

## **Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Bargaining**

### **What is collective bargaining?**

Collective bargaining is the process by which a group of employees, through their union, negotiate a contract with their employer.

Ellensburg School District (ESD) conducts contract negotiations with the Ellensburg Education Association (EEA), which includes teachers, counselors and other certified staff. EEA is the local chapter of the Washington Education Association (state-wide teachers' association). The larger parent organization is the National Education Association.

ESD also negotiates contracts with the Public School Employees of Washington (PSE), which represents many, but not all, non-instructional or classified employees. ESD also negotiates contracts with the Ellensburg Administrators Association (EAA), which is the local chapter of the American Federation of School Administrators.

### **How often do school districts negotiate contracts?**

The frequency of bargaining is determined in the contract.

### **What can be negotiated in a contract?**

Unions may collectively bargain on behalf of teachers for a variety of reasons, including:

- Academic freedom; curriculum
- Wages; benefits
- Hours; workload; responsibilities
- Tenure; promotion
- Evaluation procedures
- Grievance procedures
- Retirement and pension benefits
- Vacation and sick leave

### **When did negotiations with the teachers begin in Ellensburg?**

The ESD and EEA teams began meeting in April and have met on the following dates:

- April 1
- April 21
- April 29
- May 6
- May 19
- May 31
- June 7

When no agreement was reached at the conclusion of the June 7 negotiations, a mediator was brought into the process. ESD and EEA met with a mediator on the following dates:

- Aug. 3

- Aug. 4

Mediation sessions are also scheduled for Aug. 31, and Sept. 1-2.

### **What is mediation?**

When management and the union reach an impasse in which parties cannot reach agreement, then a third party is brought in to assist the process. Mediation is voluntary.

### **Who is the mediator?**

Mediation is provided by the Public Employment Relations Commission (PERC), a state agency that regulates and provides resources for labor relations between public employers and their employees. The mediator does not advocate for either group. The focus of the mediator is to help find a solution.

### **Why hasn't the contract been resolved yet?**

Both EEA and ESD have made a variety of proposals to resolve the issues left on the table. ESD made the last proposal in mediation and EEA indicated, through the mediator, they needed to spend some time communicating with members before responding. The last verbal offer that ESD received from EEA, through the mediator focused on financial improvements. The overall cost of the proposal was a concern to the ESD team, as was the legality of some pay provisions in the offer. The ESD team provided a counter-proposal to EEA that it has asked EEA to consider in good faith. The ESD also relayed that it remains open to continuing discussions with EEA both prior to and at the next mediation session scheduled for August 31.

ESD values, recognizes and appreciates all the time and effort teachers put into their jobs to serve our students. The District also has an obligation to all ESD employees and the taxpayers of Ellensburg to be fiscally responsible. We remain hopeful that we will reach an agreement that honors both of these values.

### **What has the District offered EEA members?**

The last proposal that crossed the table on August 4 was the District's 3-year financial/salary proposal to EEA which was:

- Year 1
  - An increase of 5.5%, and
  - One paid optional day for classroom preparation prior to start of school (non-scheduled).
  - For a combined equivalent pay increase of 6.05% increase in pay.
- Year 2:
  - An increase of 2%, or the state-funded inflationary adjustment, whichever is greater
  - The paid optional day from Year 1 becomes scheduled the day before school for staff preparation activities.
- Year 3:
  - An increase of 2.5%, or state-funded inflationary adjustment, whichever is greater.
  - One additional paid optional day for professional development.
  - Startup day continues, adding a total of two paid days.

**What if an agreement isn't reached?**

By law the current contract remains in effect after its expiration while ESD and EEA continue to negotiate. ESD will continue to honor the present contract.

**Is it permissible for the District or Union to share information with the public about the bargaining process?**

The law does not prohibit sharing of fair and factual information about collective bargaining, and the bargaining teams did not make any agreements to keep information about bargaining confidential. The District and Association teams did agree that any public communications about bargaining would not be personalized. The District will continue to honor that commitment.