



September 21, 2026

To Our Bargaining Unit Members:

Unfortunately, the negotiations process remains ongoing with no sign of an agreement on the immediate horizon.

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, the increasing cost of health insurance, low compensation, reducing the number of contract days, and reducing the number of required activities outside the school day remain unresolved.

The District's last offer on August 6 included the following terms:

- An average salary increase of 2.49% for step and salary scale enhancements plus column movement for those who would qualify;
- 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 health benefit 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.

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 out-of-pocket 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.

Although the Board of Education could have scheduled a special meeting to discuss DTA's requests, it declined to do so in August. On September 4, the District team contacted DTA to set a negotiations meeting for the next week. DTA agreed to meet on Wednesday, September 9, while the Board of Education set a special meeting for Friday, September 11 in advance of its regularly scheduled meeting on Monday, September 14. Additionally, DTA prepared a survey of the bargaining unit to measure the importance of each issue in the aggregate and allow individual staff members to share their feedback. That survey was administered between September 8 and September 11.

At the September 9 meeting, 46 members of the bargaining unit attended in person to view the proceedings. The District presented a new counteroffer with the following terms:

- An average salary increase of 2.43% for step and salary scale enhancements plus column movement for those who would qualify (not representing a change in offer, but a more accurate overall estimate);
- A fixed annual contribution of at least \$10,218 for a single health benefit and a single dental membership (with no contribution limit for dental), representing an increased District contribution of \$40 per month for a single health insurance premium;
- Including Pre-K SPED teachers among those eligible for eight hours of professional leave for paperwork;
- Maintaining the number of contract days at 187 and the number of required activities outside the school day at three for a maximum of five hours.
- Convening a joint committee to explore future solutions for the number of contract days and number of required activities.

DTA caucused to discuss the District's proposal and ultimately responded by rejecting the District's proposal. DTA communicated that even if its team were inclined to accept the District's proposal, it would wait to review the survey results before agreeing to a contract, requiring another meeting. Nonetheless, DTA argued that the District proposal still did not amount to even a cost of living adjustment in terms of compensation and still would require certified staff to pay about half of its health insurance premium increase in January out of pocket. On top of that, the District proposal made no concession on reducing the number of contract days or the number required outside activities for 2026-27. DTA argued it would be difficult to explain to its staff how any part of the offer could be seen as a win. In fact, DTA asked all 46 members of the bargaining unit in the room if they would vote to ratify the District offer; all 46 staff members indicated they would not.

The Board of Education met in executive session on Friday, September 11, and again at its regularly scheduled meeting on Monday, September 14. Seven members of the bargaining unit spoke during the patron input period to express their dissatisfaction with the Board of

Education's terms. The Board of Education also included in its consent agenda a line item to replace Alvie Cater as its lead negotiator. Board member Chad Philhour pulled the item for discussion and spoke directly to the crowd, saying it was time to stop the stalling and get things going. The Board of Education then voted unanimously to replace Mr. Cater with David Cunningham, a lawyer from the Kansas Association of School Boards (KASB) with no connection to our district. Mr. Cunningham has not yet contacted DTA.

On September 16, Mr. Cater contacted the DTA negotiations team to propose dates for our next meeting. The dates ranged from October 6 to October 20 – all after the next scheduled Board meeting on October 5. Thus, barring a special board meeting, the next time the Board of Education could approve an agreement would be at its November meeting – meaning the earliest staff could be paid under a new agreement would be November 15.

DTA has scheduled its next meeting with the District team on October 20 at 4:30 p.m. at the administrative offices. If both sides do not reach an agreement, the process could move to mediation and fact finding.

Thank you to all members of the bargaining unit who have attended negotiations sessions and Board meetings or followed along online. Thank you for taking part in our surveys, doing independent research, and sharing your opinions with our team. We will continue to advocate for our staff to bring you a contract that reflects basic fairness and a respect for us as professionals.

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

Jeff Wieland, Lead Negotiator

Jennifer Mead

Beth Loosbrock

Gina Miller

Ben Cook

Tom Byers