

Statement from the Pipestone Area School Board on Mediation with the Educational Support Professionals Group

The Pipestone Area School Board wants to share an update about our work to reach an agreement with the Educational Support Professionals group we have been negotiating with. The Educational Support Professionals (ESP) is actually two separate contracts. One contract is for the custodians, secretaries, accounts payable, and technology support. The other contract is for the school district paraprofessionals.

On Friday, December 13, 2024 the school board negotiations team and the ESP Team worked with a mediator from the Bureau of Mediation Services from 9:00 am to approximately 3:30 pm to help both sides come to an agreement that is fair for employees and works for the school district's budget.

Unfortunately, the mediation session did not conclude with a mediated agreement. Therefore, the Board has provided the ESP group a last best final offer. For the custodians, secretaries, accounts payable and technology support the compensation increase would be 5.57% in year one and 3.96% increase in year two. For the paraprofessionals, the compensation increase would be 5.67% in year one and an increase of 4.03% in compensation in year two. These proposals do not include a longevity incentive the district provides the employees that is additional compensation increases for longevity in the Pipestone Area Schools.

Why We Are in Mediation:

Mediation is a process where a neutral person helps two groups come to an agreement. The parties entered mediation to make sure both sides have a chance to share their ideas and find a solution that benefits everyone. As a school board, our goal is to treat employees fairly while also making sure we can use the District's resources to give students the best education possible.

The Board's Best Final Offer:

After thinking carefully about the concerns of employees and the needs of the District, the School Board provided the following as its best final offer:

1. Items We Already Agreed On:

- **403B Retirement Contribution:** The District will add \$100 more per level to eligible employees' retirement savings plans.
- **Activity Tickets:** Employees in the Educational Support Professional group will receive free tickets to school events.
- **Earned Safe and Sick Time (ESST):** Employees will get time off through the new state law required program that is even better than what the state requires. Any sick time employees already have will be rolled into the new ESST program.
- **Custodial Staff Bonus:** Custodial employees who earn a boiler license will receive extra pay increases to recognize this achievement.

2. Pay Increases:

- In **Year 1**, all employees in the ESP group will receive a \$1.00 per hour raise.
- In **Year 2**, all ESP employees will receive a \$0.75 per hour raise.
- Employees will keep their current longevity pay as outlined in earlier agreements.

3. New Language for Pay Placement:

The Board wants to recognize experience employees bring to their jobs and has included this new language in its final offer:

- Employees who return to the District within 24 months of leaving will keep their previous pay rate. However, sick leave balances will not be reinstated.
- Retired employees who are rehired will have their pay set by the District, but their old sick leave balances will not return.
- New hires may receive credit for relevant work experience, as decided during their hiring process.

The best final offer from the board would result in an approximate increase of 9.53% in compensation increases over two years for the custodians, secretaries, accounts payable, and technology support. Additionally, the best final offer from the board would result in a 9.7% increase in compensation over two years for the district paraprofessionals. These increases do not include compensation for longevity in the district which would increase the overall final compensation increase.

The ESP group had proposed an increase of 14.78% over two years for custodians, secretaries, accounts payable and technology support as well as an increase of 15.04% over two years for paraprofessionals.

The School Board believes the last best final offer increases in compensation is a fair and thoughtful offer that balances the needs of school district employees with the responsibilities we have to be good financial stewards to our community while still ensuring our students receive the best education possible. We are optimistic this last best offer works for everyone.

The Pipestone Area School Board truly values the work of the Educational Support Professionals and wants to thank our employees for the important work they do every day and for their patience during this process.