



Hillsborough Classroom Teachers Association

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INSTRUCTIONAL BARGAINING: FULL TENTATIVE AGREEMENT REACHED

September 11, 2026 Bargaining Update

After nine bargaining sessions, more than four months of negotiations, 102 pages of tentative agreements, and a final bargaining session from 9am to 6:30pm on Friday, September 11th, HCTA and the School Board reached a full tentative agreement for the Instructional bargaining unit negotiations.

There is a LOT in this agreement.

Because this was a full open-book bargaining year, HCTA proposed extensive changes throughout the contract based on years of member concerns, bargaining-team priorities, Contract Action Team (CAT) recommendations, grievances and issues we have encountered enforcing the agreement. The resulting tentative agreement includes changes throughout 16 sections of the Instructional Contract, three appendices, several new Memoranda of Understanding, significant employee rights and working condition improvements, and an estimated \$56.4 million compensation and benefits package.

But let's be clear from the beginning: this agreement is TENTATIVE.

Nothing can be implemented until instructional employees have the opportunity to review and vote on the agreement. If ratified by employees, it must then be approved by the School Board. HCTA does not tell employees how to vote. Every employee in the Instructional bargaining unit, whether an HCTA member or not, will have the opportunity to decide.

HCTA is preparing a comprehensive ratification package to show proposed changes. An informational meeting will also be held for employees to review the agreement, ask questions and understand exactly what they are voting on. *More detailed information will be shared.*

THE \$56.4 MILLION COMPENSATION & BENEFITS PACKAGE

The estimated economic value of the tentative agreement includes approximately:

- \$11.7 million for step advancement
- \$5.9 million for longevity payments
- \$2.4 million for the ESE Critical Shortage Supplement

- \$395,353 for the new School Psychologist Salary Schedule
- \$253,000 to protect the \$1,500 ASHA CCC's supplement
- \$246,000 to protect the \$750 professional licensure supplements for student services
- \$35.5 million in increased Board health insurance contributions.
- *A new paid funeral leave MOU for instructional staff will also have an additional cost that is not yet known.*

And yes, the salary increases are **RETROACTIVE**. The economic agreement is effective July 1, 2026, and once the tentative agreement is ratified by employees and approved by the School Board, payroll will prepare the retroactive payments to eligible employees adjusted back to July 1. *Payment dates will be communicated once we know them.*

NEW SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST SALARY SCHEDULE

For the last 3-4 years HCTA has raised concerns about the salary structure for School Psychologists and adequately recognizing their specialized credentials, experience and critical work with students, including students with disabilities, which went years without any increases. This tentative agreement establishes a new 205-day School Psychologist Advanced Degree Salary Schedule for approximately 150 employees, effective July 1, 2026.

Importantly, the Board's initial position was to eliminate the ESE supplement for School Psychologists. HCTA continued bargaining, and the Board ultimately proposed the permanent salary restructuring, moving additional compensation into permanent base salary rather than relying on a supplement that can be reduced or eliminated from year to year. *School Psychologists will receive a separate detailed comparison of the old and new salary schedules before ratification.*

HCTA PROTECTED COMPENSATION THAT WAS AT RISK

Some of the most important bargaining work is invisible if only looking at what is new.

The Board initially proposed eliminating several existing payments. HCTA protected the \$1,500 AHSA CCC's payment for eligible SLPs and Audiologists, and the \$750 professional licensure/certification payment for eligible Student Services professionals.

The Board also initially proposed eliminating the ESE supplement entirely and narrowing eligibility. HCTA continued bargaining and while the ESE Critical Shortage Supplement will decrease from \$1,500 to \$1,000, approximately \$2.4 million was preserved for eligible ESE instructional employees with rosters and instructional employees working at Exceptional Centers.

The \$56.4 million package also does **NOT** include other monetary benefits HCTA has already ensured will continue for 2026-27, including:

- tiered \$2,000 or \$5,000 payments, and \$4,500 for NBCT in the [Transformation Network MOU](#)
- \$2,000 payment and \$4,500 for NBCT in the [Designated Schools of Need MOU](#)
- \$1,000 NBCT mentoring and/or training supplement

- The option to be compensated an additional \$20 per hour for performing substitute duty during planning time
- Board paid fingerprint monitoring fees
- the minimum [\\$6,000 Millage Referendum](#) payment.

These agreements will also be incorporated into the ratification vote.

YOUR STEP IS AN INCREASE IN BASE SALARY, BUT IT SHOULD NOT BE THE END OF THE CONVERSATION

Eligible instructional employees will receive one year of experience and advance one step effective July 1. Depending upon the employee's position on the salary schedule, the increase ranges from approximately 0.5% to 2.6%.

