



## *Board of Education Column*

*By Seth Holden, Board of Education*

### **Negotiations Update**

Well, it was a long road but the Fargo Board of Education and the Fargo Education Association have come to an agreement! In my last column back in May, I described our newly adopted negotiations process and expressed the hope that this new process would lead to negotiations that produce solutions to issues in a more collaborative manner. For many of our topics, this process produced collaborative solutions.

During this negotiation cycle the Board and the FEA were able to collaboratively come up with solutions to topics such as Special Education teacher workloads, school counselor workloads, parental leave, leave bank, grievance procedures and several others. The two teams accomplished a great deal of work from February to July. However, unfortunately, there were two topics that we had a difficult time coming to an agreement on. Those topics were teacher workday and salary.

The two parties did not come to agreement on these two topics prior to the state mandated deadline of July 1, and without agreement on those two remaining topics, we found ourselves at an impasse. It was at this point that we began the impasse process. As per the negotiated agreement, the first step in the impasse process is to begin mediation. During this process, a mediation panel is created with each party selecting a mediator to represent them and a third party is to be chosen by the two chosen mediators to serve as the panel's chair. On August 23, the mediation panel met, and after nearly seven hours, the parties were still not able to come to an agreement.

The next step in the process is for the remaining topics to be brought to the North Dakota Education Fact Finding Commission. Each party submits a report to the commission, a hearing is scheduled and after that hearing, the commission provides a recommendation that the parties can use to come to an agreement. On October 21, the North Dakota Education Fact Finding Commission conducted its hearing in the South High School auditorium. After that recommendation is provided to both parties, a final negotiations meeting between the two parties is required. It was at this meeting that the Board and the FEA were able to use the commission's recommendations to guide us toward an agreement on the remaining two topics of teacher workday and salary.

After hundreds of hours of negotiations meetings and committee meetings, the Board is pleased that we and the FEA were able to come to a two-year agreement that, among many other things provides an extra five days of parental leave, \$6,000 in annual differentiated pay for our Special



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Education teachers and substantial pay increases for all of our teachers. Although both parties would prefer to avoid an impasse, faith in the process got us to where we are today. Now that we have a negotiated agreement that has been ratified by both the Board and the FEA, the Negotiations Committee will continue to find new ways to make the negotiations process more efficient, less time consuming and more collaborative.

