

District, union settle on language and salaries

Employees, school board still to vote on new contract

Alachua County Public Schools and the Alachua County Education Association (ACEA), which represents both teachers and education support professionals (ESPs), have settled on a new contract for 2007-08.

The new agreement will amount to \$7.4 million dollars more for salaries and benefits this year than last year. That amount represents an increase of just over 7%, with slightly more than 6% for increases to the salary schedules and movement on the schedules.

“Considering the state’s financial problems and the district’s tight budget, we’re pleased with the raises we were able to provide,” said Joan Longstreth, assistant superintendent for human resources and the district’s chief negotiator.

In September, both sides had agreed to an increase in the salary and benefits package of at least \$5.2 million. At the time, the state was requiring all districts to set aside money from their budgets in anticipation of a holdback—that is, the state deciding to hold back some money that was originally intended to go to schools. Alachua County was forced to set aside nearly \$4 million.

However, following a special session of the Florida Legislature, the district was able to put \$2.4 million of that set-aside amount back into the budget, and more than 90% of it was placed into the pot for raises and benefits.

“The final holdback amount was not quite as bad as it could have been,” said Keith Birkett, the district’s assistant superintendent for finances. “That certainly helped us with this year’s raises.”

Subcommittees representing both the union and the district have been meeting since September to determine how to distribute the additional money on both the ESP and teacher salary schedules. They’ve also been meeting to discuss contract language issues, although only a few minor changes were made.

Employees will now have an opportunity to vote on the contract, including the salary schedules. Balloting is being coordinated through ACEA representatives at each school and worksite. Copies of the proposed new salary schedules have been posted on the district’s website (www.sbac.edu) under the *Employee Information* link.

The results of the employee vote will be shared with the School Board, which must also approve the contract. The board’s vote is scheduled for the November 20 meeting.

Assuming that the new contract is ratified by employees and approved by the School Board, district officials are expecting to have the raises appear in employees’ November 30 paychecks.

District staff will also work toward providing employees with their retroactive pay increases before Christmas, but they do say they cannot guarantee that will happen.

The timing of the agreement is one challenge. Another is the fact that in December, employees are paid twice before they leave for the holiday break. This year employees will receive paychecks on both the 7th and the 18th.

Google Email is on the way for all employees

All Alachua County Public School employees will soon have access to a new email system that provides a wide variety of features not available on the district's current system.

The new system is called Google Education Application Email. It provides more e-mail storage, a shared contacts address list, a calendar, and gives employees web-based access to their email from anywhere with Windows, Vista or Macs. It also offers the employees the ability to work on documents, including spreadsheets and powerpoints, in collaboration with colleagues in real time.

The target date for fully implementing the Google Email system is December 1. In the meantime, the district is training employees, including site tech coordinators, who will then train people at their schools and worksites. Fliers will also be distributed to all employees with more detailed information, including



Employees learn the ins and outs of the new Google Email system during a district workshop.

websites they can visit to have their questions about Google Email answered. The sites include video presentations on specific features of the new system.

District goes online with application and transfer process

Beginning January 7, Alachua County Public Schools' Human Resources division will be converting to an entirely on-line system to handle all applications and transfers.

After December 1, no paper applications or attachments, including references, transcripts, other documents, will be accepted.

Under the new system, anyone applying for a job with the district can complete an online application from any computer with internet access through the district's website at www.sbac.edu.

The change will affect current employees who are planning to apply for transfers.

Employees who wish to apply for vacancies advertised beginning January 7 will need to complete a brief online transfer form.



Anyone needing computer access or help in completing an online application can visit the district's personnel office in the west wing of the Kirby-Smith Center at 620 East University Avenue or by calling the office at (352) 955-7654, ext. 236.

The district will also help applicants and employees who need to have their transcripts, references or other supplemental materials scanned as attachments to their online application.