



Drive Up Standards

NEWSLETTER

Connecting School Bus & Transit Workers From Coast to Coast

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Driving Up Standards for Omaha Teamsters

How Denyele's Yard Got and Stayed Organized

There are few challenges more difficult than winning union representation, but the story of how the school bus workers at Omaha & Millard School District's bus yards fought to protect their union when a new company came to town is an indication that the benefits and protections that come with a union contract are worth fighting for.

Before workers joined Local 554, the conditions were less than ideal, to say the least. The company regularly shaved route time and cut hours. The buses were not regularly cleaned. The workers did not get regular raises, and when they took special trips, such as football games or field trips, they were paid minimum wage. Rather than awarding hours through seniority, shifts were decided either arbitrarily or through favoritism. Perhaps worst of all, workers could be fired for any reason whatsoever, and they had no voice on the job.

Scott Bush is a Teamster school bus organizer, and he said worker mistreatment is typical in the industry.

"The biggest thing for me is protection and having your voice heard when there is an issue. A lot of times management treats bus people like they're a dime a dozen," Bush said. "They often have no respect for people who work for them, and they terminate workers

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STANDING TOGETHER AS TEAMSTERS THROUGH IT ALL

By Denyele Morris, Local 554



I am a school bus driver and assistant shop steward with Teamsters Local 554 in Omaha, Nebraska. I transferred from a Teamster First Student bus yard in Hesperia, California to First Student of Omaha, Nebraska. Our bus yards in Omaha and Millard have been organized since May of 2008, when over 600 bus drivers, monitors and mechanics vote to join the Teamsters in a landslide victory.

The Teamster shop stewards at the East Base Omaha yard were very strong in standing together. They approached me right away about joining the Teamsters Union. I signed an application as soon as I received it, because I knew the benefits of working under a Teamster contract firsthand: we have higher pay rates with yearly raises, even when other drivers in the area may be in a rate freeze. We have seniority, which prevents the company from distributing work based on favoritism. We have a "just cause" provision in our collective bargaining agreement, along with a progressive discipline policy and a grievance procedure set in place that helps to resolve differences and protects workers from wrongfully being disciplined or even fired.

First Student of Omaha, Nebraska learned quickly that the Teamsters

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The Bus Organizing Basics

For 50,000 or so Teamster members, we know first-hand the benefits of becoming a union member. But for many of us, we started working at a Teamster bus yard long after our yard was first organized and well into a contract. Our fellow members that were there from the start know how confusing and daunting the process can seem, especially if your employer doesn't want a union around. Be sure to thank the more senior members at your bus yard that helped to form your union. Thanks to them, you have the benefits and protections that come with a union contract.

Within our industry, we are often working in the same communities as bus workers employed by non-union companies. They should have the same right to a strong contract with good benefits and wages. You can help them by talking to them about the process and letting them know you (and your union) will have their backs. Here are some basic questions that unorganized bus workers often ask:

Q: I think we could use a union on our yard. How do we go about becoming Teamsters?

The first thing you should do is contact the union and let the representatives know that you are interested in joining. They have professional staff that can help you form your union. The Teamsters will help you start reaching out to workers at your yard to assess their interest in joining the union.

Workers who are interested in joining will form an organizing committee. The organizing committee is the key to a successful organizing campaign because working together is always better than trying to go it alone. The committee will educate fellow workers on the benefits of union membership. Once a majority of the workers at the yard are interested in joining, the Teamsters will file for an election with the National Labor Relations Board, a federal government body that, oversees union elections. An election date will be set, and then you're off to the races to encourage your coworkers to vote to join the union.

Q: Why do committee members and union representatives do house calls?

The union does house calls because they give the workers more privacy. In the beginning of an organizing campaign, you may need to keep a very low profile in order to prevent your employer from harassing or intimidating you and your coworkers. If the company finds out about the organizing campaign before you've had a chance to talk to your coworkers, it will be easier for them to stop the organizing drive by scaring and intimidating workers away from union membership. Workers are often scared that if management hears them talking about the union on the job they will get fired. House calls allow workers to communicate about issues that matter to them without any pressure from management. During

house calls, committee members and union organizers educate workers about their right to organize.

