

Bargaining Priorities for Education Support Professionals



The union of 70,000 educators

Recommended ESP Bargaining Goals

Introduction

Education Minnesota is the leading advocate for public schools in Minnesota. Our members help students in every part of the state achieve their highest potential and deserve community support for this vital work. Increasingly, our local unions are facing challenges that require creative responses as they bargain new contracts.

Two such challenges are the growing public scrutiny of contract negotiations and an increasing interest in the complex details of our public education system. It is important for Education Minnesota locals to understand that this changing dynamic in collective bargaining also creates great opportunities for us. These include bringing subjects to the table that all educators care about: fostering students' well-being and achievement; connecting with our communities over solutions and ideas that improve education for all; and joining with local unions across the state to speak with one voice about the shared needs of our schools and educators.

Since every community is different, every local union is free to tackle issues that address local needs—from educational environments that optimize student learning to educators' economic welfare. This checklist is intended to serve as a guide to Education Minnesota's ongoing priorities for local contracts and can be used to assess existing contracts and plan for future ones.

We have grouped these goals into five theme areas to help organize and focus negotiations.

*Goals marked with an * are shared teacher and ESP goals*

Bargaining Themes

I. Advance meaningful professional development opportunities and fair evaluation processes

II. Support high-quality learning environments for students

III. Foster strong schools as building blocks of our communities

IV. Promote educators' economic security

I. Advance meaningful professional development opportunities and fair evaluation processes.

Rationale: Students deserve well-prepared educators and other school support staff who are equipped with the tools to help students succeed in an ever-changing world and 21st century economy. Taking responsibility for our work and our professional development is a vital principle of unionism. We have a responsibility to help new and veteran staff alike become the best they can be.

To be effective, evaluation systems must foster both professional growth for ESPs in all areas. School support staff must be involved in decision-making. Access to relevant and timely professional development is critical and ESPs should be involved in decisions about the content and delivery of professional development opportunities.

- ☐ Negotiate a minimum of two and a half days of paid professional development each year for ESPs in all job areas to maximize ESPs' access to meaningful professional development.
- ☐ Negotiate ESP representation on the district's staff development committee to promote equal access to state staff development revenue. ESP members should be appointed by the local union president.
- ☐ Establish a labor-management committee to create appropriate, compensated professional learning opportunities for ESP. This committee should focus on professional learning above and beyond the minimal job requirements and should coordinate with the teacher local to ensure the district gives priority to joint training opportunities, if they are available and relevant.
- ☐ Negotiate a requirement that the labor-management committee adopt additional credentials, such as the "nine core competencies" grid of the Minnesota Voluntary Paraprofessional Credential, or other certifications relevant to ESP job categories.

II. Support high-quality learning environments for students

Rationale: Educators' working conditions are students' learning conditions.
Through collective bargaining, our union can advocate for research-based best practices that foster positive learning environments in every classroom and all school settings.

Students deserve learning environments that are safe and up-to-date, and educators and support staff who are able to do their work with necessary resources and training.

- ☐ Negotiate at least 30 minutes of paid time each week for paraprofessional and teacher teams to meet and discuss goals, expectations and communication strategies.*
- ☐ Negotiate language ensuring ESPs are prepared to address and stop bullying behavior. Provisions may include professional development for all staff, a process for reporting and tracking bullying, a bullying prevention specialist and a joint district-union committee to enforce district policies on student bullying (see note).*
- ☐ Negotiate language that provides paid training to ESPs on all new curriculum, district initiatives and up-to-date learning tools.
- ☐ Negotiate increased professional development related to classroom and instructional technology to increase students' access to appropriate and up-to-date learning tools.*
- ☐ Negotiate contract language that provides reimbursement to ESPs for their purchases of school supplies.*
- ☐ Negotiate contract language ensuring that staffing decisions are made in consultation with the union to protect students with special needs.
- ☐ Negotiate contract language providing for appropriate training and protections based on needs identified by staff working in different areas to protect staff health and safety.
- ☐ Negotiate joint decision-making process to evaluate and manage new and ongoing initiatives and mandates at the district level that affect teaching, learning and professional development time.*

Note: The Safe and Supportive Minnesota Schools law (MN Statutes 121A.031) requires districts to ensure relevant training for staff and a clear reporting mechanism, but the legal requirements can be supplemented by negotiating better involvement of staff in decision-making and enforcement of the district's legal obligations.

III. Foster strong schools as building blocks of our communities

***Rationale: Public schools are the cornerstone of our communities.** They connect families, provide a sense of community pride, and build partnerships among local businesses, their future workforce and the consumers who support them. Strong public schools not only unite a community, but can shape its future. Investment in early childhood; all-day, every-day kindergarten; and elementary programs is the first step in ensuring that every child is ready to learn, regardless of the barriers children may face.*

Public school employees are the key to the success of these efforts. Our union can advance the connection between strong local contracts and strong schools, and bring financial, educational and social advantages to our communities. .

