



# Hillsborough Classroom Teachers Association

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## August 20, 2026, HCTA ESP Bargaining Update

### **HCTA & School Board Move Closer, But No Compensation Agreement Yet**

On Thursday, August 20, HCTA's ESP Bargaining Team met with the School Board's team from 1:00-5:30 p.m. to continue negotiations for our Paraprofessional and Clerical bargaining units.

Unlike the Instructional Contract, the ESP Contract is not in a full open-book bargaining year. That means negotiations are primarily focused on compensation and economic issues, along with a limited number of contractual improvements. After more than four hours at the table, HCTA and the School Board moved closer on compensation, but did NOT reach an agreement.

The Financial Reality We Are Bargaining Against

There is no way around it: this is an extremely difficult budget year.

The Florida Legislature and Governor increased the Base Student Allocation (BSA), the primary source of flexible funding available for employee compensation and other operating expenses, by only 1.6% this year. Last year's increase in funding available for employee compensation was .78%. That amounts to roughly 2.3% in increased funding over two years, during a time when employees continue to experience significantly higher costs for housing, groceries, transportation and other everyday necessities.

For employees living and working in the Tampa Bay area, affordability is not an abstract issue. It is an everyday reality, and it is particularly difficult for our hardworking Educational Support Professionals. At the same time, portions of new State funding are legally restricted. Most notably, Teacher Salary Increase Allocation (TSIA) funding cannot be used for ESP compensation.

And then there is health insurance.

HCPS is facing an approximately 18% increase in health insurance costs this coming year. A 1.6% increase in State funding simply does not cover an 18% increase in health care costs. For employees in HCTA's Paraprofessional and Clerical units alone, the School Board will absorb approximately \$7.2 million in increased health insurance costs rather than passing those increases on to employees.

That matters. Health insurance is employee compensation, even when the money never appears in your paycheck. And HCTA stood strong to ensure employees did not see any increase to their health insurance costs while maintaining coverage and access.

For 2026-2027:

- HCTA has continued to protect a no-premium individual health plan option.
- Regular office visit co-pays will decrease by \$5 and specialist co-pays by \$10.
- A new value PPO option will provide lower paycheck deductions for family coverage in exchange for a higher deductible.
- Employees using the new Garner program may qualify for reimbursement of eligible co-pays up to \$1,000 for individuals and \$2,000 for families when utilizing qualifying in-network providers.

Protecting employees from those increased costs has real value. Unfortunately, it also means millions of dollars that cannot simultaneously be used for wages. That is the difficult financial environment in which we are bargaining.

### **Where Compensation Stands**

HCTA and the School Board made progress today, but significant differences remain.

### **The School Board's Current Offer**

The School Board has proposed:

- One step/level increase for eligible employees, retroactive to July 1, 2026.
- A \$1,250 longevity payment for employees at the top step/level who do not receive a step increase. This is \$750 less than the \$2,000 longevity payment provided during each of the previous two years.
- Regrading Department Representatives, Job Code 51314.
- Continuing payment of employee fingerprint monitoring fees.
- Continuing the no-premium individual health plan option.

The School Board's current compensation package totals approximately **\$9.4 million**.

### **HCTA's Current Position**

HCTA has not accepted that offer. HCTA's current proposal includes:

- Two step/level increases for eligible employees, retroactive to July 1, 2026.
- Continuing the \$2,000 longevity payment for employees at the top step/level who do not receive a step increase.
- Regrading Department Representatives, Job Code 51314.
- Increasing the Professional Learning Stipend to at least \$15 per hour.
- A one-year pilot MOU providing a \$250 payment for completion of an approved micro-credential, for up to 40 individual micro-credentials during 2026-2027.
- Continuing payment of employee fingerprint monitoring fees.
- Continuing the no-premium individual health plan option.

HCTA's current package totals approximately **\$11.5 million**.

**That leaves the parties approximately \$2.1 million apart.**

### **What Has the School Board Rejected?**

During negotiations, the School Board rejected several additional HCTA proposals, including:

- A 2% increase to ESP base salary schedules.
- An ESE critical-shortage supplement for eligible ESP positions.
- Additional job regrades for positions not addressed during the previous two years.
- Increases to Data Processor and Highly Qualified Paraprofessional payments.

- New payments recognizing bilingual interpretation/translation services and highly effective, experienced Para 1 employees.
- Advanced-degree supplements.
- Industry certification reimbursement for Nurses.
- Increased compensation for paraprofessionals serving as substitutes and a new substitute payment for Clerical employees.
- Moving ESE Paraprofessionals, Assistant Teachers, Aides and Hearing Technicians to an eight-hour workday.

Those proposals matter because they came directly from the experiences and needs of the employees we represent. HCTA continued pushing for improvements throughout today's session, but the School Board has not agreed to fund them.

### **Contract Language: Some Progress**

The parties did reach several Tentative Agreements on contractual language.

**Section 4.1.1, Reclassification:** The parties agreed to clarify the reclassification process for groups of ESP job codes and add an updated Reclassification Form to the appendix of the ESP Contract.

**Sections 24.5.1, 24.5.2 and new 24.5.4, Insurance Committee:** The parties reached agreement on updates providing additional clarification regarding the role and operation of the Insurance Committee.

HCTA continues working to improve Section 18.9.4, addressing how ESP employees receive notice of available in-service programs and request opportunities to attend. HCTA also continues to maintain that employee insurance rates are mandatory subjects of bargaining and should be incorporated into the appendix of the collective bargaining agreement.

## **Now We Need YOU**

The bargaining teams are approximately \$2.1 million apart. HCTA can continue making proposals. We can present the hard work employees do each day. We can make the arguments. We can push across the bargaining table.

But there is something the Bargaining Team cannot create inside that room: **collective power**.

That comes from you.

A union's bargaining power is directly connected to the number of employees willing to stand together behind the proposals being made in their name. When thousands of ESPs are members, show up at School Board meetings, contact Board members and publicly demand better pay and working conditions, the message is unmistakable:

**These employees are organized. They are paying attention. And they expect action.**

When the majority of employees remain outside their union or remain silent during negotiations, the School Board sees that too. This isn't about blaming employees who are struggling financially. HCTA members know dues are a real expense, particularly for the very employees fighting for better wages.

But there is a hard truth about collective bargaining: **We cannot build collective power individually.**

If ESPs want HCTA's Bargaining Team to push the School Board further than its current \$9.4 million offer, we need employees standing behind this team in overwhelming numbers.

### **SEPTEMBER 1: SHOW UP.**

Our next major opportunity is the **September 1 School Board Meeting.**

We need Paraprofessionals and Clerical employees there **in HUGE numbers.**

Come to the meeting. Wear your HCTA gear. Bring your coworkers. Speak during public comment. Tell the School Board what your work is worth and what these compensation proposals mean for you and your family.

And if you aren't an HCTA member yet:

**[JOIN NOW.](#)**

If you're already a member, don't stop there.

**Ask the person working beside you to join.**

The Bargaining Team represents your voice at the table.

**Membership determines how loud that voice is.**

Watch the August 20 Bargaining Session: <https://youtu.be/NwqpFVSCyyw?si=pv80lsaojaqTorji>

**Stay tuned for the next bargaining date!**