

## **District reaches tentative agreement with teachers, educational support professionals to increase salaries**

All teachers and educational support professionals (ESPs) in Alachua County Public Schools will receive salary increases this year based on a tentative agreement reached by negotiators for both the district and the Alachua County Education Association (ACEA), which represents those employees.

Under the agreement, salaries for teachers would rise another 2% in addition to the 1.5% 'step' increases that nearly all teachers are also receiving for this year. Steps are annual salary increases based on years of experience and performance evaluations.

Many teachers will also receive additional pay increases based on such factors as where they teach and any supplemental activities they take on, such as coaching, serving as department heads, sponsoring certain clubs, etc.

An additional \$300,000 has been set aside for teacher bonuses. The ACEA will determine how to distribute those funds, with the plan to be approved by the School Board.

The new agreement, along with annual step increases, represents a total boost in pay for most teachers of 9% over the last two years. During the last school year, the average teacher salary of \$45,215 placed ACPS 44<sup>th</sup> among the state's 67 school districts. That's up from a ranking of 55<sup>th</sup> in the 2017-18 school year and 62<sup>nd</sup> eight years ago. The new average teacher salary and rankings for ACPS and all Florida districts will be calculated at the end of the school year.

The district's ESPs, a group which includes paraprofessionals, food service workers, custodians, clerical staff and many other employees will receive a salary increase of 60 cents per hour, which represents an average of about 4.3%. That brings the minimum wage to \$11.57 an hour, an increase of more than 8% over the last two years.

"Our teams worked very hard and we're pleased that salaries have continued to increase over time," said Sande Calkins, the ACEA's chief negotiator for ESPs. "This is a particularly significant increase for people at the lower end of the salary scale."

Unlike most Florida districts, ACPS covers the entire cost of health insurance premiums for all full-time and half-time employees, including significant year-to-year rate increases. This year that benefit amounts to more than \$7000 per employee. For ESPs, the district's payment of health care premiums adds up to nearly \$3.50 an hour.

"We're pleased that we've been able to maintain that important benefit for our employees," said Kevin Purvis, Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources and co-chair of the district's negotiating team. "It's a significant amount of money that does not have to come out of their own pockets."

Increasing employee salaries has been a key element of the School Board's priorities, the goals and objectives for Superintendent Karen Clarke and the district's Strategic Plan, which call for average teacher salaries ranked among the top 2/3 of Florida districts and a 'living' wage for ESPs of \$15/hr. including health insurance benefits.

"We've made very significant strides in the past couple of years in meeting our goals for employee compensation," said Purvis. "We believe this will help us recruit and retain the high-quality teachers and staff we want for our students."

The district and ACEA continue to negotiate over language in the contract not related to salary issues. When those negotiations are completed, the ACEA will present the new contract to teachers and ESPs for ratification. The School Board would then hold a final vote on the contract.

"We are making progress in the right direction but we have a situation where salaries for educators in Florida must be radically improved," said ACEA president Carmen Ward. "My bargaining team is pleased that employees will get their raises earlier this year."

####