

Tuscola Community Unit School District #301

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Michael Smith, Superintendent

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Press Release: Tuscola CUSD #301 Teacher's Contract

"It is correct to say that previous negotiations have gone rather smoothly, and the relationship between the board and the teachers has always been one of collaboration and mutual interest to end with a fair contract. Over previous contracts in recent years, together the board and teachers have worked to clean up some problematic structures within the contract without raising taxes.

We've also worked very hard to manage the district finances conservatively. We want to pay our teachers as well as we can, but we can't afford to pay an individual teacher over \$100,000 a year anymore - without raising taxes.

We want teachers in front of our students as much as possible, because our teachers do such a good job for students and student learning is impacted by how we structure the schedule within the negotiated school day. The current contract (which remains in place as we continue to negotiate a new contract) provides teachers with a work day from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. with two preparation periods, a lunch, and possibly a study hall during that time.

We've continued to implement the teachers' schedules within the framework of the old contract, despite the displeasure teachers have voiced in their pamphlets about working from 8:00 until 4:00.

The District has been as respectful as possible during this process – no yard signs, no flyers, no t-shirts, no disrespectful Facebook comments, no letters to the editor, etc. We've simply offered to negotiate on a weekly basis.

We've sent an email to the teachers every week (or nearly every week) since the early fall offering to meet and continue to work on finalizing the contract, or to offer using mediation to assist us in getting this process concluded. Until the IELRB ordered mediation recently, the teachers have refused to meet, despite the board's ongoing invitation to resume the process. The Board has offered to meet and offered mediation continually since the school year began.

We can't help the teachers until they allow us to do so.

There have not been any other ULP charges filed in Tuscola for as long as anyone can remember, and not only is there the pending ULP charge that the teachers filed, but Board also filed a ULP charge because the union is illegally refusing to even meeting with the Board's negotiation committee. That charge remains pending as well. While it is true that the state has taken a long time processing the file and getting the ULP process moving forward, this could have been settled in the early fall if the teachers had not continued to refuse to meet with the Board. There is no evidence that the Board has violated the law or committed a ULP, and if there's a hearing on this matter, that will become clear. However, we agree that the preferred outcome is using mediation to settle the outstanding issues once and for all.

During my five years with the district, we have always put what is best for students first and we will continue down this same path. At the same time, it is always the district's goal to work constructively with the teachers, but unfortunately we can't make them come to the negotiating table.

The world, and the world of education, has changed in the last decade and the Tuscola CUSD has to recognize those changes and be proactive in doing what's best for our students."

Michael Smith
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