- Steps 1-8: approximately \$250
- Steps 9-22: \$1,335
- Step 23: \$1,350
- Step 24: \$1,400
- Step 25: \$1,500

Employees already at the top for one year will receive a \$1,500 longevity payment and employees who have remained at the top for two or more consecutive years will receive a \$2,250 longevity payment. Details regarding the timing of these payments will be communicated once known.

We already know one reaction: ***"My step shouldn't be my raise."***

HCTA understands that frustration. Employees should receive recognition for another successful year of service AND meaningful improvements to the value of their salary schedules. But to understand why this agreement looks the way it does, employees also need to understand how Florida actually funded salaries this year.

SO WHAT HAPPENED TO THE "\$3,000 VETERAN TEACHER RAISE"?

The short answer is Florida did NOT deliver Hillsborough enough money to provide every eligible teacher a \$3,000 raise. The final state budget for TISA (*the Classroom Teacher and Other Instructional Personnel Salary Increase – formerly called the Teacher Salary Increase Allocation*) says an individual increase funded through this allocation may not exceed \$3,000. That is a maximum, not a guarantee.

For Hillsborough, after removing the required charter-school allocation, approximately \$12.6 million is available in new TSIA growth funding. Approximately 66% of HCTA's Instructional bargaining unit has 10 or more years

of experience, making us a more veteran workforce than some other districts. State law restricts the new TSIA growth funding to eligible full-time classroom teachers and certified prekindergarten teachers with at least 10 years of verified full-time teaching experience in a Florida public school.

HCTA and HCPS cannot expand those restricted dollars to every instructional employee, so the \$12.6 million will fund the negotiated step advancement and longevity payments for employees who qualify under the state's TSIA requirements.

Providing the negotiated step and longevity across ALL HCTA Instructional employees costs approximately \$17.6 million, including employees the State excluded from the new TSIA growth allocation. In other words, HCTA did not agree to take \$12.6 million intended for veteran teachers and simply divide it among everybody. The restricted TSIA dollars will fund eligible employees' salary movement and longevity, and HCTA negotiated an additional \$5 million dollars so employees excluded by the Legislature were not simply left behind.

FLORIDA CREATED THE SALARY COMPRESSION PROBLEM WE ARE STILL TRYING TO FIX

The years of salary compression was created when Florida lawmakers prioritized increasing starting teacher salaries without providing enough funding for proportional increases to veteran educators. This has resulted in Steps 1-8 moving by only \$250 while later steps provide significantly larger increases. This year the Legislature said it wants to address experienced-teacher pay, but once again did not provide enough funding to actually repair years of compression or guarantee the "\$3,000" employees understandably heard about.

There was never a separately funded step +PLUS additional funding for base salary increases +PLUS an additional funding for \$3,000 for veteran educators.

WHY WAS BARGAINING SO DIFFICULT THIS YEAR?

Every year HCTA independently analyzes HCPS finances. Since 2022-2023 that analysis has shown us more room than the Board initially suggested existed. **This year it did not.**

We reviewed the FEFP, enrollment, expenditures, fund balance reserves, the Annual Financial Report and more. We also consulted with Florida Education Association bargaining and financial specialists this year to double check our work. Unfortunately, the picture is concerning.

HCPS budgeted to end 2025-26 with a financial condition ratio of approximately 6.9%. However, the Annual Financial Report shows the District actually ended around **3.5%**, only half a percentage point above Florida's statutory 3% minimum.

There simply is not the same financial cushion available that we identified and fought for in prior bargaining cycles. Since HCTA's successful impasse for the 2022-2023 school year, the School Board has spent down substantial fund balance reserves with significant dollars supporting employee compensation and benefits, with

the majority rapidly going to the increasing health insurance costs and compensation improvements HCTA has negotiated over the years.

The harsh reality is that Florida elected politicians increased the 2026-27 Base Student Allocation by only **1.58%**, from \$5,372.60 to \$5,457.60. That's only \$85 more per student. Meanwhile, Hillsborough is projected to lose approximately 3,535 district FTE, representing roughly \$32 million in funding capacity associated with that enrollment decline.

At the same time, approximately **\$5 billion** is being directed to private-school vouchers. Using the current funding formula, our FEA bargaining specialists verified this weekend that if the voucher dollars were instead available through FEFP funding, **Hillsborough's share would be approximately \$385 million.**

For perspective: compare \$385 million with only \$12.6 million in new TSIA growth funding.

THEN HEALTH INSURANCE INCREASED 18%

For the Instructional bargaining unit alone, the Board will absorb rising healthcare costs of approximately \$35.5 million. That's 63% of the entire \$56.4 million compensation and benefits package. Those dollars are certainly part of employee compensation and prevent those increased costs from simply being shifted onto employees, but they do not show up in anyone's paycheck.

