

Quolke's Corner

Contract Ratification, School Funding, 24 pay transition, and FSA

As we begin to wind down to the end of another school year, I want to thank all CTU members for their strong ratification vote approving our Tentative Agreement. This past Tuesday, April 23rd, the CMSD Board of Education also ratified the TA.

As with every contract, the hard work begins once it has been ratified. We secured great language around reduction of testing, successfully incorporated the changes of SB216 around teacher evaluation into our CBA and improved language on number of events, class room integrity, for all CTU members--teachers, RSP's, paraprofessionals. Now we need to make sure those changes are implemented fairly across the district and that our TDES system accomplishes its stated purpose: "to improve and/or recognize effective instruction." Additionally, the financial challenges confronted by CMSD are real, and we all will need to work hard on ensuring the passage of the November 2020 levy renewal, and for that matter, any school levy in next few years.

Whenever the topic of school levies is brought up, the conversation inevitably centers on school funding in Ohio and how the Supreme Court ruled, not once, but 4 times that Ohio's system of funding schools was over-reliant on property taxes and unconstitutional. However, over the past year, a bipartisan approach to "fixing" school funding began in the Ohio House. Representatives Cupp (R) and Patterson (D) canvassed the state in an attempt to create a funding formula that would address the unconstitutional aspect, as well as focus on getting more dollars to districts that served high percentages of families in poverty. Additionally, Governor DeWine's budget, while not changing any school funding formula, does recommend funding an additional \$19 million to address wraparound and wellness supports to Cleveland Schools.

The CTU and OFT were optimistic that these two approaches would ultimately lead to better school funding in the state. Unfortunately, the Cupp/Patterson school funding plan, while finally creating a true school funding formula, leaves Cleveland and a number of other school districts serving high populations of students in poverty (Toledo, Dayton, Youngstown, Lorain, East Cleveland) flat funded without any increases. At same time, the plan increases funding for predominately wealthier districts. While I commend the hard work that Reps. Cupp and Patterson did, the school funding formula did not create an additional revenue stream targeted solely for public education. Across the country, AFT locals from Florida to California, Texas to West Virginia to Minnesota have been advocating for state legislators to Fund Our Future and invest in public education. OFT locals across the state are pressing for legislative changes that actually fund our schools and our communities.

One of the most commonly asked questions we are getting at the CTU offices involves our transition from 26 pays to 24 pays. That transition begins next month in May. Everyone should know that this is not the first time we changed our payroll procedures. Prior to 1993 all CTU members were on a 20-pay system. YES...20 PAYS....NO PAYCHECKS DURING THE SUMMER!!!! Most CTU members created Summer Reserve Accounts through the Ohio Educational Credit Union and deposited enough money to get them through the summer months. (It was brutal, and as a newer teacher, I was pretty much living paycheck to paycheck).

In 1993 we negotiated 26 pays and got CTU members' pay stretched out over the summer. Believe it or not, that was one of the major "con" reasons why members voted "AGAINST" that contract. Their argument was, and the logic is accurate, that they worked their 185 days from September to June and the district had no right to delay pay for the time they worked. That argument is one of the reasons we currently have in our CBA the option that allows members to get 20 pays instead of 26. That option to get paid in

20 installments goes away when we transition to 24 pays. The transition from 26 to 24 pays for the 2019-20 school year **will not result in any loss of pay.**

For the 2018-19 school year, this school year, CTU members will still receive 26 equal pays. May 17th is our 21st pay check of the 2018-19 school year (22nd for year-round schools). The first payroll transition begins with the 22nd paycheck of the year (23rd for year-round schools) which is moved from Friday, May 31st to Monday, June 3rd (a 17-day gap), our 23rd check will be June 20th (17-day gap), our 24th check will be July 5 (15-day pay gap), our 25th check will be on July 19th (14-day pay gap) and our 26th pay check will be on August 5th (a 17-day pay gap).

For year-round schools, the shift is one pay earlier (i.e. their 26th pay will be on July 19th and their first for the 2019-20 school year will be August 5th). Beginning with the August 20th paycheck (August 5th for year-round schools), ALL CTU MEMBERS WILL BE ON 24 PAYS. In the simplest of terms, everyone's pay check will be larger (your salary divided by 24, rather than 26). However, this means many of us may need to adjust our automatic bill deductions...mortgage, loan, credit cards, bills, etc. Most banks have grace periods, but use the summer to confirm any payment changes that you may need to address.

When we negotiated this change, we successfully addressed our concern of having a potential 3-week pay gap at the beginning of the school year, and the districts concern of having 27 pay periods in a fiscal year resulting in moving the last June pay date into July. The 24-pay cycle resolves both of these potential problems.

Finally, this past January, CMSD transitioned to a new Flexible Spending Account (FSA) Provider, from HealthScope to Medical Mutual. While a number of members hoped we could go back to HealthScope, that is not an option. HealthScope chose to not even submit a RFP request to provide FSA services to CMSD. Our Joint Healthcare Committee, consisting of representatives of all CMSD unions and the district, interviewed the FSA providers that submitted RFPs and selected Medical Mutual. With that said, the switch to Medical Mutual has not been as smooth as we had hoped for. Members have complained of the extensive amount of documentation that Medical Mutual is requiring to approve claims and the process of members having their FSA card being deactivated if documentation is not received.

This past Tuesday, Michael Kulcsar and I met with the Joint Healthcare Committee to discuss the problems and did get some clarification. We pointed out that, in most cases, the documentation issues that our members were experiencing centered on dental and vision claims for which Medical Mutual was requesting verification paperwork and a threatening to shut off their FSA card. What we found out was that IRS regulations actually do require this verification, and that HealthScope didn't necessarily enforce this requirement. There does not seem to be an issue with medical and prescription claims. We have asked that the District provide an FAQ sheet regarding the IRS requirements, and we will get that out as soon as we get it from them.

I hope that your remaining weeks of school are peaceful and productive. Thank you for all you do.

David