The other reason to talk to workers at home is quite simple: individual, face-to-face communication is the best way for you to make your case for joining a union because it provides an opportunity for workers to share their personal stories and understand why the union is needed at their workplace.

Q: Why does management host mandatory "captive audience meetings?"

The laws governing the rules between labor unions and companies are spelled out in the National Labor Relations Act, or the NLRA. Under the NLRA, your employer cannot fire you or threaten your continued employment for your decision to join a union. They can, however, force you to attend a meeting where they tell you why you shouldn't join. These are called "captive audience meetings."

During captive audience meetings, management will try to convince you that they are on your side. They will probably say that your interests are the same as theirs, and that everyone is just part of one big, happy family. The truth is they are trying to trick you into believing that it's in your best interest to believe that a union is not needed.

You probably have good relationships with a lot of your managers on the job, and they're not bad people. But the truth is that

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the company is in business to make money, and if making money means paying you less and providing fewer benefits, that is what they will do. The company makes money because of your hard work, and the only guarantee of keeping good wages and increasing your benefits is a union contract—not management’s empty promises.

Q: What are the benefits of membership?

The idea of a union is that by coming together with our fellow workers, we have a greater ability to improve conditions at the work site. By becoming a member of the Teamsters, you’ve given yourself strong representation and a voice on the job to fight for better pay, benefits, conditions, safety, and job security.

The biggest benefit of union membership is the right to negotiate a contract through the process of collective bargaining. By coming together with one voice, you have

the power to demand that your employer commit to improvements such as pay raises, benefits, better working conditions, and higher safety standards. If the company violates the contract after it’s been agreed upon, they are in the wrong and workers can fight back through a grievance procedure.

The other big benefit of union representation is a voice on the job and professionals that have your back. With a union, you will have dedicated representatives you can go to with your concerns to improve your job; without that, your working conditions can be decided on a whim by the company. Unions provide protection from management: under a union contract you have job security. An employer must show “just cause” for termination. Without a union, you can be fired at any time for any reason.

The cold, hard fact is that union members are better off than workers doing the same job in a non-union setting. Union

employees make an average of 30 percent more than non-union workers, and union members are far less likely to be injured in a workplace-related accident.

Q: Who runs the union?

With the Teamsters, the workers are the union. Working with your local, you decide what’s important in your contract, you vote to approve that contract, you elect your own officers, and you vote on actions taken by your local. The union is not a “third party,” it is a democratic body made up of workers just like you. You are the union!

Business agents, shop stewards, elected officers, and all other union officials are there to work on your behalf, but it’s ultimately on you to decide what you want your job to be like. At the end of the day, it’s on all of us to stand up for ourselves; the union is a tool that makes that possible.

Standing Together *continued from page 1*

of Local 554 would always stand in solidarity to enforce our contract, no matter how small the violation! I had three grievances, all of which I won, including back pay plus my end of the year bonuses.

As a union member, I spent a lot of time listening and learning about the issues my coworkers were facing in the yard. Pretty soon, people were coming to me with their concerns when they wanted to know something about the contract. My stewards noticed that, so when there was an opening, they wanted me for the position. I became an assistant shop steward in February of 2014. I took the position on because I like helping my co-workers and fighting for what is right.

First Student of Omaha lost the contract with Omaha Public Schools/Millard School districts to Student Transportation of America, Inc. (STA) in January of 2013. After five years with First Student, the first three fighting for what was fair and safe, having to work with a new company and a new collective bargaining agreement could have been very disheartening.

As Teamster union members, we stood together, though. We re-organized the committee and got to work

reminding all the employees how we benefited from a collective bargaining agreement. When we faced problems like being short-staffed or the company making payroll errors, my co-workers and I were ready to go on delegations to management and remind them of their obligations under our union contract.

I was usually the steward that went to management and said, “Hey, this is what our contract says.” I didn’t mind being an enforcer I really liked it. I was there to fight for the people, because at the end of the day, my co-workers needed to know that they have someone that’s willing to back them up. We stayed strong by talking to our coworkers and reminding them of the importance of being a union member – this is important because it causes people to really think about how a union benefits them.

