On May 12 and May 26, your DTA negotiations team met with the USD 232 administrative team to negotiate the 2026-27 contract. After reviewing proposed language from DTA, the District made an initial proposal on May 12. DTA asked some clarifying questions and adjourned to prepare a counterproposal. On May 26, DTA presented its counterproposal, which the District reviewed and then presented its own counterproposal. While both sides were able to find common ground on many issues, DTA concluded that the sides would not be able to reach an agreement and suggested suspending negotiations until August when more information on health insurance costs will be available.

Two issues, in particular, have not yet been resolved:

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 $9,730 for a single health insurance benefit and $510.96 for a single dental membership. The District says 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 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 not replace a defined benefit – covered employee health insurance – with a defined contribution. Under the District's proposal, any increase in insurance premiums above the defined amount would be paid by our employees. For example, if similar language had been in place last year, the additional $931,000 would have unexpectedly come out of our employees' paychecks.

The District has also consistently rejected DTA's proposed language that would cap increases on health insurance premiums for spouses, child(ren), and family at 10%. DTA is concerned that the exorbitant increases in those premiums – approximately 17% last year – erased any raise many of our employees received. DTA believes it cannot ask employees to ratify a contract until employees have a clear understanding of how increases in health insurance premiums for spouses, child(ren), and family will affect their monthly budgets.

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. Moreover, we do not accept that our individual employees, living month-to-month on strict household budgets, are better able to absorb unexpected health care costs than a school district with a multi-million dollar budget and cash reserves. Thus, DTA did not agree to the District's proposed language on health insurance premiums.

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 April, employees will find their paychecks won't buy as much next year as they did this 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 cutting the flex professional development day and replacing the October 19 professional development day 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.

On the following issues, however, both sides have found common ground:

Compensation: In addition to the changes to the salary schedule outlined in the section above, both sides have tentatively agreed to the recommendations of the supplemental salary committee which include:

- An increase of 2.4% per cell plus step movement
- Add HS E-Sports as a new position at Category 10
- Add HS Girls Flag Football Head and Assistant Coach at Category 4 and Category 8
- Add HS Head Track Coach Combined as a Category 2 position with multiplier of 1.3
- Add HS Head Wrestling Coach Combined as a Category 2 position with multiplier of 1.3
- Add HS Head Powerlifting Coach as a new position at Category 9
- Move HS Asst. Dance/Drill from Category 8 to Category 6
- Move MS Head Track Coach from Category 7 to Category 6

Improvements to Leave Policy: DTA initially introduced language to require the District payroll department to provide employees with timely notice, including the reason for the pay dock, before docking an employee's pay, as well as more timely notice on blockout decisions. The District responded by reconsidering its overall leave policy to limit the reasons to dock pay. The District and DTA tentatively agreed to language changes that would eliminate separate categories of Sick Leave, Personal Leave, and Discretionary Leave, and allow accrued leave to be used "for any reason."

Association Leadership Leave: The District and DTA tentatively agreed to formally incorporate the existing practice of granting DTA leadership up to 80 hours of professional leave annually to fulfill Association-related responsibilities and obligations in support of professional employees.

SPED Paperwork Days: DTA initially proposed helping SPED teachers responsible for creating and maintaining Individual Education Plans (IEP) by either providing a stipend or 32 hours annually of professional leave specifically for completing necessary paperwork, such as writing or modifying IEPs. The District responded by offering a $500 stipend to K-12 Resource and Gifted teachers with only 1.18% increase on each cell of the salary schedule, citing the the high cost of professional leave. DTA countered by asking for a 1.26% increase on each cell for all teachers and providing K-12 Resource and Gifted teachers with eight hours annually of professional leave for completing necessary paperwork. The District tentatively agreed to DTA's counterproposal.

Flexible Location Workdays: The District and DTA tentatively agreed to make permanent the policy of allowing flexible location on workdays throughout the year for a minimum of 16 hours, as determined by Calendar Committee.

Job-Sharing: The District and DTA tentatively agreed to language that would require a member of a job share team seeking to end the partnership or change the agreed upon share of benefits to notify their partner, supervisor, and human resources in writing by March 15.

Retirement Language Changes: The District and DTA tentatively agreed to changing language under Sick Leave Pay Out to correct an error in characterizing the 403(b) account and adding 457(b) since that is currently an option under our benefits package. Both sides also tentatively agreed to strike the entire section providing up to a $23,000 lump sum payment for retirees who had 30 years of service prior to 2012, since there are no longer any District employees eligible for the incentive.

Grievance Procedure: The District and DTA tentatively agreed to language that would streamline the grievance procedure by initiating the grievance process at the first level in which the arbiter was not the respondent or subordinate to the respondent.

JCPRD Benefits: DTA originally noticed the possibility of providing discounts or preferred enrollment for employees who use the before and after school care programs housed in our District buildings. The District made a good faith effort to explore the topic and reported that JCPRD could not provide either benefit due to its obligation to provide equitable access to its services.

Please note that all issues above could be subject to change in future counterproposals. If a Professional Negotiated Agreement for the 2026-27 school year cannot be ratified before the start of the new school year, certified staff will continue to operate under the existing contract.

Once a new contract is ratified, the District would pay any unpaid compensation owed under the new contract.

We appreciate those members of the bargaining unit who have attended our meetings in person and watched online, and we encourage more people to come and observe the process.

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.

Thank you for your support and interest in the negotiations process!

Sincerely,

DTA Negotiations Team