July 29, 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 another bargaining session of the 2021-2022 school year. Two tentative agreements were reached on the Para and ESP salaries and schedules for the upcoming school year.

Once presented as part of the final contract proposals and duly ratified by the bargaining units and the School Board, these agreements will include raising the base pay for both bargaining units to $11/hour, which will require some level compression, and the levels will no longer equate to “years of experience.” The agreement will also include a 2% increase on their current salary levels except for those who have already reached or surpassed the 2% with the new minimum and those who are on Board-approved unpaid leave who will receive their raise upon active employment as long as there is no break in service. Those who are already at the top of the salary schedule will also receive a 3% increase added to their current salary in addition to the 2% for a total of a 5% raise.

Both sides agreed to a two-year trial for automatic annual level increases for both bargaining units for employees who have worked at least one day over half of their contracted days. A stipulation was also put in place that this agreement will be revisited if the district’s financial situation changes.

Work on an MOU for the beginning of the year and school reopening began. Many issues were flagged for follow-up pending the district’s call with the FDOE tomorrow with Mr. Heid again being actively involved in today’s bargaining session.

Polk Education Association President Stephanie Yocum stated at the close of today's negotiations, "This tentative agreement for automatic level increases for our support staff for the next two school years is an important first step in our struggle to provide a living wage to all Paras and ESPs and honor the value they bring to Polk County schools."

The Para/ESP salary subcommittee will be meeting to discuss other issues regarding pay grades and job descriptions on Tuesday Aug. 3rd. The TSIA subcommittee is looking at dates to meet on the week of August 10th.

The next bargaining meeting which will focus on the reopening MOU will be Monday, August 2nd from 12:30 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/UCGE9V6YPsnGFkn-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.