This is not simply a Hillsborough problem. [Healthcare costs are exploding nationally](#) and like others, HCPS's plan has experienced several years in which claims significantly outpaced the premium equivalent funding going into the plan.

Through bargaining HCTA has continued to protect the contractual guarantee in Section 13.2.1 that the School Board pays the employee premium for a comprehensive medical insurance program. For 2027 employees will continue to have access to an employee-only plan with a \$0 employee premium contribution, deductibles will not increase, primary-care and specialist copays will decrease by \$5, and a new program beginning in January will provide an opportunity for employees to receive up to \$1,000 toward copays for individual coverage and \$2,000 for family coverage.

The School Board is also introducing a new Value PPO option with lower dependent premiums for employees choosing family coverage, although deductibles will be substantially higher for that plan. Additionally, the new annual insurance MOU will document the actual Board and employee premium contributions as part of the collective bargaining agreement.

WHAT ABOUT THE \$720 INSURANCE OPT-OUT CREDIT?

We know employees who waive HCPS medical insurance have significant concerns about the elimination of the \$720 annual FSA credit. HCTA raised those concerns directly at bargaining on September 11.

The opt-out credit has never been contained in the Instructional Contract or a negotiated MOU, and its amount and availability have changed over time, so there was not a proposal HCTA agreed to in eliminating the credit. However, HCTA specifically asked the Board to explain its decision and financial reasoning on the record during bargaining.

The Board explained that its actuaries do not project significant migration of employees back into HCPS plans as a result of eliminating the credit and that approximately \$3 million previously associated with the credit can instead support the overall health plan during an approximately 18% cost increase. The Board's position is that those dollars help preserve premiums and plan benefits for the overwhelming majority of employees enrolled in the group plan.

This does not make the loss insignificant to employees who received the \$720 credit, but it explains the financial tradeoff involved. Employees who want to hear the Board's complete explanation can review HCTA's question and the District's response in the September 11 bargaining recording at [[55:40 time mark of the session](#)].

COMPENSATION IS ONLY PART OF THIS AGREEMENT

This was a full open-book contract year and employees can review the original overview of HCTA's proposals here: [HCTA Instructional Proposals 2026-27](#). Not every proposal reached agreement, but after months of bargaining some of the most meaningful changes have nothing to do with a paycheck.

NEW PAID FUNERAL LEAVE

After years of HCTA proposing this benefit instructional employees will finally have access to dedicated paid funeral leave through an MOU for the 2026-2027 school year!! Permanent-status instructional employees may receive up to three paid days, depending upon the location and circumstances of the funeral. Most importantly, this leave does NOT come out of the employee's sick leave or another leave account.

The MOU also includes a broad definition of immediate family and reasonable documentation requirements while specifically prohibiting the District from requiring death certificates, medical records or documentation creating an undue burden.

NEW REMOTE-WORK PILOT

HCTA also secured the opportunity for instructional employees to work remotely on designated non-student/teacher workdays:

- October 12, 2026
- March 29, 2027
- November 11, 2026 (*for 12-month instructional employees only*)

This MOU pilots the impact of remote work on these designated days and gives us all an opportunity to demonstrate that professional flexibility and accountability can coexist. Importantly, these are remote **WORK**

days. Employees working remotely remain responsible for their full workday. Employees who intend to take time off must appropriately report applicable leave or compensatory time.

MAJOR EMPLOYEE-RIGHTS IMPROVEMENTS

One of the most significant changes in this agreement is only a sentence long. Current contract language governing dismissal from employment says School Board decisions are final and "*will not be subject to the grievance and arbitration process of this contract or any other appeal.*" This language is being **REMOVED!**

HCTA also negotiated clearer procedures allowing employees suspended without pay to move directly to Level III of the grievance process to appeal to the School Board, along with additional improvements to grievance timelines and procedures.

Protecting the contractual right to defend your employment against the employer is one of the most fundamental reasons our union exists!!!

OTHER IMPORTANT WORKING-CONDITION IMPROVEMENTS

Among the additional tentative agreements are clarified protections for scheduling IEP, MTSS, CST and other required meetings during the normal workday; clear establishment of the one-hour lunch during preplanning; volunteer-list language for planning-period substitute coverage at worksites; stronger Faculty Steering Committee language; improved protections surrounding supplemented positions from unit loss; FMLA language finally incorporated into the contract; and clarification of student referral procedures consistent with Florida law.

Additional agreements address K-8 schools, Technical Colleges, Library Media Specialists, conference nights, comp-time accounting when employees transfer, leave reporting, handling of money, inventory responsibilities, attendance recording as an expectation, annual-contract non-renomination hearings and more.

A new Instructional Materials MOU establishes a one-year pilot of a more detailed committee-driven selection process including committee training, better evaluation of materials, three weeks for teacher review and anonymous feedback before the committee's final recommendation. Most importantly a majority of the committee remains classroom teachers appointed by the HCTA President.

