



Education Jobs Bill money and furlough days

As most of us have heard, 4J is set to receive 3.3 million dollars from the Education Jobs Bill passed last month. This is certainly good news for local districts which were urged by the governor last spring to cut spending for this school year. In June

EEA agreed to cut six instructional days and one professional development/planning day from the calendar, together representing a reduction in compensation of 3.5% for each member. At the time, EEA's Bargaining Team knew that a federal bill was a distinct possibility in the coming months, so it wisely negotiated language to restore up to five days, one day for every \$450,000 that 4J received during this school year. At this time the Team is in discussions with the District on how to fulfill this part of the Contract.

Confusion

When the Ed Jobs Bill was passed, there was quite a bit of buzz in the press and in many districts about how the money should be used. The Bargaining Team received several emails containing members' opinions on the use of the funds as well as many questions. It would be difficult to answer questions and clarify matters on an individual basis, so we hope this newsletter will provide some clarity.

Questions and answers

Q: Is there enough money from this bill to restore those five days?

A: Yes, approximately \$2.25 million would be enough to restore five days for all employee groups, leaving 4J with approximately \$1 million.

Q: Why doesn't the District use these funds to restore any lost FTE?

A: The District has a contractual agreement with EEA to use these funds to restore days, not FTE. Many members have worried that they will not be able to cover essential material in our shortened school calendar. The Bargaining Team feels that bringing days back would do much to maintain the integrity of what we deliver in our schools.

Q: If we restore five furlough days and then the state tells districts that revenue has come up short later in the year, won't 4J have to lay off members?

A: If 4J receives less state money than expected, it would be appropriate for the District to use reserve funds to cover the shortfall. There are adequate reserves to take care of this deficit, and this is precisely what reserves are for.

Q: Next year is forecasted to be worse than this school year. Shouldn't we save these federal dollars and use them next year?

A: Some expect that in the 2011-12 school year 4J will receive up to \$30 million less from the state than this year—truly a large reduction that may be beyond the capability of 4J's reserves. However, if the \$2.25 million needed to restore days now were banked until next year, it would represent only 7.5% of that \$30 million the District would be losing. This is clearly not a solution to next year's problem. In addition, we really have little assurance that this dire forecast will turn out to be true. We do know, however, that this school year has been shortened, and we believe 4J has the means to fulfill this article of the contract and restore lost days.

Q: What are the biggest reasons for restoring days this year?

A: First, the money that is contractually earmarked for restoring days would add the equivalent of a full week of days to the calendar and would keep our members in schools to help 4J students achieve their academic goals. As said before, many members have expressed concern that this task has not been easy with a 192-day calendar; doing it in only 185 days makes the challenge even more difficult. Second, if members forego this money, they would be giving up an average of \$1,492 in compensation, and it is

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highly unlikely that they would *ever* see this money come back to them. History has shown us that Districts always find uses for money that do not involve compensating employees for the vital work they do. In addition, members will see in their end of October checks an unparalleled hike in their outlay for insurance benefits compared to last year. Income from restoring days would help to mitigate that increase.

Q: If next year is as bad as believed, how will the state’s school districts provide services for their students?

A: There is no single strategy being discussed presently. Many strategies have been suggested in the news. Two local groups, the Community and District Thought Leaders, brainstormed several belt-tightening ideas, some of which may merit more exploration, some are dubiously touted as an “opportunity to improve what we do,” and others are simply unworkable and pure wishful thinking. Frankly, no one knows exactly how to solve this problem.

Q: The furlough days are approaching. When will we know for sure what the calendar will look like?

A: The Bargaining Team understands the time-sensitivity of this. It is not easy running a school, a program, a class, or a household without a firm calendar. We are trying to bring this issue to a close as efficiently as possible for all involved.

Perspective

We know that educators must have a solid grasp of their subject matter and the ability to connect with children with many different learning styles. Of course, this is only the beginning of a long list of abilities and traits we must possess in order to be successful in arguably the most important profession. Perhaps most importantly, we care passionately about our mission, and when faced with a seemingly insurmountable problem, financial or otherwise, we step up and sacrifice.

At the bargaining table we have asked for improvements in our contract when the District had money, and we have also given back in the areas of

compensation and insurance whenever conditions truly called for such action. In the last two years we decided as a group to give back days twice, at significant cost to members in the midst of soaring insurance costs, so that we could continue to do our best for kids. Members have sacrificed in similar fashion countless times over the years.

We need to be mindful that we will not always be treated fairly if we do not stand up for ourselves. As much as others say that teachers are not paid enough for what they do, the fact is that when times are good, we rarely are offered what other professions receive, and when times are tough we are the first ones that are asked to do more with less or “work smarter,” a phrase with which we are annoyingly familiar. We will continue to work cooperatively with the District to use unstable funds efficiently and appropriately, but we will also see to it that our profession is respected.

Thanks for the input

The Bargaining Team would like to thank you for your input in last spring’s written survey, the regional input sessions, your questions and opinions on the contract summaries sent out in June, the Q/A at ratification and unanimous vote in favor of accepting the contract, and your emails in the last two weeks. Your views and suggestions are vital to the Team.

If you have questions or feedback, do not hesitate to contact us at our personal email addresses written below, preferably using your personal email account. Dayna Mitchell or Tom Di Liberto will also pass along your messages to the entire Team.

Thank you

The Bargaining Team thanks you for your support over the last few bargaining sessions. Your presence at last year’s negotiations was invaluable.

To the many members who contacted their leaders in Washington and pushed for this funding, thank you. This bill would not have come to fruition without the guidance and support of educators.

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