



by Andrew Weber
KUT NEWS



Austin's police union, city agree to a \$218 million, five-year labor contract



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(AUSTIN, TX) - Austin's police union and the city agreed in principle Monday to a five-year labor contract.

The \$218 million deal, which comes after years of occasionally contentious negotiations, would give police officers a 28% raise over the next five years. The complete details have not yet been made available to the public.

Austin City Council is expected to vote on the contract Oct. 10.

Austin Mayor Kirk Watson said in a statement the new deal extends an olive branch to police officers, while incorporating provisions of the Austin Police Oversight Act, a measure voters passed last year to expand civilian oversight of APD.

"It's a new day for our officers with the Austin Police Department as I am hopeful our Austin Police Association members will understand the City's support of them, particularly as it relates to pay and benefits," Watson said. "I've stood firm in saying that a long-term contract is in the

best interest of our community, as well as for our officers, to ensure we can fill vacancies as well as retain officers."

APD has struggled to retain officers over the last five years. At last update, it had more than 350 vacancies in patrol positions.

Watson vowed to get a contract done this year. The city had a deal under previous City Manager Spencer Cronk in 2023, but City Council rejected it because it didn't take into consideration the forthcoming vote on whether to increase police oversight.

That referendum

passed by a 4-to-1 margin, expanding the role of the citizen-led Office of Police Oversight by giving it access to previously confidential police files documenting complaints against officers.

The tentative contract lengthens the timeline for police disciplinary action and allows the Office of Police Oversight to investigate anonymous complaints. In his statement, Watson said those provisions are "a first for the State of Texas, if not the nation."

Chris Harris, a board member with Equity Action — the nonprofit that helped put the Austin Po-

lice Oversight Act on the ballot last year — said the process to reach the deal hasn't been transparent. For one, Harris said, the language hasn't been made available to the public yet — and hasn't been available throughout the year-plus negotiation process, unlike during contract negotiations in 2017, 2018 and 2022.

"Unfortunately, when you keep things secret, that ... implies that there's something that you have to hide," Harris said. "That gives us a really good reason to believe that there is language in here that they don't want the public to

see."

Harris and others have specifically been concerned about confidential police discipline files. For years, the department has kept private complaints leveled against police officers that didn't result in disciplinary action. A judge ruled this month that the city must release those files after a lawsuit from Equity Action, but it's unclear how the contract would address that ruling.

Harris said City Council's vote Oct. 10 could be a drawn out affair, depending on what the contract says about the employment files.

Harris was one of more than 150 Austinites who testified over a seven-hour stretch against the city's 2017 police labor contract. The vote on that contract was ultimately delayed, and the city later incorporated changes based on that marathon testimony.

"If there were things that were problematic, it could've been surfaced in advance ... and potentially changed or renegotiated at the bargaining table," he said. "If there is some big showdown at City Hall over this, city staff will have no one to blame but themselves."

On the anniversary of the desegregation of Little Rock Central High, Black students still attend racially segregated K-12 schools.

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a year of relentless harassment, isolation, and even physical violence at the hands of their white peers.

Elizabeth Eckford, whose iconic image of her walking alone through a hostile crowd remains etched in history, spoke about the obligation of the moment:

"Somewhere along the line, staying at Central High became an obligation. I realized that what we were doing was not for ourselves," she told Newsweek in 1997.