This is NOT the complete list.

A comprehensive section-by-section comparison will be provided before ratification.

PUBLIC SCHOOL EMPLOYEES DESERVE MORE!

We are not simply celebrating employees receiving their earned year of service through a step increase. We are not claiming a step solves the affordability crisis facing educators. And we are not pretending that \$35.5 million in health insurance contributions pays someone's rent, mortgage or grocery bill.

At the same time we must recognize what collective bargaining accomplished in an extraordinarily difficult funding environment.

We protected experience-based step movement, longevity, ESE and professional supplements, employee health insurance and existing monetary benefits. We achieved a permanent School Psychologist salary schedule and new paid funeral leave. We negotiated remote-work opportunities, stronger working-condition protections and significant employee due-process rights.

That is what collective bargaining does.

HCTA can fight for every available dollar and force difficult conversations at the bargaining table. We can fight to protect employees from losses. We can improve our contract. We can enforce rights. We can make employee compensation the priority. This is why our union matters at the bargaining table,

But collective bargaining cannot manufacture public-education funding that the Legislature and Governor choose not to provide.

So our collective voice has to extend far beyond it.

YOUR HCTA INSTRUCTIONAL BARGAINING TEAM

These agreements did not happen by themselves. For more than four months, your HCTA Instructional Bargaining Team spent countless hours at the table speaking out for all employees, and many more hours preparing, reviewing employee feedback, researching, developing proposals and counters, analyzing District responses and advocating for nearly 13,000 instructional employees!! Thank you to the following for their dedication and energy:

- **Leslie Adams – SLH – York Prk-8**
- **Debbie Blackwell Owensby – Access Points – Caminiti Exceptional Center**
- **Renee Bowser – Media Specialist – Folsom Elementary**
- **Karen Campbell – DRT – Headstart**
- **Kimberly Coleman – DRT – Middle School Office of Administration**
- **Carissa Deneca – Math – Gaither High School**
- **Virginia Dickinson – Reading Resource – Cypress Creek Elementary**
- **Pearl Ershery – School Counselor – Marchall Middle Magnet**
- **Stephanie Geyfman – Science – Collins PK-8**
- **Anita Greenbaum – School Psychologist – Lewis Elementary**
- **Maridea Groves – Pre-K ESE – Riverview Elementary**
- **Roger R. Marcellus – Media Specialist – Kenly Elementary**
- **Travis Medling – Math – Riverview High School**
- **Erinn Michaelson – Access Points – Lavoy Exceptional Center**
- **Michelle Miller – VE – Hillsborough Virtual**
- **John Mitchell – Automotive Technology – Erwin Technical College**
- **Jody Orlando – School Social Worker – Adum PK-8**
- **Mackenzie Roberts – VE – Kingswood Elementary**
- **Katie Sparks Jones – Art – Ferrell Middle Magnet**

President: Robert Kriete, **Vice President:** Regina Gambrell, **Secretary Treasurer:** Valerie Chuchman, **HCTA Bargaining/Research Associate:** Sherry Gunn, **HCTA Member Services Specialists** David Peacock & Chris Rusnak, **HCTA Financial Administrator:** Tamica Thomas Simpson, **HCTA Chief Negotiator & Executive Director:** Brittni Wegmann, and all HCTA Staff who support our members every day!

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

The agreement remains tentative! Before anything can be implemented instructional employees must vote on ratification. If ratified the agreement must then be approved by the School Board. Every employee in the Instructional bargaining unit has the right to vote, regardless of HCTA membership.

Before voting begins HCTA will provide more summary of all contract changes, the complete tentative agreements and MOUs, detailed compensation information, and hold a Ratification Information Meeting where employees can review the agreement and ask questions.

Voting dates, times and instruction information will be shared soon.

NOT AN HCTA MEMBER YET? NOW IS THE TIME TO JOIN.

Everything you just read exists because employees have the legal right to organize together and collectively bargain with their employer.

None of it simply happens.

More than 8,200 Hillsborough educators currently pool their collective power through HCTA. But Florida law requires public employee unions like ours to maintain at least 60% membership or face a recertification election.

Right now we need 795 more Instructional employees to join HCTA by March 31, 2027!

Without them, we risk our certification, our collective bargaining rights, and ultimately the contract we just spent months improving.

If you are already an HCTA member, THANK YOU. Your membership makes this work possible. Ask one colleague who isn't a member yet to join you.

If you aren't a member, JOIN US!

Not because every tentative agreement is perfect. Not because every salary increase is enough. And not because HCTA will ever tell employees they should be satisfied with less than they deserve. But because the answer to not having enough power isn't less union. It's MORE employees standing together to demand better.

JOIN HCTA TODAY → [\[JOIN HCTA HERE!\]](#)