



To Our DTA Members:

On August 6, your DTA negotiations team held its fifth negotiations meeting with the USD 232 administrative team but was **unable to reach an agreement** on a contract for the 2026-27 school year. While both sides have reached a tentative consensus on many issues (see Negotiations Update 2), there are three issues which have continued to divide the parties. The May 26 meeting ended with DTA rejecting the District's counterproposal and suggesting that both sides suspend negotiations until there was greater clarity on projected increases to health and dental premiums for 2027. The parties notified the state that they would extend negotiations beyond the July 31 statutory deadline. After the Benefits Committee met to review options on July 30, both sides had a better understanding of potential insurance costs and resumed negotiations. The unresolved issues entering the August 6 meeting were as follows:

Health Insurance Premiums: The District has consistently insisted on amending the District's obligation to provide "a single health and dental membership" to a specific monetary contribution of up to \$9,738 for a single health insurance benefit and \$510.96 for a single dental membership. The District has argued that it is necessary to cap its contribution because it had to expend an additional \$931,000 to cover unexpected increases in health insurance costs in 2026. The District also has expressed concern that unexpected health care increases could lead to difficult "mid-year cuts," which DTA clarified did not mean cutting staff members.

DTA argued that it would significantly hurt employees to replace a defined benefit – covered employee health insurance – with a defined contribution. The District proposal would only cover the cost of premiums for the lowest tier plan at the 2026 rate of \$811.50 per month. That would mean that ALL increases to health and dental insurance premiums beginning in January 2027 would be paid by the employee. For example, insurance premiums for employees increased almost 14% from 2025 to 2026. If that increase were only 10% for 2027, the increase would be \$81 per month for our lowest tier option – money that would come out of our paychecks beginning in January. DTA argued that it would be wrong to ask our individual employees, living month-to-month on strict household budgets, to absorb unexpected health care costs rather than a school district with a multi-million dollar budget and cash reserves.

DTA also proposed language that would cap increases on health insurance premiums for spouses, child(ren), and family at 10%. DTA has been concerned that the exorbitant increases in those premiums – approximately 17% last year – erased any raise many employees received. The

District's proposals have consistently rejected any cap on insurance premiums for spouses, child(ren), and family.

In DTA's view, the District is seeking to push all risk of increased health insurance premiums – for the employee, for their spouses, for their children, for their whole family – back on the employee. DTA believes, first and foremost, that the defined benefit of fully-provided health insurance for the single employee is a cornerstone of benefits we receive as public employees. We entered this profession knowing we would never be highly compensated, but at least we would have the promise of full health insurance among our benefits. We believe the District's proposal would break that promise.

Time, if not Money: Given the District's transparency on its budget constraints, our understanding of the state legislature's decision not to fully fund public education, and the Board of Education's history of supporting compensation for staff, DTA has been willing to accept a compensation package that will see employees' salaries fail to increase at the rate of inflation for the first time in many years. DTA has agreed to accept a proposal that would add 1.26% to each cell, plus step and column movement, which means most employees will see their salaries increase between 2% and 3% on the salary schedule. With the midwest inflation index at 3.8% in June, employees will find their paychecks won't buy as much this year as they did last year.

In lieu of additional money, DTA has made two modest, non-monetary proposals for the District to compensate its employees with additional time. First, DTA has proposed reducing the requirement to participate in activities outside the school day from three to two, and reducing the total number of hours from eight to five. Second, DTA has proposed reducing the number of contract days from 187 to 186 by replacing two professional development days with a student-contact day.

The District argued that both professional development and time for outside activities are necessary to comply with new state requirements, and thus would not accept either proposal, other than reducing the number of hours for three outside activities from eight to seven. DTA believes that both proposals are reasonable and creative ways to compensate employees with time rather than money.

At the August 6 meeting, DTA opened the proceedings by presenting a counter proposal seeking to compromise on both issues. DTA's proposal included the following changes:

- **Health Insurance:** Language would remain unchanged from 2025-26. DTA would drop its request for a cap on premiums for spouses, children, and families, while the District would continue to fully fund "a single health and dental membership."

- Additional Time: DTA proposed both reducing the number of school days from 187 to 186 and reducing the number of required activities outside the school day from three to two, however DTA suggested it would be open to accepting one of the two options.
- SPED Work Time: DTA proposed extending the eight hours of professional leave for a “paperwork day” to include Pre-K SPED teachers.

The District caucused to review DTA’s counter proposal and responded with the following counter proposal:

- Health Insurance: The District proposed maintaining the fixed contribution but alternate ways of funding it, including eliminating all dental premiums and moving that money to healthcare premiums, reducing health plan benefits to lower costs, or moving to a lower cost insurance provider that would push many of our employees out of network.
- Additional Time: The District proposed moving to 186 days and eliminating the final teacher workday of the year from the calendar while maintaining three required activities outside the school day at a maximum of six hours.
- SPED Work Time: The District expressed reservations about whether Pre-K SPED teachers needed additional time.

DTA chose to caucus and review the District’s counterproposal, ultimately rejecting it. After careful deliberation and in recognition of the District’s significant financial constraints, DTA proposed that it could accept a fixed annual contribution of at least \$9,738 for a single health benefit and \$510.96 for a single dental membership if the District would make the following concessions:

- Agreeing to a reopener in November 2026 that would allow the parties to increase the District’s contribution if more money would become available;
- Including Pre-K SPED teachers among those eligible for eight hours of professional leave for paperwork;
- Reducing the number of school days to 186 by reducing a professional development day;
- Reducing the number of required activities outside the school day from three to two for a maximum of five hours;

The District team chose to caucus to review DTA’s counterproposal and ultimately responded by countering with the following offer:

- A fixed annual contribution of at least \$9,738 for a single health benefit and a single dental membership (with no contribution limit for dental);
- Including Pre-K SPED teachers among those eligible for eight hours of professional leave for paperwork;

- A reopener in October 2026 that would allow the parties to increase the District's contribution if more money would become available;
- Reducing the number of school days to 186 with no guarantee of which day would be eliminated;
- Maintaining three required activities outside the school day for a maximum of five hours.

After a short caucus, DTA responded by rejecting the District's counterproposal. DTA argued that given its willingness to accept a salary increase well below the rate of inflation and a potentially significant increase in health care premiums come January, it would be very reasonable for the District to make modest concessions in granting its employees additional time – both by reducing the number of required activities outside the school day to two and reducing the school year to 186 days by eliminating a professional development day.

The District responded by saying it was not authorized by the Board to make those concessions; DTA then asked the District team to take its final proposal back to the full Board for review. The next scheduled Board meeting is September 14, although the Board can call a special meeting if it chooses to meet sooner.

If both parties cannot ratify an agreement in time for payroll to make salary adjustments before September 15, the District will continue to operate under the terms of the 2025-26 Professional Negotiated Agreement. Any pay increases negotiated will be paid retroactively once an agreement is ratified.

Thank you to all members of the bargaining unit who watched the proceedings in person and online and to all those individuals who have provided feedback.

We would also like to thank our DTA members for their membership. The right to collective bargaining is only guaranteed by law if a majority of our certified employees are members of the De Soto Teachers' Association. Simply put, without your membership, there would be no negotiations process, and we would be forced to accept whatever terms the Board of Education would choose to offer.

Sincerely,

DTA Negotiations Team