FAQ: 2019 Tentatively Agreed to Contracts and Ratification Process
Updated 11/14/19

Teacher CBA

Question: Can the District move from a self-insured health plan and negotiate a better deal with another provider?
Answer: The District is self-insured because this is the cheapest option. Our plan is reviewed every quarter, and districts must bid providers every year. Blue Cross of Alabama is not Polk's insurance company. The School Board of Polk County is our insurance company, and Blue Cross of Alabama provides the billing structure for our plan. Over the last few years, our plan has incurred many high dollar claims like cancer treatments, catastrophic events, and life enhancing medicines. Being self-insured allows the District to locally control premiums, deductibles, and copays. PEA has been successful in negotiating lower insurance premiums with Polk being only 1 of 3 counties in Florida to have a $0 employee premium. On average, health insurance premiums for individuals under an employer’s plan rose 4% from last year to this year with family coverage increasing by 5%. Those insurance increases have outpaced growth in average wages and inflation. In good years (before these last couple) the District saved money on the insurance plan, but in bad years we tap into our reserves. Now our reserves are running dry due to multiple high claim years.

Question: Why aren’t experience levels automatically given at the beginning of the school year?
Answer: Polk, as well as most of the districts in Florida, do not have automatic annual salary level increases for years of experience. Salaries are negotiated every year.

Question: How does the lesson plan page maximums apply to all teachers?
Answer: Elementary teachers, regardless of how many subjects they may teach, cannot be required to have more than 5 pages of plans a week (about 1 page for everything per day). Secondary teachers cannot be required to have more than 5 pages of plans a week per course taught (about 1 page per day per course). This language is a restriction on administration and what they can require.

Question: What is going on with pay frequency?
Answer: PEA and the District want to move toward a bi-monthly pay system (two checks a month). During our negotiations, possible issues were discussed by both sides. It was agreed to that a pay frequency committee would be convened with the SAP programmer to work out these issues. PEA wants to offer current employees the option of staying on monthly pay if they choose to not transition to bi-monthly pay. This with other possible issues is why the committee language was decided. Both sides have a tentative goal date for a bi-monthly pay frequency by August 2021.

Question: What happens if the bargaining unit votes “NO” on the ratification of the contract?
Answer: A “NO” vote would bring the bargaining teams from both sides back to the table but bringing both sides back to the table doesn’t change our current financial situation. Your bargaining team isn’t happy with a deal that includes a salary freeze for this school year, but we feel we made the best deal possible with the limited amount of resources available. Other districts were able to give a raise, but they are in different situations from Polk. Some districts passed local millage referenda that is providing the extra money for, while other districts have a much healthier fund balance; and that’s where their raise money is being pulled. Salaries PEA has been urging the Board to put a millage referendum on the 2020 ballot since the summer, and PEA has successfully brought the Polk’s fund balance down to just below 4%. Over the last couple negotiation years, the fund balance has been bank rolling employee raises, but it’s no longer viable to keep pulling from our fund balance. The state mandates that the fund balance cannot drop below 3%.
FAQ: 2019 Tentatively Agreed to Contracts and Ratification Process
Updated 11/14/19

Question: Why can’t LSI spending and other related spending be used for salaries?
Answer: Most of these programs are paid out of categorical line items from the State. Categorical line items have restrictions on what that money can be used for, and salaries/benefits come out of the general fund. The general fund is made up of money from the State’s Base Student Allocation (BSA). There is also earmarked money in the BSA (ie. This year’s best and brightest bonus scheme and the Turnaround School Supplements are some of the bigger examples).

Question: Would a “Work to the Rule” campaign be effective in creating pressure for more funding towards salaries?
Answer: “Working to the Rule” means that staff walk into their worksite at the start of their duty day and walk out right when their duty day ends; no extra work is done while the employee is off the clock (no at home grading, emails, plans, phone calls, unpaid tutoring, unpaid before/after school programs etc). A “Work to the Rule” campaign has the potential to affect real change, but most employees must be on board for the campaign to be successful. Working only during your contracted hours would show parents and other stakeholders how many unpaid hours are worked on behalf of students and their schools. The messaging to parents and other stakeholders would need to be clear, so they can direct their frustration to the appropriate State and Local Representatives. Those folks are the people with the real power, and they control the purse strings. A “Work to the Rule” campaign would probably be most effective right before and during the Legislative Session which starts January 14, 2020.

Question: If I choose to opt out of the insurance, can the district pay my premium cost back to me?
Answer: No. In order to make the plan affordable for all, the Board must pay all premiums they contribute into the plan. Plan coverage is free to every employee, and with coverage, you have access to the free employee clinics and their many services.

Para CBA

Question: What is happening with Network Manager Paras?
Answer: The District had proposed a new job description with experience criteria/levels, but those criteria/levels didn’t have any pay associated with them. PEA told the District that we would need an actual proposal tied with money. The District removed their job description since they didn’t have the money in the general fund to restructure the Network Manager Para description. The Task Force was created under a previous Superintendent and hasn’t been convened in a few years. PEA recognizes that the Network Manager situation between the teacher and para units must be addressed.

Question: Do paras have the right to refuse a subbing job?
Answer: Under our current contract, paras have the right to refuse a sub job if an unfilled job is not provided.

Question: For Sick Leave Buy Back, what rate will be used for paras?
Answer: The para’s own daily rate will be used to calculate Sick Leave Buy Back.