July 19, 2021 CONTACT: Stephanie Yocum- President PEA, polk@floridaea.org or 863-533-0908

The Polk Education Association and the Polk County Public School district staff met today for their first bargaining session of the 2021-2022 school year. The productive meeting included a few early wins for both sides. Tentative agreements were reached for terminal pay for both the para and ESP contracts, raising the hourly payout from 50% to 100% after 13 years of service.

Both sides also agreed to the creation of two separate subcommittees for the TSIA (Teacher Salary Increase Allocation) funds and the Para/ESP pay.

PEA is looking forward to working closely with district personnel on the Para/ESP pay. The proposal from the district includes compressing levels to an $11 base with a 2% increase for those already making that amount. PEA contends this is NOT a living wage for our support staff and are hoping that in the subcommittee we will be able to come up with something that provides a living wage for our support staff NOW. The subcommittee's first conversation will happen at the district office tomorrow, July 20th from 2 pm-5 pm.

With the complicated four part formula handed down by the state, the TSIA subcommittee has a daunting task ahead. Their first meeting will be Wednesday at the district office from 10 am-1 pm.

Open conversations took place regarding several other issues including supplements, health insurance, planning time at turnaround schools, and the potential pathways for dealing with quarantined students.

Also of note, Mr. Heid, the new Superintendent of Polk County Public Schools, was in attendance and actively participated in the discussion.

Polk Education Association President Stephanie Yocum stated at the close of today's negotiations, "Our bargaining committee feels that the open conversation was refreshing and we are hopeful that this first session signals a renewed partnership between our union and the district bargaining team."

The next bargaining meeting will be this Thursday, July 22nd from 12 pm -4 pm at the PEA office at 730 E Davidson St, Bartow, FL 33830. This meeting will again be open to the public and live streamed on the PEA YouTube channel at https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCGE9V6YpsnGFm--2ajwxrw.

The Polk Education Association is the union representing teachers, paraeducators, and secretary-clerical personnel who work for Polk County Public Schools. Connect with PEA on Facebook and YouTube.