- A. Negotiate contract language providing for more robust wraparound services in the district and increased staffing for counselors, nurses, social workers and other job classifications, including ESP.*
- B. Negotiate language to prevent the outsourcing of community-supporting jobs to help protect communities' economic stability.

IV. Promote educators' economic security

Rationale: Given the multiple challenges facing public school employees, it is critical for our union to address all elements of economic security for our members. Thinking about both short-term and long-term economic issues will lead to more comprehensive and just compensation structures. Investing in public school employees will not only ensure that our schools can recruit and retain the best educators, but will also benefit our communities as salaries are spent and invested in the local economy.

- ❑ Establish wage goals that include schedule improvements or annual cost-of-living adjustments in the collective bargaining agreement. To improve career earnings, local unions are also encouraged to reduce the number of steps in salary schedules, with a long-term goal of no more than six steps.
- ❑ Negotiate a wage enhancement or stipend for any ESP member who holds a license, certification, credential or other advanced training above and beyond the minimum requirements of the position.
- ❑ Negotiate language for reimbursement of costs associated with certification or membership in an organization required to maintain licenses or job requirements.
- ❑ Negotiate retiree benefits that convert all cash severance pay plans to 403(b) plans and/or retirement health care savings plans. Locals should also consider converting employer contributions toward future retirees' insurance premiums to retirement health care savings plans.*
- ❑ Negotiate contract language that 1) improves the quality and availability of health care through plan design changes and benefit improvements; 2) makes care more affordable through increased employer premium cost-sharing, lower out-of-pocket expenses or alternative health plan options; and 3) increases access to health care through less restrictive eligibility requirements.*
- ❑ Negotiate life insurance and long-term care insurance improvements to ensure that these policies are sufficient for changing member needs.*
- ❑ Negotiate long-term disability (LTD) plans to ensure improved, relevant LTD coverage for all employees.*
- ❑ Negotiate labor-management insurance committees empowered to review insurance plans and bids, decide plan specifications and recommend changes to insurance.*

V. Recognize the importance of local union work as a contributing factor to district success.

Rationale: Local leaders provide support and resources to members on a daily basis, and districts benefit from this work. Union leaders are often asked to serve on district committees, represent members in discussions with the district, and provide insight into on-the-ground problems and solutions available. Education Minnesota activists are also critical voices about the needs of students and school districts to legislative leaders.

Negotiating additional time, access to district facilities and voluntary payroll deductions for political action expand the work that unions do on behalf of district employees and students..

- ☐ Negotiate contract provisions that ensure that the exclusive representative has full use of school facilities, including teacher mailboxes and district email systems, to communicate the business of the union without regard to the content of the material.*
- ☐ Negotiate local union security language that provides for identified blocks of district-paid union leave time for local presidents. This time is in addition to leave time to be used when other members need time off to do the work of the union.*
- ☐ Negotiate language that provides for members of the exclusive representative to voluntarily request payroll deduction and district transmittal of contributions to the federal political action committee(s) identified by the exclusive representative.*

PROCESS GOALS*

In addition to priorities relating to the content of collective bargaining agreements, Education Minnesota has set goals for locals addressing the manner in which contracts are negotiated. A critical component of the collective bargaining process is member mobilization and engagement during negotiations. These goals address actions that all locals should take to help organize members in support of bargaining.

All process goals are shared teacher and ESP goals.

V. To build bargaining strength through member unity and mobilization, local unions are encouraged to:

- A. Establish a local bargaining team and a Local Contract Action Team (LCAT) by the end of February 2013.
- B. Establish a target settlement date before the end of the 2012-13 school year.
- C. Develop a planning calendar for organizing settlement activities and for communicating with members throughout the negotiation process. The plan should include opportunities for members to offer feedback to local leadership throughout the process.

VI. To build bargaining strength through purposeful planning and strategy development, local unions are encouraged to:

- A. Develop a clear communication plan that provides timely, predictable updates to members about progress on important goals. Negotiation updates may be delivered through personal contact, planned and rapid-response updates, regular general membership meetings and other means.
- B. Create a clear process for updating and working with the LCAT to ensure member support for the bargaining team.
- C. Develop ground rules at the table that promote transparency and permit members to give feedback to their union on the bargaining process.
- D. Create issue-based member committees to research specific proposals and make presentations to the bargaining team.

VII. To build bargaining strength through intradistrict collaboration and community engagement, local unions are encouraged to:

- A. Develop common bargaining proposals with other unions in the school district to promote common issues and build unity and strength among employees.
- B. Hold public listening sessions to hear parent concerns and develop bargaining proposals to address those concerns.

ESP Council of Local Presidents members:

Cindy Amann, Hawley

Kirsten Christensen-Okongwu, St. Louis Park

Kevin Combs, New London-Spicer

Michelle Dodge, Dakota 917

Jennifer Dunn, Pipestone Area

Therese Dzuck, Duluth Clerical

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Notes



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*Education Minnesota is an affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers,
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