



Hillsborough Classroom Teachers Association

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ESPs HAVE A TENTATIVE AGREEMENT

September 4, 2026 Bargaining Update

After months of negotiations, HCTA's ESP Bargaining Team reached a Tentative Agreement with the School Board today for our Paraprofessional and Clerical bargaining units!

This was an incredibly challenging year for compensation negotiations. Florida's Legislature and Governor increased the Base Student Allocation by only 1.6% this year, following an increase of less than 1% last year, while employees continue facing increased costs for housing, groceries, transportation and nearly everything else.

At the same time, health insurance costs increased approximately 18%, consuming millions of dollars that otherwise could have been available for wages.

Despite those challenges, HCTA secured approximately \$9.6 million in economic improvements and protected benefits for ESP employees.

COMPENSATION

The Tentative Agreement includes:

ONE LEVEL/STEP FOR ELIGIBLE EMPLOYEES

- Eligible employees will advance one level on their salary schedule, effective retroactively to July 1, 2026.
- Eligibility requires working at least half the 2025-2026 work year plus one day and receiving an effective evaluation.

\$1,500 TOP-LEVEL PAYMENT

- Eligible employees already at Level 24 who do not receive a level increase will receive a \$1,500 one-time, FRS-eligible payment.
- The same eligibility requirements apply.

DEPARTMENT REPRESENTATIVE REGRADE

- Department Representatives, Job Code 51314, will move from Pay Grade 25 to Pay Grade 26, effective July 1, 2026.

PROTECTING YOUR HEALTH INSURANCE

The School Board will continue paying the full employee-only premium for a designated health insurance plan, protecting a no-premium option for HCTA ESP employees.

This was especially significant this year.

Health insurance costs increased approximately 18%, while State funding increased by only 1.6%. For our two ESP bargaining units alone, the Board will absorb approximately \$7.1 million in increased health insurance costs rather than shifting those costs onto employees.

We know employees would rather see every available dollar added directly to their paychecks. But protecting employees from thousands of dollars in potential additional health insurance costs has real economic value.

ADDITIONAL ECONOMIC IMPROVEMENTS

HCTA also secured:

- An increase in the voluntary, after-hours Professional Learning Stipend from \$9 to \$11 per hour.
- A new one-year Micro-Credential MOU providing a \$250 payment for each approved micro-credential completed, up to two per employee (\$500 maximum), with up to 40 payments available during the 2026-2027 school year.
- Continued Board payment of fingerprint monitoring fees for Paraprofessional and Clerical employees.

CONTRACT IMPROVEMENTS

Although this was not a full open-book bargaining year, HCTA also reached agreement on several contractual improvements:

- **Reclassification:** Clarified that reclassification involving groups of ESP employees/job codes should be initiated through the collective bargaining process.
- **Reclassification Form:** Established a new Appendix E for Forms, where the parties will place the updated Reclassification Request Form once revisions are completed.
- **Professional Learning:** Improved Section 18.9.4 so employees requesting to attend teacher in-service programs make the request in writing/email through their tier supervisor, with reasonable efforts made to communicate placement or non-placement in writing/email.
- **Health Insurance Rates:** Employee and Board premium contributions will now be documented annually through an MOU included in the Contract appendix.
- **Insurance Committee:** Guaranteed representation for one Clerical and one Paraprofessional employee and clarified the committee's role and processes.
- **MOU Appendix:** Removed outdated agreements and incorporated current and newly negotiated MOUs.

THE STATE FUNDING CHALLENGE IS REAL

We want to be transparent about the environment in which this agreement was reached.

Florida has simply not provided enough flexible funding to adequately address employee compensation, inflation and rapidly increasing health insurance costs.

A 1.6% increase in the Base Student Allocation cannot simultaneously fund meaningful wage growth and an 18% increase in health insurance costs.

That is not a reflection of the value of our Educational Support Professionals. It reflects the choices being made in Tallahassee about how Florida funds its public schools.

HCTA pushed throughout negotiations for more. Our team proposed additional steps, base salary improvements, supplements, regrades and other compensation improvements. Ultimately, we had to evaluate what could realistically be secured this year while protecting employees from substantial increases in health insurance costs.

The result is an agreement providing approximately **\$9.6 million in economic value**, including retroactive level movement, a \$1,500 payment for employees at the top level, a Department Representative regrade, new professional learning opportunities, and continued protection from increased employee-only health insurance premiums.

NEXT STEP: RATIFICATION

This is a Tentative Agreement. It is not final until ratified.

HCTA will provide Paraprofessional and Clerical bargaining unit employees with complete ratification information, including the full Tentative Agreements, voting dates and instructions in upcoming communication.

Thank you to our ESP Bargaining Team and to every member who stood behind them throughout these negotiations.

- **Mili Criswell – Para – Benito Middle**
- **Cathy Butler – Clerical – Barrington Middle**
- **Derrick Bullard – Para – Cypress Creek Elementary**
- **Girlene Brown – Para – Foster Elementary**
- **Sabrina Wright – Clerical – Marshall Middle**
- **Olivia Ago-Stallworth – Clerical – Mann Middle**
- **Genesis Zschocher – Para – Sulphur Springs PK-8**
- **Cathryn Jones – Para – Burns Middle**
- **Theresa McCain Cole – Para – Jennings Middle**
- **Denise Verrill – Para – Lomax Magnet Elementary**
- **Felecity Lewis – LPN – Witter Elementary**
- **Wanda Centeno – Clerical – Foster Elementary**
- **Pamela Perks – Para – Hospital Homebound**
- **Rhonda Miller – Para – Pierce Middle**
- **Serina Holmes – Clerical – Middle School Education**
- **Cynthia Shim – Clerical – Turner Bartels K-8**
- **Janice Carr – Para – Riverview Senior High**
- **Rhonda Gentle – Para – Middleton High School**

President: Robert Kriete, **Vice President:** Regina Gambrell, **Secretary Treasurer:** Valerie Chuchman, **HCTA Financial Administrator:** Tamica Thomas Simpson, **HCTA Bargaining/Research Associate:** Sherry Gunn, and **HCTA Chief Negotiator & Executive Director:** Brittni Wegmann

Our ability to bargain comes from our collective strength.

**When ESPs join HCTA, participate and stand together, we strengthen the voice of every
Paraprofessional and Clerical employee at the bargaining table.**

Instructional negotiations will continue on September 11th, 2026, at 9am at the HCTA building.