

SO WHAT ABOUT HEALTH INSURANCE?

A Message from the Presidents of CTA and OESPA

As you probably have heard by now, CTA and OESPA's joint bargaining session with the District last Tuesday night ended with the District turning down our proposals on health insurance and salary and then announcing they were going to "pick" the health insurance plan without any agreement from the two unions because of "exigent circumstances." One of the members of our team who has been representing employees at the bargaining table for a long time was heard to say that this was the first time she had ever seen something like this happen. It was strange—our team received a response from the District to the proposal we had made a month ago, we asked questions, we made some comments, and we said we would like to consider our options and get back to them about scheduling another session. And then the District's spokesperson read a three paragraph statement on behalf of the School Board.....and now employees are being asked to enroll in a health insurance plan their bargaining agents haven't agreed to, one the employees haven't even seen much less ratified. Why? Sad but true, the best answer to the question we can come up with is because that's what the District wanted to do.

Even during the best of times, dealing with economic issues at the bargaining table can be difficult and contentious. We think there are several reasons why that is particularly true in our situation:

- The state of the economy is difficult for everyone to deal with. That's true for all of us—the District and its employees.
- Just last year employees were told that if we took \$15 million worth of savings to our health plan by increasing out-of-pocket costs, the rising cost of health insurance could be lessened or stopped. The results of those cuts have been in place less than a year.
- Salary increases over the last couple of years haven't met anyone's expectations.

For several months, the district has been floating ideas about health insurance to us, starting with a 22% increase. But during that time they've never floated any ideas about salary. We had been waiting to get a clear picture on state school funding from Tallahassee. The last week in April, OESPA and CTA bargaining teams met together to craft a proposal that we wanted to make to the District since both groups of employees are impacted in the same way by these issues.

The first week in May, CTA and OESPA presented a package of two proposals to the district: a 2.3% salary increase and no change in health insurance for the 2010-11 school year. The proposed salary increase was based on the March 2010 Consumer Price Index, which the team felt was a reasonable figure. The rationale for the insurance proposal is that we haven't seen even a full year of experience with the changes we made last year.

We heard nothing from the District until Tuesday night. Our position has not changed—we want to talk about both issues at the same time. Financial issues are financial issues; dealing with them one at a time makes no sense.

We are in the process of getting legal opinions and doing other work about what the District has done in the hopes of getting us back to the bargaining table soon—at least soon enough so you won't be asked by the District to sign up for something that hasn't been bargained and ratified by the employees it will affect the most.

We will keep you informed of any developments through our web sites throughout the summer. Our office will be on a four-day week this summer. Call or stop by if we can do anything for you.

Thanks for all you do for the students of Orange County Public Schools.

Mike Cahill

Bill Humphreys

CTA president

OESPA President