We still have issues with STA sometimes, and our jobs aren’t perfect. But with a Teamster contract, we have a way to enforce the rules that are designed to protect us and improve our jobs. As Teamster school bus members, we know that by standing in solidarity, we can continue to enforce the CBA, win grievances, and have fair and safe bus yards!

Tips on Bargaining a Strong Contract at Your Yard

By Gary Kumpa, Sue Knapp, and Lori Monroig, Local 1205



Collective bargaining is what happens when an employer and a group of workers meet to negotiate the conditions of employment. These include, but are not limited to: wages, working hours, overtime, holidays, sick leave, vacation time, retirement benefits, health care, training, grievance methods, and any management rights. Teamsters who have all been on negotiating committees at one point or another, we understand that it is a great honor and responsibility to be a part of this process. It's important to understand, though, that the single most important factor in the process is the membership.

Every local bargains differently, but there are a few things you can expect to go through during the negotiating process:

Formation of the negotiating committee: Bargaining unit committees are made up of workers from every classification in the bargaining unit. The committee should be well informed going into negotiations, with knowledge of wage chronology, wage rates, average hours worked, and a list of specific guarantees from the membership. Members of the negotiating committee are often chosen by the bargaining unit, and in addition to negotiating the contract, they serve as intermediaries between the negotiating parties and the membership. For this reason it is important that the negotiating committee is in constant communication with the membership during contract negotiations.

Survey of the bargaining unit in order to engage the membership: Workers jointly decide their priorities for bargaining. This can be done through contract surveys or contract proposal meetings where members express the issues that are most important to them. The committee then prioritizes all of this information and puts it into the union contract proposal. It's important to be active during this process because the more the members get involved, the better the chances are of the contract passing. You should get as many members as you can to participate in the survey.

Contract Negotiations: A ratified contract legally binds both sides—management and workers—to the contract terms. In negotiations, there is a process by which the union and the company go back and forth with proposals and counter-proposals. During negotiations, the committee reviews the counter-proposals that

are put forward by the company. It is the committee's job to inform the bargaining unit about these proposals and make recommendations about what the next steps should be. The more informed the membership is, the more mobilized they will be, and the more you can get at the bargaining table.

One way to keep the membership updated about negotiations is to hold regular meetings. Locals often have their members spread throughout a large area, and meetings during negotiations give everyone a chance to be heard by union leadership. Meetings are also effective for members to voice concerns to one another and hear about what's happening (or not happening) from within the company and from within the different yards.

Vote by the negotiating committee: Members of the bargaining unit will have a dedicated union official or lawyer in bargaining sessions with the employer, and the committee will vote to accept or reject the contract proposal. Typically, if the agreement is accepted by the negotiating committee, it is to be put out to the rank and file for ratification.

Ratification Vote: When the union and the negotiating committee believe they have reached a tentative agreement on a contract, they will put it out to vote by the membership to see if it is something they want to accept or reject. It is crucial that the negotiating committee get out to the membership during this time and educate them about why they should vote for the contract. Make sure that your co-workers understand what they are voting for!

If the membership rejects the proposed contract, the union and the committee then notify the company and inform them that the offer has been rejected, and the two parties must negotiate a new contract. If it is accepted by the membership, they then ratify the contract and work by the stated terms and conditions.

Engaging the membership doesn't stop after the contract is ratified. It is important that stewards and committee members hold regular meetings with fellow members to make sure that everyone understands the contract, the grievance process, and their rights as union members. It is very important to maintain solidarity throughout the negotiations process and the life of the contract. Your union brothers and sisters will be with you every step of the way.



The Dog Days of Summer: Unemployment Advice for School Bus Members

By Phyllis Pepper, Local 777

Hello my fellow Teamster members!

Are you ready for summer vacation?

The 2016-2017 school year is finally coming to a close. For many of us, we'll be off for three months, and there are some im-

portant questions to consider. Can you afford to be off for three months? Can you/will you receive unemployment benefits? Will you get a route in the summer? These are all things to consider as you prepare for the school break.

At our base, First Student of South Holland, Illinois, most of the drivers that want to work will be able to find a route during the summer months. Sometimes the attendants are not that lucky, but we always make sure that our employer has the best phone number to reach us in case a new route becomes available. If you're interested in working during the summer, make sure you check with your shop steward to see if routes are available.

