavior is increasing, discipline has been inconsistent.

Some of the speakers said the result is a disruption in student learning and a dangerous environment for teachers. The speakers at that board meeting did not discuss specific incidents.

Superintendent Christine Fowler Mack said at that meeting that she would work with senior-level administrators to respond "in a timely fashion" to the speakers' concerns. She said she

looked forward to reviewing the matter.

Last year, union members met with a reporter to discuss various incidents, sounding the alarm over spikes in student violence, including assaults on teachers.

The contract covering the teachers and other licensed staff covers a variety of compensation and job responsibilities, including salaries, pay increases, benefits, class sizes and working conditions.

After negotiations on a new pact reached an impasse earlier this year, the district and teachers' union agreed to have a fact finder meet with both sides and came up with the recommendations. These recommendations were the subject of a vote following a union meeting Sunday.

Shipe said then the district is not following the student code of behavior.

She said the pandemic made an already bad situation worse.

In 2018, the union demonstrated at school board meeting, calling for changes in discipline practice.

## **What APS is saying about the contract talks**

Had the union members and school board members both accepted the recommendations, a new labor agreement would have been reached.

Mark Williamson, director of marketing and communications for Akron Public Schools, said there would be no further comment from the administration until the board votes Monday.

While talks between Akron teachers and the district administrators have not been smooth in the past several contract negotiations, teachers have not gone on strike since 1989 — the first and only work stoppage in the district's history. This was after talks with a federal mediator broke down in early January of that year. Schools were closed for nine school days.

Student disciplinary procedures were an issue in the talks and an agreement on a provision setting penalties for specific disciplinary infractions helped to end the strike.

Ohio law says public teachers cannot strike unless their union first issues a 10-day notice of intent to strike.

