



Hillsborough Classroom Teachers Association

3102 N. Habana Avenue, Tampa, FL 33607 | 813-238-7902 (T) 813-237-4541 (F) | www.hillsboroughcta.org

Bargaining Update: HCPS Budget Realities and Our Next Steps

On Wednesday, June 25, Hillsborough CTA resumed negotiations with Hillsborough County Public Schools (HCPS), continuing to advocate for the rights, working conditions, and learning conditions of all HCPS employees and students.

We began the day with negotiations over ESP contract language, followed by a budget presentation from new HCPS CFO Jaime Lewis. The District's presentation signaled an austerity-minded approach as we head into economic bargaining for both Instructional and ESP units. Both HCTA and HCPS acknowledged the delayed start to negotiations this year due to the late passage of Florida's state budget, which resulted in a paltry 0.7% budget increase for Hillsborough, far below the 3.4% national average inflation rate for 2025.

This small increase is tied to decreased projected enrollment (FTE) and reduced per-student funding in the Base Student Allocation (BSA). As health insurance costs rise, universal vouchers drain funding from public schools, and inflation continues, HCPS forecasted a challenging year while struggling to answer many of the budget questions advanced by HCTA on your behalf.

What HCPS Said "No" To:

While we reached several tentative agreements (TAs) for the ESP contract, the District refused:

- Creating continuity for all support staff by extending the ESP workday from 7.5 to 8 hours for all
- Additional pay for paras absorbing more students
- Granting paraprofessionals credit for previous work experience

Instead, HCPS proposed extending the ESP probationary period, shortening allowable health leave, and casually suggested the removal of ESP bereavement leave, all proposals we strongly oppose.

Millage and Salary Scale Realities

We also discussed the millage referendum, reminding HCPS that while millage helps, it is not a substitute for continuing to improve our salary scales. HCTA requested updated calculations showing what step movement would cost so we can continue pressing for fair raises for all employees.

As President Rob Kriete noted in bargaining, part of the reason the state is not robust in its funding is because HCPS sits on a massive general fund balance of 25%, far above the 3% required by the state. As Rob put it, "There is no reason to have a fund balance this large just for the sake of having a pile of money."

Stay Informed and Engaged: Mark your calendars for our next bargaining sessions:

- ESP Units: July 9 at 9:00 AM at our HCTA building
- Instructional Unit: July 15 at our HCTA building

We will continue to advocate for fair pay, protect your rights, and challenge proposals that undermine your working conditions.

📺 Watch the June 25 Bargaining Session here: https://youtu.be/LIPxYUTDMJQ?si=6XFb6_Xaqp4DF-le



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2026 Health Insurance Update: What's Changing and What Isn't

HCTA recently held a Health Insurance Town Hall to help members understand upcoming 2026 health insurance changes, including the shift to a self-insured model while maintaining Aetna's doctor network.

What's Changing:

- In 2026, HCPS will shift to a self-insured model, meaning the District will pay claims directly, while Aetna will continue managing claims, networks, and approvals.
- This change allows the committee (HCPS, HCTA, HSEF, HASA, and retirees) greater access to data and plan design input throughout the year.

What's Not Changing:

- Your network of doctors, pharmacies, and hospitals under Aetna remains the same.
- Aetna still manages claims and pre-authorizations. Not the District, not the union, not the committee.
- Your individual medical information remains private and protected under HIPAA. Neither HCPS, HCTA, nor the committee sees your personal doctor visits or prescriptions.

Why Are Costs Rising?

Healthcare costs continue to rise nationally, and carriers like Humana and Aetna are no longer able to offset these costs without adjustments. HCPS and HCTA continue to protect your no-premium-cost base plan as guaranteed in your contracts, but rising claims and inflation pressures will impact the overall budget.

How Do We Compare?

Other districts often do not offer a no-premium-cost plan or have smaller networks and less generous coverage. Hillsborough's plan remains competitive, but continued funding challenges require member awareness and collective advocacy.

Your Voice Matters:

HCTA will launch a members-only health insurance survey during pre-planning to gather your input for negotiations.

Want to see the charts, graphs, and FAQs? 📺 Watch the recorded Town Hall here:

[Watch on YouTube](#)

Together, we will continue to protect your healthcare, advocate for cost-saving options, and ensure members' voices shape the plan.



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Join Now – Strength in Numbers

HCTA's power comes from our members. Every member who joins strengthens our collective voice to secure better pay, protect your rights, and improve working and learning conditions for all. As we enter a challenging bargaining season, it's more important than ever to stand together. Every conversation you have with a colleague about joining helps us fight for fair raises, protect health insurance, and push back against policies that undermine public education.

✓ **Not a member yet? Join today and add your voice to the movement.**

✓ **Already a member? Ask a colleague to join with you!**

 [Click here to join HCTA now](#)

 **Need help or have questions? Email HCTA@HCPS.net**

Together, **we are the union**—and together, we can protect and improve our profession.

