

FAIRBANKS NORTH STAR BOROUGH SCHOOL DISTRICT
BOARD OF EDUCATION
FAIRBANKS, ALASKA

Work Session

MINUTES

January 19, 2009

President Hajdukovich called the work session to order at 5:59 p.m. in the Board Room of the FNSBSD Administrative Center at 520 Fifth Avenue to review the negotiation process.

Present:

Leslie Hajdukovich, President
Patrick Lee, Clerk
Kristina Brophy, Member
Sean Rice, Member
Howard Thies, Member

Absent:

Wendy Dominique, Vice President (recused)
Sue Hull, Treasurer
Michael Fitzgerald, Base Representative
Timothy A. Jones, Post Representative
Ken Sample, Student Representative

Staff Present:

Nancy Wagner, Superintendent
Roxa Hawkins, Assistant Superintendent – Elementary
Dave Ferree, Assistant Superintendent – Facilities Management
Mike Fisher, Chief Financial Officer
Clarence Bolden, Executive Director of Human Resources
Gayle Pierce, Director of Labor Relations
Sharon Tuttle, Executive Assistant to the School Board

Negotiation Process Review

Due to Mrs. Dominique's son's employment with the school district and his affiliation with the Education Support Staff Association (ESSA), she was recused from the work session.

Gayle Pierce, labor relations director, reviewed the negotiation process with the Board. The Board's bargaining team for the upcoming Education Support Staff Association (ESSA) negotiations had been selected: Dave Ferree, Mike Fisher, Roxa Hawkins, Gayle Pierce, Clarence Bolden, Colleen Fitzgerald, Dave Norum, Amy Rouse, John Fink, and Shari Merrick. The bargaining team had been meeting weekly since October.

In preparation for bargaining, the team had been going through each contract article line by line to be certain they understood the contract and language, resulting in the contract language receiving a thorough review every three years. Ms. Pierce noted the contract was mature, having been bargained for thirty years. There were years when some articles received more scrutiny than others.

Principals and management team members were surveyed prior to the beginning of the contract review. With traditional bargaining, the team worked through the contract to identify issues, language concerns, as well as solutions. They drafted language to address the issues and concerns that would become part of the district's proposal.

Bargaining was a process of compromises and both sides usually presented proposals reflecting that process. Each party usually came to the bargaining table with comprehensive proposals, which allowed for give and take.

Ms. Pierce explained Interest Based Bargaining (IBB) would be used for the upcoming negotiations. There would be training on the IBB process on February 4 and 5 for both bargaining teams from Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service (FMCS). The training would focus on the

teams letting go of the desire to secure ideal solutions and work through a process, along with the other team, that identified issues and mutually reached avenues to address the issues. If the IBB process broke down, or one side or the other felt it was not working, there would always be the option to return to traditional bargaining.

Ms. Pierce explained the union went through a similar process – appointing their negotiation team, reviewing the contract, and identifying issues of concern, along with solutions. They would also have to let go of the desire to secure ideal solutions and work through a process that identified issues and mutually reached avenues to address the issues.

Mrs. Hajdukovich asked if Interest Based Bargaining was widely used. Ms. Pierce stated it had been used to a limited degree in the state and knew a couple of districts had used it. Clarence Bolden, executive director of human resources, stated it had been around for a long time, but many locals had chosen to use traditional bargaining. Dr. Wagner thought Kenai had used IBB. Ms. Pierce stated the district had looked at using IBB in the past, but it hadn't been the right time for the district at that time. She believed the district was now better positioned to use IBB.

Mrs. Hajdukovich asked if ESSA considered IBB a positive move. Ms. Pierce thought they were in favor, although there were some reservations. Dr. Wagner thought it was like anything new – there was always nervousness with something new. Dr. Wagner mentioned there had been discussions about IBB during her monthly breakfast meetings with ESSA. Three of the two districts Dr. Wagner had worked with in the past had changed from traditional bargaining to IBB and it had worked very well. It had been a great way to build relationships and it was not as adversarial. It helped to work towards common interests and solutions together. She was hopeful it would be a positive experience for the district. Ms. Pierce thought the bargaining teams were looking forward to trying IBB.

Ms. Pierce explained if a settlement was not reached, there would be a Nominal Impasse, at which time a federal mediator would be called in to work with the parties to try to reach a settlement. If that was not successful, the next step would be Advisory Arbitration.

Ms. Pierce thought there had been concerns from the Board regarding how the process went last time with FEA. She thought the Board and district needed to continue to communicate as much as they could, even though they would be using the IBB process instead of traditional bargaining. Ms. Pierce said negotiations were never easy, especially in light of the different budget climate from the last round of negotiations.

Mr. Thies asked about the number of ESSA members. Ms. Pierce said there were approximately 800 members, noting the complexity of the group. There were many different levels of employees represented by one union, including electricians, carpenters, nurses, classroom aides, custodians, secretaries, and nutrition service workers, just to name a few. Some districts had several unions representing specific groups of employees, but in Fairbanks, all were represented by one union, ESSA.

Mrs. Hajdukovich asked if the bargaining team had any recommendations for the Board about lessons learned from the last round of negotiations. Ms. Pierce stated the last round of negotiations had been different than any of them had experienced in the past. Dr. Wagner thought one thing that had made the last round of negotiations different was FEA asking for the money discussion at the beginning of the negotiations, which normally would happen later in the process. Ms. Pierce said another issue was both Anchorage and Mat-Su had settled at 4%-4%-4%.

Ms. Pierce said although there were always issues to address, negotiating ultimately came down to money in the end. She noted FEA's contract would be out there as a benchmark.

Mr. Rice asked if the union would make a presentation of their proposal to the Board. Ms. Pierce explained the union made their proposal presentation to the Board's bargaining team and in turn the bargaining team communicated to the Board. Mrs. Hajdukovich added the bargaining teams could potentially meet many times before reporting to the Board.

Ms. Pierce would like to have a settlement prior to the end of the current contract on June 30, 2009. Mrs. Hawkins noted negotiations might take a little longer using the new IBB process.

Mr. Rice asked if the Board would see the proposed language and contract changes. Ms. Pierce said they would, as bargaining was a public process up until the point of mediation if it was necessary. Mrs. Hajdukovich added the bargaining teams had always done a great job of keeping the Board informed and updated.

Ms. Pierce briefly reviewed the different roles of the Board and bargaining teams in traditional bargaining. There would be more to discuss after the IBB training as the roles might change. When the Board provided the bargaining team with guidance, the team counted on confidentiality. Ms. Pierce did not believe the role of the Board would change under the IBB process, as the Board would always have the final decision in settling.

The meeting adjourned at 6:29 p.m.

Submitted by Sharon Tuttle, executive assistant to the Board.