



## 4J asks members to forfeit paid holidays, accept step and benefits freezes on top of a large salary cut

"Outrageous," "Unbelievable," and "Seriously?" were the comments most heard by members present when 4J unveiled its opening bargaining proposal April 13. The rollbacks would have been shocking by themselves, but the same day the *Register-Guard* reported that the new superintendent would be receiving a \$180,000 salary with built-in 5% raises, cost of living raises, in addition to many lavish perks. To bridge the current budget deficit, the District decided to roll out the following:

- Salary: 2.6% reduction
- District insurance contribution: frozen (members would have to absorb the expected hike in the cost of insurance)
- Step advancement: frozen at 50% of the current step (members would not be made whole as agreed to a year ago; essentially, members would not advance a step, but rather be stuck at the same half step next year as they are this year—a double whammy).
- Work year: Instead of using furlough days, members would forfeit their five paid holidays and have them converted into workdays.

The District also proposed eliminating its pickup of the PERS contribution on TSAs for Plan B employees (hired after 7/1/98). This was proposed despite not being one of the four articles subject to discussion during this reopener. While this rollback was not the largest in 4J's proposal, its surprise inclusion in a list of severe rollbacks, coupled with the news about the superintendent, felt like rubbing salt into the wound.

This is clearly a proposal that attempts to solve the school budget crisis almost completely on the backs of employees. These rollbacks would mean members on steps would earn 10.75% less than the status quo and 5.2% less than the status quo for members at

longevity. This would be in addition to the increased out of pocket cost for health insurance. The freezing of the insurance contribution and the compounding effect of a step freeze are measures that will negatively affect members and their families now and for the rest of their lives. However, perhaps the most appalling piece of the proposal was the request that members give up the five paid holidays that our predecessors fought hard for several decades ago and instead work those five days for free. Undoubtedly, this was not a serious effort to reach agreement and ignores what members have already given up in the last three years.

### Superintendent's salary

The elephant in the room at Wednesday's proceedings was the news that the Board had approved a very generous contract for the new superintendent. EEA's Bargaining Team pointed out repeatedly the surreal irony of sitting in a room watching a slide show that explained how poor 4J was while just hours before everyone in attendance had learned of the new superintendent's exorbitant salary. The District provided no answer or explanation to our questions about this contradiction. Members were left to make their own conclusions as to why the District believes that it is imperative to spend so much more on a superintendent while sending out scores of layoff notices to employees and reducing the wages, benefits, and eliminating the paid holidays of those still employed.

### Budget deficit narrows

Recently it was made public that 4J's budget deficit will be smaller by approximately 3 million dollars. This does not solve our District's financial problems, but that amount of money would be enough to retain up to 40 teachers and specialists next year. District negotiators received this information just hours before our bargaining session, and it is possible there

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was not enough time to change their opening proposal to reflect the change. However, it would have been helpful to negotiations and encouraging to many of our members if 4J had mentioned this.

### **EEA's counterproposal**

After caucusing, the Bargaining Team responded with the following proposal:

- Salary: 0.6% increase
- District insurance contribution: \$60 increase per member per month
- Step advancement: Members would advance to the next step but would not receive the increase until February 2012. In effect, there would be normal advancement, no loss steps, but members would receive only half the difference between the step rates next year.
- Work year: 185 days (a reduction of 6 instructional days and 1 planning day)
- Tax measure contingency: If the city tax measure passes, it would be up to the District to add back days and/or decrease class size with the additional funds.

Given 4J's financial situation, the Association's counterproposal is fair, especially so given the recent news of the Bethel District's contract. It is consistent with the Team's three principal goals that were formed from the member survey, the regional input

sessions, and email input:

- minimize layoffs and limit class size increases
- retain a fair, progressive salary schedule
- maintain affordable health insurance

The Team realizes this was only the first round of negotiations during a difficult time; we did not expect to reach agreement after only one meeting. However, it is our hope that the District comes to the table with a proposal that respects our contract, our members, and our profession.

### **Thank you, members!**

Thanks to all who attended the bargaining session last Wednesday and sent their input and support to the Team. The next round of negotiations is set for Thursday, April 21, from 6:00 to 8:00 at the Ed Center. If you are able, please come. Although often frustrating, you will find the experience informative, and your presence is heartening to the Bargaining Team and helpful to the process.

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