

Overview of the Seattle School District Collective Bargaining Agreement

by Liv Finne

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Seattle School District officials are negotiating a new collective bargaining agreement with the city's teachers' union, the Seattle Education Association. The talks will take several months, and will determine costs for taxpayers and the quality of instruction for Seattle students for up to five years.

A new in-depth study from Washington Policy Center, "Overview of the Seattle School District Collective Bargaining Agreement," describes the terms for working conditions, pay, benefits and time off provided under the current collective bargaining agreement. Following is a summary the study's main findings.

School district salaries and benefits

- Teachers in Seattle receive an average of \$70,850 in total salary (base pay and other pay), plus average insurance benefits of \$9,855. These figures apply to a ten-month work year.
- Teachers in Seattle public schools can earn up to \$88,463 in total base and other pay for a ten-month work year, or \$98,318 including benefits.
- Seattle Schools employ 371 people as "educational staff associates," who receive an average of \$76,339 for a ten-month year, or \$86,194 including benefits.
- Seattle Schools employs 193 non-teachers, mostly senior administrators, who each receive more than \$100,000 in total pay.

The school year – State law entitles public school students to 180 days of instruction. Due to a waiver, Seattle students receive 177 days of instruction.

Paid time off and leave – The ten-month work year includes nine paid holidays, and a total of four paid weeks off. In addition Seattle teachers receive ten days of paid sick leave, two days of personal leave and days for professional development. Teachers in Seattle public schools use an average of 16 leave days per school year, or about 9% of the school year, not counting holidays and vacations.

Teacher assignments – Principals have some control over hiring, but seniority often overrules the decisions of principals. Teachers with full contracts must be given priority over younger teachers with provisional contracts. Some teachers have "super-seniority" transfer rights.

Teacher evaluations – The collective bargaining agreement defines the criteria used when evaluating teachers. Assessing teachers based on improved student learning is not permitted.

Layoffs – A layoff must be made based on seniority, with younger teachers being

let go first. The collective bargaining agreement expressly bars officials from using teacher performance evaluations in making lay-off decisions: “The performance ratings (evaluation) of employees shall not be a factor in determining the order of layoff under this Section” (page 106 of the agreement).

Mandatory union membership – As a condition of employment, teachers must join the Seattle Education Association and pay dues, or pay a fee equal to the amount of the dues.

Monthly dues transfers – The Seattle School District collects money from employee paychecks as dues and deposits them into union bank accounts. For example, in May 2008, the district transferred \$286,181 to the Seattle Education Association. Between May 2007 and May 2008, the district forwarded a total of \$3.29 million to the union.

Dues payments to other unions – District officials also collect dues for 18 other unions. From May 2007 to May 2008, District officials transferred a total of \$509,811 in dues to these unions.

Paid leave for union officials – Education funds are used to pay for union members to work on union business. Each year Seattle education funds pay for up to 320 substitute teaching days to cover for teachers who spend the day on union-related activities. Statewide this practice reduces school budgets by about \$3 million per year.

Policy Recommendations

The full study includes three recommended policy changes that would improve learning for children in Seattle Public Schools:

1. **End the “seniority-only” rule in teacher assignments and layoffs** – Local principals should control the assignment of teachers in their own schools, regardless of seniority, so they can assemble a teaching team that best serves the needs of students and the community.
2. **Allow performance pay** – School District officials should be allowed to reward the best teachers based on measurable performance standards, particularly the ability to raise the academic achievement of students.
3. **End the automatic transfer of education funds to union accounts as monthly dues** – About \$290,000 a month is transferred as dues to union accounts. Discarding automatic withholding lets the union, as a private organization, be responsible for collection of its own dues, and would save the District bookkeeping and other costs.

Conclusion

On the whole teachers in Seattle schools work hard, and deserve support from policymakers, parents and the public. Most teachers are deeply concerned about the children entrusted to their care, and they should receive the classroom resources needed to carry out their educational mission. A new collective bargaining agreement that liberates the best in teachers and encourages bold community leadership in principals would provide vital support to fulfilling the District’s vision of “every student achieving, everyone accountable.”

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