

What Communities Should Know about Negotiations

Districts should use a process for regularly informing their communities about the issues involved in collective bargaining, and the effects of negotiations on school budgets. The table below delineates the major issues involved in negotiations.

TOPIC	NEGOTIATIONS ISSUES
Salaries	Although average teachers salaries countywide have risen from \$18,850 in 1979-80 to \$46,000 in 2003-04, many teachers feel that their salaries do not compare favorably with those of other professions or fairly compensate them for their responsibilities and required training. Districts should ensure that their communities know the relationship between its budget and its employee contracts.
Pupil-Teacher Ratio	Teachers tend to measure educational progress in terms of class size. In spite of rising costs since 1983, average class sizes in Monroe County districts have remained constant or fallen slightly, with almost classes having fewer than 25 students.
Governance	Teacher units, locally and nationwide, believe that teachers should have basic control of educational processes. In negotiations they seek control of curriculum text selection and veto power over board of education policies.
Personnel Practices	Units frequently seek control over evaluation procedures, assignment and transfer rules, and dismissal procedures.
Supplies & Facilities	Units seek faculty rooms and offices, separate facilities for dining and parking, and control of supply budgets.
Non-Professional Duties	Units often express dissatisfaction with the length of the work day, the number of required meetings, and lack of non-pupil-contact time during the work day. During negotiations they have been known to seek shorter work days, work years, more free time, and limits on the number of staff meetings
Teachers as Wage Earners	Teachers oppose requirements for “non-teaching” duties such as play supervision, hall monitoring, and oversight of school bus loading; they seek to limit duties to actual classroom instruction and to receive extra pay for all other duties. Teachers increasingly are heads of households, and therefore seek job security through restrictions on staff reductions, insurance programs, and increased salaries.

Districts may/can develop fact sheets that state the following:

- Issues and their financial impact on parents and taxpayers,
- Effects of board positions on the district’s quality of education,
- Plans to deal with a strike (if needed),
- Person to call for additional information.

Before distribution, any written communications regarding negotiations should be reviewed by the district’s attorney and negotiator.

If the cost of mailing the fact sheets is prohibitive, the media and key communicators should receive the fact sheets. In either case, the district should host meetings to discuss the fact sheets.

Districts should also communicate with their employees during protracted negotiations. Any district document will, however, be viewed by staff with suspicion. Therefore, such communication should be sent to ALL employees, and should:

- Be factual, not editorial (omitting adjectives and adverbs) as well as non-threatening,
- Provide reasons for rejecting any union demands but listing concessions made by management,
- Detail the district’s offer to the union.

During negotiations, board members should refrain from publicly sharing their own opinions about the bargaining process, because their remarks can have a direct impact on the outcome of the negotiations.