

FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) ...and a Few Answers

In an effort to provide some additional information about the tentative agreements for the 2008-2009 school year, we are offering some responses to questions TEA leaders and staff have heard about negotiations and/or questions we anticipate that people may have.

1. Why didn't we get a raise?

Last spring, there was a projected \$20 million deficit in the TUSD budget for the 2008-2009 fiscal year. With declining enrollment, higher insurance costs, higher fuel and related transportation costs, more spending for ELL needs, and a number of other factors, the District budget has been strained to a degree extraordinary even by TUSD standards. Several government entities – including Pima County and the City of Tucson – are in an especially difficult situation at this time with the economic downturn resulting in lower tax revenues, resulting in less ability to raise salaries and benefits.

2. Do you think there will be any savings resulting in a chance for a raise later in the year?

There could well be, especially from attrition, or the difference between salary costs this year from last. We believe the District has calculated this savings very conservatively. However, attrition savings are not fully apparent for at least a few pay cycles, and are difficult to predict with certainty. There could also be other factors that would lessen the amount of additional money being available in December, such as higher than anticipated costs for ELL services, or less money saved from positions left vacant. The point is, we will watch carefully how the budget develops in the next few months, while still locking in protections against pay cuts and benefit take-backs.

3. Why not simply keep negotiations open until December?

Contingency language keeps open the possibility of starting negotiations for salary increases on or before December 1st, if the District's financial situation improves due to savings from position vacancies and attrition. We settled the tentative agreements because it was important to protect against furlough days and take-backs in benefits by acting now.

4. Was there a real danger of pay cuts and take-backs, or was this a TUSD negotiating ploy?

The TUSD Partnership process, involving regular meetings between District leadership, staff, and the employee groups, resulted in an unprecedented level of transparency regarding the budget. All budget information is public information, albeit a little difficult to absorb. TEA has many years of experience in reading and following these budgets, and the threat of pay cuts and take-backs was real.

5. Why can't we negotiate a better insurance program?

The contract for health insurance is between the District and the provider. What TEA negotiates with TUSD is the District's contribution toward the cost of the employee premium. The employee groups, including TEA, do have a substantial voice in the selection of a provider and the plan design. No one plan will cover all area doctors or hospitals, or all medications and services. Cost is an important factor in choosing a provider and designing the plan. Funding for the employee health care premium benefit comes from the same source of revenue as for salary and wage increases. While we are fortunate that TUSD contributes more to the employee health care cost than do most districts, this does inevitably constrain the amount of money available for salary and wage increases.

6. If there are fewer students, why doesn't TUSD just reduce staff?

Actually, there were unprecedented cuts in positions for 2008-2009. Over 80 central positions were eliminated, as were 175 certified positions. Reductions were also made in support professional positions in all bargaining units. These reductions were painful as they reduced some student services, increased some primary grade class sizes, and resulted in lay-offs or transfers of personnel. However, this slimming of staff positions was vital to closing the \$20 million deficit without resorting to pay cuts and take-backs in benefits. Most of the reductions were taken care of through attrition, i.e., by not replacing people who retired or otherwise resigned from TUSD.

7. Shouldn't we declare impasse?

Impasse is only useful if one party decides the other is not negotiating in good faith, or if one party believes it can achieve a better outcome through the intervention of a third-party arbitrator. The facts in this instance do not support either conclusion. TUSD would have no difficulty establishing inability to pay for raises.

8. How did other districts get increases?

No other district in Tucson is experiencing the same drop in ADM (average daily membership, a statistic derived from the average attendance between the 40th and 100th days of the school year and is the basis for state funding). Also, all other Tucson school districts have overrides, which provide additional local funding on top of the amount received by the state.

9. Didn't the District get a 2% increase?

*Yes, sort of. Remember that almost all state and federal funding to school districts is on a **per pupil** basis. The amount **per pupil** that was allocated to the districts for Maintenance and Operation (M&O) funds increased by 2%, as mandated under Proposition 301. But since TUSD's student count dropped by **1,300** last year (each year's M&O allocation is based on the previous year's ADM), TUSD lost considerable revenue. If TUSD's ADM had dropped by 300 (itself considerable, but more in keeping with the previous few years) instead of 1,300, TUSD would have received \$5 million more in M&O dollars from the state for FY 2009. That is just a little less than what it would have cost TUSD for each employee to receive a 2% raise. Obviously, we all have a stake in turning around this decline in the number of students in our district.*

10. Why not have a two-year agreement?

TUSD was not interested in a two-year agreement largely due to economic uncertainty. Also, we have a new superintendent and the likelihood of at least two new Governing Board members in January so there was a reluctance to commit to a two-year agreement. We wouldn't want a two-year agreement either if there is no assurance that the second year will be better than the first.

11. What happens if the tentative agreements are not ratified?

Most likely we would have to go to arbitration. This is risky as everything that has been agreed to, including protection from pay cuts and benefit take-backs, would be off the table. The other option would be for the District to impose a contract, an action we would have to vigorously resist.

12. How can I learn more about the agreements?

Attend the TEA Know Your Agreements study groups, currently scheduled for October 4, 11, 18 and 25. You can also get involved with TEA committees that are announced in the Newsletter or flyers.