

NEWS

SF schoolbus drivers face insurance hike

Union asks school board to help expedite negotiations

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Laidlaw Transportation, which has the contract to operate school buses for the San Francisco public schools, is increasing health insurance premiums for bus drivers by as much as five times what they were paying last year, a union official said.

Brock Estes, vice chair of the United Transportation Union Local 1741, came to the school board Tuesday night asking it to help expedite the arbitration over the increase.

The SF Daily attempted to get Laidlaw's side of the story, but company officials would not return calls.

The increase hit drivers this month, and some of their paychecks — after the deduction for health care and taxes — will show a net of zero dollars, he said. In fact, he said he thinks some employees will owe Laidlaw money.

He didn't provide dollar figures.

While the bus drivers work for Laidlaw, and not the district, Estes is asking the board to pressure the transportation company to speed up the arbitration over the increase. Arbitration could take a year or longer, he said, and during that time the increase will be in effect.

Estes said he fears the increase will cause drivers to quit, which will eventually reduce the number of students who are taken to school by bus. This could have a major impact on children who are physically handicapped and can't walk to school.

Estes said many of the drivers live in the East Bay, and the health care increase coupled with the Bay Bridge toll increase from \$4 to \$5 will cause them to quit and find jobs closer to home.