

BOARD OF EDUCATION AND HILLSBOROUGH EDUCATION ASSOCIATION IN MEDIATION

The Hillsborough Board of Education and the Hillsborough Education Association were unable to reach a contract settlement after five (5) months of direct negotiations and two (2) sessions with a State-appointed mediator that combined to more than 14 hours of continued negotiations. The second mediation session was scheduled for September 12, but at the Association's request and with the cooperation of the mediator and the Board's Negotiations Committee, the session was scheduled for August 14, 2019. While some progress was made, the parties were unable to reach settlement on a number of critical issues, including salary, the work day for part-time employees, tuition reimbursement criteria and the length and content of professional learning communities. On August 14 the Board made several proposals and counterproposals, all of which included competitive salary increases for all of its employees. While the Board was optimistic that a contract settlement could be reached at the second mediation session, particularly since the Association was so insistent on meeting before September 12, it was extremely disappointing that once in mediation, the Association did not change its prior bargaining position and forced the mediation session to end because it declined to make any counterproposal to the Board for settlement.

As to where we proceed from here, that decision is now in the Mediator's hands and largely depends on whether or not he feels that another session will be productive. If he does not, then the contract dispute will be sent to fact-finding, which is a formal but non-binding process that requires that a State-appointed fact-finder conduct a hearing, consider the parties' last best offers, and make recommendations for the terms of a settlement. This process will likely not conclude until well into the school year. For these reasons, the Board hopes that the Association will return to the mediation process with a commitment to settlement, which requires compromise and a mutual exchange of proposals. If the Association expresses a willingness to do so, then there may be another mediation session on September 12. Otherwise, it appears that the dispute will likely be sent to a fact-finder.

Outside of negotiations, the Board and Association are participating in Rutgers' Labor Management Collaboration Initiative, and were among the first districts in the state to do so. The Board, with considerable effort, responded last year to the Association's concerns about Aetna's health plan and customer service to its members, and switched back to Horizon in the middle of the year. The Board and Association also initiated a "Boro Pride" project to gather government and community groups in collective efforts on behalf of Hillsborough.

The Board values the employees' contributions to the District's outstanding educational and extracurricular programs. However, this must be balanced with all of the District's educational priorities and the impact of these costs on the taxpayers of Hillsborough in light of the serious financial challenges the District is facing this year and beyond. As this process moves forward, the Board continues its commitment to working cooperatively with the Association and remains optimistic that a voluntary settlement can be reached without resorting to a protracted and costly fact-finding process.

The Association's contract expired on June 30, 2019; however, the employees continue to work under the expired agreement and continue to receive their salaries, medical insurance, sick days, and all of the other benefits of the expired contract.