

School district, teachers union end negotiations impasse with tentative agreement

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The negotiations impasse between the school district and the teachers union experienced a breakthrough May 7 with the two sides reaching a tentative agreement.

Marshall Jones, Del Norte Teachers Association president, said the membership will meet twice this week to discuss the 2019-20 contract with a vote probably next Wednesday or Thursday. Jones said the resolution to the negotiations came down to getting past the current uncertainty caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

“I’m glad to have some closure to it. It’s unfortunate, due to COVID, what that has done. At least this is settled,” Jones said. “I would have loved to settle this 15 months ago. But we do need to move on. There are some extreme challenges yet we need to get through.”

In the end, Jones said the union representatives accepted the district’s last one-year proposal. The details to the tentative agreement include:

- A 2 percent increase to the salary schedule effective July 1, 2019.
- An increase from \$10,700 to \$11,700 in the district’s contribution to DNTA members’ health benefits.
- A 2 percent increase to flat-dollar stipends.
- A one-time 0.5 percent off-schedule supplemental payment based on teachers’ annual salary.

The DNTA began the school year in August without a ratified agreement. The district and union had been negotiating unsuccessfully since Feb. 28, 2019, over certificated staff salaries and benefits for 2019-20 contract. The DNTA initially sought a 3.54 percent increase to the salary schedule, while the DNUSD held fast to a 1 percent raise.

The DNTA had also sought a 3.54 increase in flat-dollar stipends and a \$795 increase per eligible employee in the district's contribution to teachers' health benefits.

Having reached an impasse, both sides met with a California Public Employees Relation Board appointed arbitrator in December. The arbitrator's factfinding report was released on Jan. 14 recommending a one-year and three-year solution.

Although the two sides initially disagreed on how much the combined factors added up to within the offer, they continued to meet weekly, inching closer to a deal.

The negotiations took on a new sense of urgency in the wake of bad economic news from the California Department of Finance last week. The report's initial estimates put a \$4 million loss in revenue for the district's 2020-21 budget due to the economic shutdown caused by the pandemic.

One of the additions to the contract, Jones said, was a provision allowing DNTA members to donate sick leave to their colleagues.

"Sick leave is a good thing. We've had members in the past come down with an illness and not have enough accrued sick leave," Jones said. "This allows their colleagues to donate sick time. So members who are out an amount of time can use the donated time without using up their personal income."

Jones said to approve the tentative contract next week, 50% plus 1 of the DNTA members must vote yes. Meanwhile, negotiations continue for DNTA's entire three-year contract, which ends Aug. 31.

"We've been in talks with management with what our top issues will look like next fall," Jones said. "We'll continue to flush out each of those one by one. But we just don't know how things will be health wise with COVID moving forward."