

Off the Line

Sept. 15, 2015, No. 13

The last un-strike newsletter of the Pasco Association of Educators

Smiles and hugs ... and a great two-year contract!

Robinson music teacher Marlene Meyer gives a hug of thanks to Chief Bargainer Matthew Polk for an amazing contract. Monday's vote to ratify was nearly unanimous, with only one teacher voting 'no.'



It was just 14 days — 14 long days — and it's over. Given what we faced, the gains we made were amazing, and Monday's vote showed it. Of the 898 teachers and specialists present, there was but a single vote of protest.

PAE President Greg Olson told us what we all knew was true: we did not win this victory on our own.

Our contract improves curricula with full adoptions within two years — not six. Compensation will climb nearly 14% over two years, with more money going into health insurance as well. We've begun to reduce our overcrowded classrooms, and we're turning the tide on unnecessary testing. We have more time to plan the instruction our students need. Our evaluation procedures are improved, appropriately shifting more of the burden onto administrators who are conducting the evaluations. The district promises to provide more classroom supplies, and to increase the money we have individually to purchase other materials.

It is a good contract, and our members knew it.

The 13.5% raise was a windfall that many of us said would be a nice, but believed was an impossible dream. When we held one-on-one union conversations just six months ago, questions then were about only a 5% raise.

Most importantly, we awakened our community to the secretive practices of a district that was proclaiming to be transparent. We won parents' trust, and they quickly renounced the tactics used by Sandra Hill and her team.

We also reached out to sections of our community who have long felt they were not invited to have a voice in their own schools. We must build on that connection.

On picket lines, businesses opened their doors to us, nourished us and supported us ... emotionally, and financially. We discovered we have the support of other working families — churches and other unions — in the Tri-Cities. They offered us facilities for our meetings, they joined us in walking our picket lines and they even fed us during their Labor Day union picnic.

Our community was with us when we needed their support. Please don't forget our allies once our own needs have passed. Be aware. Use this experience as reason to be a more active voice in our community. When other working families, other businesses and other unions ask for our help, please take the time to volunteer, to stand with them the way they stood with us. When you see businesses that supported us on the line, please support them with the choices you make about where to shop, and where to spend your money.

We are not done. Our schools will always have too many students with too many needs, and not enough hours to help everyone as much as we would like. But our community has other needs as well: our police and firefighters, our union trades members, our small businesses. Please, please remember to stand with them as we move forward together in a more united community.

PAE: Taking a stand for Pasco's students and our profession!