

Decatur Teaching Assistants may be denied a pay increase

The Decatur Federation of Teaching Assistants [union contract](#) expired about 2 months ago, on June 30th, 2023. They've been negotiating since April and have been given a "hard no" to their requests, according to Michelle Mitchell, President of DFTA, Local #4324.

The District refuses to comment on the negotiations, [per Denise Swarthout](#), the District's Communications Officer. And Board President Bill Clevenger says it would not be "appropriate" to comment during ongoing negotiations, and that "we can talk about all the issues involved" after negotiations are finished.

Mitchell spoke at Tuesday night's [board meeting](#), and interviewed on [Byers & Co](#) Wednesday morning.

Mitchell says she wants administrators to visit the schools and see all that Teaching Assistants do.

According to Mitchell, the union is asking for:

- \$2.50 raise for 1st & 2nd year TAs
- \$2.00 raise for 3rd & 4th year TAs
- Four personal days (*an increase from three*)
- Allow TAs to enroll their dependent in the same building as them
- Additional compensation for diaper-changing
- Senior assistants, who have served DPS for over 30 years get \$1,000 annual bonus for their loyalty
- Allow TAs with degrees to substitute teach, and provide additional compensation
- Extra pay for TAs who are in the Special Ed Learning Academy, Essential Skills, Calm Care (*in-school suspension*), since it's "hard to keep people in there", LPNs and the Transition Rooms
- For retired DPS teachers who return as TAs, start at a 3rd-year pay rate, rather than the 1st-year pay rate.
- Additional compensation when "classes are split"
- The *option* of year-round pay, which she says they're close to getting

Mitchell says they asked for same-school enrollment, but they were told "to our face" that they were "not a part of the community".

The District representative who told her that is now deceased, and unable to respond to the accusation, so I am withholding their name. And she says the District did not record the meeting, so I can't provide proof.

Mitchell says Pershing Early Learning & Essential Skills TAs are already changing diapers, since the District no longer requires the littles to be potty-trained before attending school.

She says the District also wants newly-hired Kindergarten and 1st-grade TAs to help with diaper changing.

Mitchell says they are "absolutely not" happy about the diaper changing. She says the district should offer a dollar amount for compensation, as it was their idea to add this responsibility.

Mitchell says she can't name a specific board member who's to blame for making negotiations difficult. She says "just the money guy, I guess" Chief Operations Officer Dr. Mike Curry.

Mitchell says "I guess he's the one who's giving the hard 'no's, youknow, because he's finagling the numbers, but yet they have a \$40 million dollar surplus, yaknow, and they have \$4 million dollars in an account over in China, that they are investing in."

She says "Invest in us. That's what we're asking them to do."

Board Member Mark Reynolds had asked about these investments during the [June 27th, 2023 Board Meeting](#).

The [June 27th Board Packet](#) shows a ~\$10 million "cost" in "Savings Deposit Account - BANK OF CHINA (ICS - DDA)" for investments.

Dr. Mike Curry told Reynolds that's something "PMA works with" and that "PMA is our investment account," saying "they hold

most of our money" and that DPS "runs most of their money through an investment account, and then we reach out and claim some of that money for payroll and bills. And then we entrust them to make deposits and investments, based on their expertise."

Tuesday's [Meeting Packet](#) shows a ~\$43 million Education Fund balance as of July 31st. This is a \$10 million increase from the June 30th balance reported at the August 1 [Finance Committee Meeting](#).

Mitchell says "I am aware of issues with [the] Security [union]," SEIU Local 73, but declined to comment on it. The [Security contract](#) also expired on June 30, 2023.

We've sent a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Request for more information about union negotiations.

Mitchell says "we're hoping to avoid a strike."