If your yard does not have routes available during the summer months, you may be eligible for unemployment insurance. While not all states offer this for school bus workers, it's important that you find out by asking your local. Unemployment eligibility rules vary from state to state, but typically you are eligible as long you are a) unemployed through no fault of your own, and b) not a full-time student. When you go to file, it's important that you bring your Social Security card, a photo ID, your work history from the past 18 months, and any other additional documentation required by your state. It can take a couple of weeks to process your application, so make sure you apply as soon as possible.

If you have any additional questions about filing for unemployment, you can contact your local or go to unemploymentapply.com. I'd like to wish everyone a safe and beautiful summer. See you all in the new school year!

Omaha Teamsters

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without proper cause.”

There was a great deal of interest in the Teamsters at the Omaha bus yards. Workers were showing up to meetings with twice as many, sometimes three times as many people as they had promised to turn out, so the organizers and the committee got to work educating everyone in the bus yard about the benefits of union membership.

For the members of Local 554, they knew that the best way to prepare for a new company taking over was to do the same kind of talking and educating that they did during their initial effort to become Teamsters. Their efforts paid off. Although Student Transportation of America had a spotty record when it came to respecting the workers and their union, the company agreed to recognize the collective bargaining agreement (CBA) in Omaha.

Building power at your union bus yard and securing a strong contract is a never-ending job. Your local representatives, stewards and active members are there to help you keep your group together. The members of Local 554 set a great example of how the hard work can pay off. Interested in doing the same at your location? Reach out to your local today!



TEAMSTER ★
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How do we keep our union growing strong? By building political power, one member at a time, at every Teamster local union across North America.

Interested in joining DRIVE?
Talk to your local union.



Another Year of Driving Up Standards – Our Year in Review

By Rick Middleton, Teamster Passenger Transportation Division Director

Teamster Brothers and Sisters,

It's been another big school year for Teamster bus members across North America. While we continue to provide the safest and most reliable service in the passenger transportation industry, we are doing our part to drive up standards even more! By bringing more members into the union, we are allowing more bus workers to know the benefits and security that come with a union contract. Speaking of which, let me congratulate all of the members of bargaining committees across the country for the work you did to deliver industry-leading CBAs.

In Lockport, N.Y., Local 449 members fought hard for their first contract with Student Transportation of America (STA) that gives them a 62 percent wage increase over the life of the contract. In Santa Rosa, Fla., Local 991 members finally won their hard-fought, three year battle for recognition with Durham School Service. The list goes on and on.

Growing our membership is the driving force to stronger contracts and a louder voice in this industry, but it also means real improvements in the daily lives of our members. That is why I am proud of the partnership that has been forged between the Teamsters, FirstGroup America and the U.S. Military. We will be working together to identify and place servicemen and women and their family members in good Teamster jobs at FirstGroup bus yards all over the country. It is an honor to be part of a program that will be truly supporting our veterans and their families.

The Teamsters are on the cutting edge when it comes to global union solidarity, and nowhere is that more true than in the passenger transportation industry. In December, General President James P. Hoffa attended a meeting of the International Transport Workers Federation (ITF) in Brussels, Belgium on behalf of our bus members. Mr. Hoffa spoke with labor leaders from all over the world about global strategies to take on some of the worst actors in the transportation industry wherever they operate. Large, multinational transit corporations are making up more of the industry, so our General President is taking the lead in redefining global solidarity with our friends and colleagues around the world.

On behalf of the General President and all of the Teamsters Joint Councils and local unions that support you, let me thank you for the work you do every day. While you focus on keeping your passengers safe, we are focused on you and your wellbeing. That is why it is with great pleasure that I announce the creation of the Teamster Passenger Transportation Division, dedicated solely to you. You now have staff in Washington, D.C. and representatives in the field that are committed to supporting you and your local union.

With these kinds of resources behind us, we are eager to push forward into the future together, and dedicate ourselves to driving up standards at bus yards all over North America!

Yours Truly,

Rick Middleton

P.S. We are in the process of re-vamping our website, so be sure to check us out at driveupstandards.org!

Have a question or story idea?
Email us at
driveupstandards1@gmail.com

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