Violent Opposition to Integration Was Common

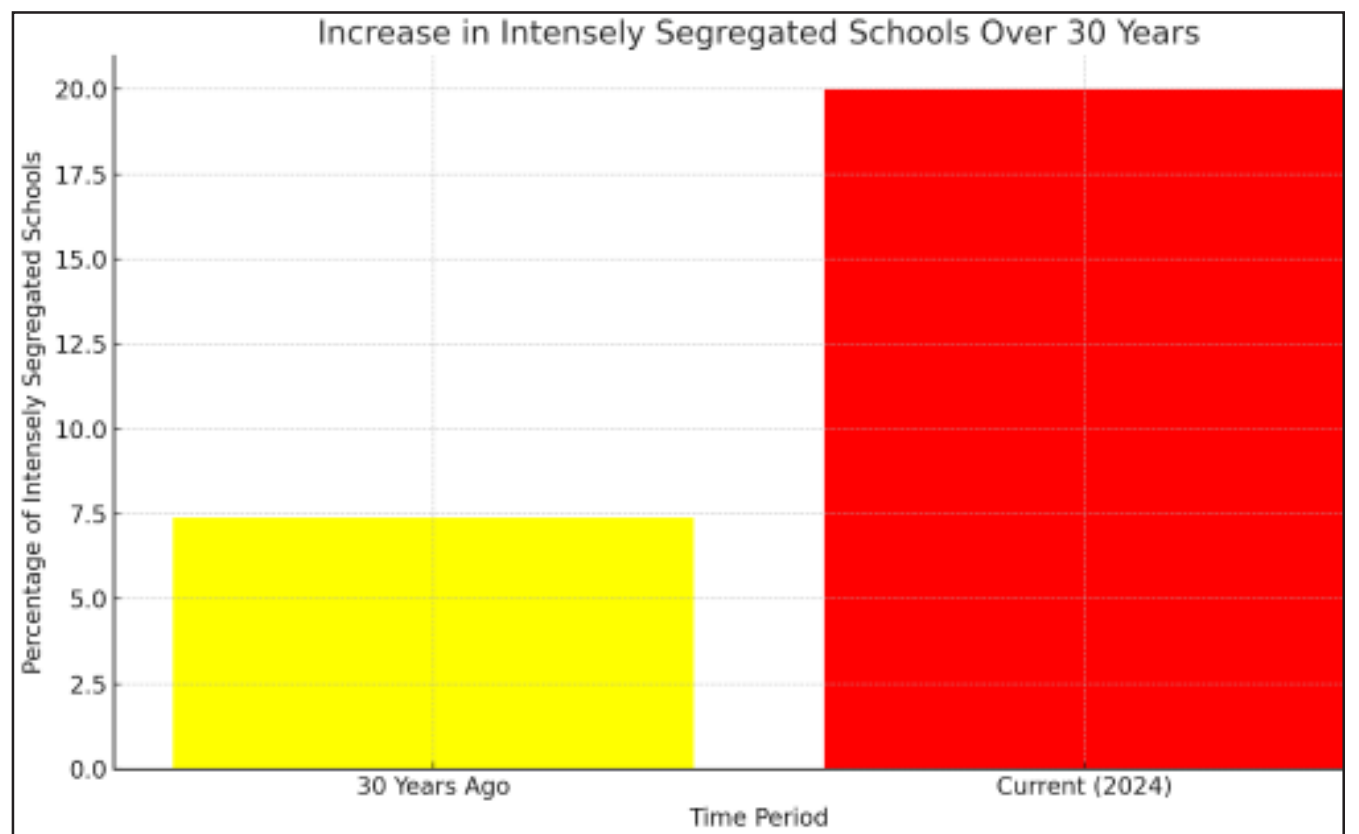
What the Little Rock Nine went through wasn't an isolated incident. In 1956, 12 Black students integrated Clinton High School in Clinton, Tennessee, becoming the first to desegregate a public high school in the South. The Clinton 12 faced violent resistance from segregationists in the town, and tensions escalated to the point that the school was bombed in 1958 by white supremacists in retaliation for the integration.

In 1959, public schools were shut down in Prince Edward County, Virginia, for five years to prevent integration, leaving Black students without formal education. Black families created makeshift classrooms in homes and churches until the schools were forced to reopen under a federal mandate.

In 1960, Ruby Bridges, at just 6 years old, became the first Black child to desegregate an all-white elementary school in the South. Bridges also faced threats, taunts, and isolation. For an entire year, her teacher taught her in an empty classroom.

Segregation in Today's K-12 Schools

Significant change happened for Black people in all Southern states after the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was enforced. At its high point in the 1980s, 43% of Black Southern students attended schools with white students, up from 0% when the Brown decision was decided in 1954.



The bar chart represents the increase in intensely segregated schools (with zero to 10% white students) over the past 30 years. According to data from the Civil Rights Project at UCLA, the proportion has nearly tripled, rising from 7.4% to 20%, reflecting the growing issue of segregation in U.S. schools.

However, a 2024 report by the Civil Rights Project at UCLA found schools in the United States are more segregated now than they were in the late 1960s. Only 16% of Black Southern students attend schools with white students.

Nationwide, Black students in the present day are often concentrated in underfunded schools with fewer resources, overcrowded classrooms, and limited access to advanced courses and extracurricular opportunities.

Segregation today is highest in our nation's big cities, where Black students attend schools with an average of more than 80% non-white classmates.

An Ongoing Fight for Equality

The courage of the Little Rock Nine reminds us of the need for continued advocacy and reform in our educational system and that the fight for equality is ongoing — and is intersectional.

"Over the last 30 years, the proportion of schools that were intensely segregated (with zero to 10% whites) has nearly tripled, rising from 7.4% to 20%," researchers at the UCLA Civil Rights Project found. "These schools are now doubly segregated by race and poverty with an average of 78% poor students."

From ensuring equitable funding to dismantling discriminatory practices, the work to provide all students—especially Black students—with the education they deserve is far from complete.

As Carlotta Walls-LaNier, one of the Little Rock Nine, put it: "The road to success was through education. That's the step I took at the age of 14 in signing that little sheet of paper to go to Little Rock Central High School. Any opportunity that comes along, whether it's a crack in the door or the door's wide open, you're supposed to go through it."