USD 232
Unified School District No. 232
www.usd232.org

October 27, 2026

Board of Education Opening Statement: Negotiations Update

Before we begin, I would like to share a brief statement on behalf of the Board of Education.

We recognize that this year's negotiations have been challenging and have taken longer than anyone would have preferred. We understand that uncertainty can be difficult for employees, and we appreciate the time, professionalism, and commitment everyone has brought to this process. We value the work our teachers do for students every day, and we respect DTA's role in representing its members. We offer these comments in the spirit of transparency and with a shared desire to reach an agreement.

We know there have been questions about the pace of negotiations. As was often the case this year, scheduling challenges, needed time for information gathering, and continued discussion on complex issues contributed to a longer timeline than anticipated. Throughout this process, the Board's focus has remained the same: engaging in good-faith discussions and working toward meaningful progress.

We also recognize that compensation discussions are about more than percentages and budget figures. Rising costs for groceries, utilities, transportation, housing, and health care affect our employees and their families in real and meaningful ways. Many employees feel those pressures every day, and we understand those concerns. At the same time, the Board has a responsibility to balance those realities with the long-term financial stability of the district and our obligation to serve students and taxpayers responsibly.

As compensation has been discussed, we believe it is important to consider both the current proposal and the district's long-term commitment to employee compensation. For eleven consecutive years, professional employees received annual salary increases averaging approximately 4 percent, with increases ranging from 2.5 percent to 6.3 percent. That history reflects the Board's ongoing commitment to educators, though we recognize it does not lessen the concerns employees may have today.

The compensation proposal currently under discussion would provide an increase of approximately 3 percent through steps, salary schedule enhancements, and column movement, separate from benefits. When supplemental compensation adjustments and health and dental benefits are included, the total compensation package represents an estimated increase of 4.64 percent.

We believe it is important to view these discussions within the broader financial context facing the district, including state funding levels, rising benefit costs, and future enrollment trends.

Health insurance is one example of those ongoing financial pressures. Over the past nine years, the Board's contribution toward employee health insurance has increased by more than 131 percent as health care costs and claims utilization have continued to rise. Throughout that time, the district has worked to balance affordability, access to care, and the quality of benefits available to employees and their families.

As negotiations have continued, updated enrollment and financial projections have reinforced the need for careful long-term planning. The district is facing a decline in enrollment this school year, which will require adjustments in future spending to maintain financial stability and avoid significant budget challenges. We have shared detailed financial information with DTA throughout this process because we believe informed discussions are important to reaching sustainable decisions.

The Board has also proposed changes beyond compensation. These include making all leave discretionary and providing up to eight hours of professional leave for non-center-based K-12 and Pre-K Resource and Gifted teachers who are responsible for IEP paperwork. The board demonstrated its respect for and trust in teachers to use accurced discretionary leave as it is intended. We have also agreed to revisions to the grievance procedure and to removing the sunset provision on work-location flexibility for teacher workdays.

Allocating resources to improve salary and advancing proposals to improve other aspects of the terms and conditions of employment that were not noticed by DTA demonstrates the board’s commitment to teachers.

We also want to provide context regarding the current status of negotiations. At the October 20 meeting, the Board's negotiating team acted within the authority the board had established. The team presented proposals within the authority previously established and had no ability to advance new or different proposals. Under Kansas law, individual board members cannot make decisions independently outside a duly called meeting. To address those matters, the Board convened a special meeting on October 22 to review the issues discussed during negotiations and provide additional direction to its representatives. Today's counterproposal reflects a sincere effort to respond to DTA's priorities while also meeting our responsibility to support staff, serve students and parents, and maintain the long-term health of the district.

We appreciate everyone's time, preparation, and willingness to engage in these difficult conversations. While there may be differences regarding how best to address these issues, we believe everyone involved shares the same fundamental goal: attracting and retaining excellent educators, providing outstanding opportunities for students, and ensuring the continued strength of our district.