



NEWS FROM

# Teamsters Local 891

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## TEAMSTERS AT FIRST STUDENT IN HINDS COUNTY TO STRIKE ON THURSDAY

*Workers Seeking Comparable Wages To Other Mississippi First Student Drivers*

(Jackson, Miss.)—First Student bus drivers in Hinds County will go on strike at 4 a.m. Thursday, said W.C. 'Willie' Smith, President of Teamsters Local 891.

"A strike is not what we want, but we are being forced to do this by First Student and Hinds County School Board," Smith said. "The Hinds County school superintendent is already trying to take applications for replacement drivers and will pay higher wages and offered them health insurance and pension benefits trying to demoralize the drivers not solving the problems for the drivers and students. Our current First Student drivers have provided the county with superior service as they have safely transported our children to and from school every day. They should be fairly compensated for the extraordinary work they do. Bus Drivers are more than CDL professional Drivers. They serve as mentors, counselors, sometimes assisting as a guardian for the parents and also making sure the students are picked up and delivered safely every school day."

"The Teamsters will not strike in Clay, Madison and Yazoo counties at this time," Smith said. These counties have indicated they are going to be able to assist in reaching an agreement between First Student and Local 891. All indications are the school superintendents in these counties will be able to pay the reasonable wages requested from the drivers through First Student.

Officials from Local 891 have worked tirelessly to negotiate a fair wage increase for the 130 First Student workers in Hinds County, but on Monday, the company rejected the Local's final offer of a 50 cents an hour increase retroactive to Aug. 1, 2009, with a 30 cents an hour increase beginning Feb. 1, 2010, and 50-cent increases starting in August of the next three years. The starting wage in Hinds County for CDL Professional bus drivers is only \$10.20 per hour. The Local also asked for two paid holidays, Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday and Labor Day. Presently they are not paid any holidays.

The company has offered 30 cents an hour increase at a four-hour work day guarantee. Currently the workers have no health insurance, no paid holidays and have not had raises since August 2008. The workers are seeking their first contract as Teamsters. It would cost First Student about an additional \$100.00 dollars a day totally and the two paid holidays for all 130 drivers to settle this contract between the company and Teamsters Local 891 final offer." Local 891 has reached out for the Hinds County School Superintendent four times over the past two weeks to see if he could assist the drivers in resolving the negotiations with First Student and he has refused to contact us unlike the other three school counties", Smith said.

First Student workers in Gulfport, about 160 miles away, earn \$11.00 an hour starting salary, and are presently negotiating a contract that guarantees them higher wages and benefits that has been offered in Clay, Hinds, Madison, and Yazoo counties in central Mississippi.

"These workers all perform the same duties," Smith said. "We are asking that First Student workers in Hinds County be given comparable wages to workers in the same state performing the same job for the same company providing professional driver safety for the kids and their families."

Local 891 represents about 350 bus drivers in the four counties.