



District 97 and OPTA Reach Agreement

On May 30, 2018, the members of the Oak Park Teachers' Association (OPTA) ratified the terms of a new collective bargaining agreement with the District 97 Board of Education that will run through the 2021-22 school year. The agreement, which the board unanimously approved on June 1, 2018, features several key outcomes, including:

Compensation

One of the major accomplishments associated with the teacher contract that was approved in 2015 was the establishment and implementation of a sustainable compensation structure that would:

- Provide District 97 students with continued access to high-quality educators.
- Create a fair and equitable system for paying teachers.
- Continue to recognize the importance and value of continuing education and externally validated endorsements and certifications.
- Align with the district's history of sound fiscal management.
- Support the district's referendum promise to reduce annual growth.

The work on the new contract included an effort to refine several aspects of this structure. This work led to the following changes:

- Recognition of retention will begin in year five following the attainment of tenure.
- Salary increases will be based on CPI, with the floor for these increases set at 1.5 percent and the ceiling for these increases set at 3.5 percent.
- Two new endorsements will be recognized as part of the continued commitment to and encouragement of the acquisition of additional teaching endorsements. One of the areas this change will aid is our ability to meet the needs of our growing English learners student population, which has increased by 16 percent over the past two years.
- Opportunity for salary increases on an annual basis. Under the previous contract, teacher salaries remained flat until the start of the fifth year of employment. Under the current contract, teachers have the chance to earn increases starting in their second year.
- Creation of a chart that will enable teachers to track their progress throughout the duration of the contract.

While changes were made to the compensation structure, many of the key aspects/elements of it, including the provisions below, will remain the same.

- Maintain the alternate salary schedule with the five recognition areas that were established in conjunction with the agreement that was approved in 2015.

- Maintain the elimination of increases for any teacher who receives a summative evaluation of unsatisfactory or needs improvement.
- Maintain a higher than average starting salary that will enable District 97 to continue attracting and retaining highly qualified and skilled teachers from diverse backgrounds in an increasingly competitive marketplace.

Increased Instructional Time

Below are changes that were made following a comprehensive review of the district's professional development and meeting schedules. The intent of the review and changes were to make these types of sessions more efficient and purposeful, while also increasing the amount of time that is available for instruction.

- Increase in the length of the school day for elementary buildings by five minutes on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday (from 2:55 p.m. to 3 p.m.) and 35 minutes on Wednesday (1:55 p.m. to 2:30 p.m.). This equates to nearly an hour of additional instructional time per week.
- Replace two Institute Days with two days of student contact.

Leaves of Absence

Below are the changes that were made to leaves of absence that led to increased access for teachers and reduced costs for the district.

- Sick Leave Bank
 - All teachers are eligible to draw from the sick leave bank.
 - There is greater clarity regarding the reasons teachers can access the days that are available via the sick leave bank.
 - There is a shift in the funding and management of the sick leave bank from the board to the teachers. This will save the district approximately \$200,000 per year.
- Parental Leave of Absence
 - Teachers have the opportunity to apply for short- or long-term leave. They can choose from an allocation of 15 paid parental leave days or a contribution from the district that will be put toward the cost of insurance during parental leave.
 - These leaves must conclude by a specific time (e.g., end of a trimester) to help minimize disruption for students.
 - Teachers will have four days to work side by side with their long-term subs in order to help provide a smooth transition for students.
- Sick Leave
 - Balance requirement has been removed; leave will now be based on accrued seniority.
 - 4 years = 15 days
 - 11 years = 17 days
 - 18 years = 19 days
 - 25 years = 21 days
- Bereavement Leave
 - Teachers will now have one day of bereavement leave for non-immediate family members (e.g. aunts, uncles, cousins, etc.). Bereavement leave for immediate family members will remain three days.

Retirement

The previous version of the contract included a sunset of the 4x6 retirement option (four consecutive years with a six percent increase to salary base), with the goal of completely phasing it out of the district by 2020. It also featured the creation of a 403(b) plan, which includes a 50 percent district match up to a maximum of two percent for all OPTA members. Those two provisions will remain in place as part of the new contract. However, the following changes were made to the 403(b) plan in an effort to assist teachers with long-term planning and retirement, especially given the instability and uncertainty of the state's pension system.

- Teachers with 10 or more years of service to the district who have declared for retirement will be eligible for \$3,000 per year in non-matching 403(b) contributions in each of the last four years before they retire.
- Teachers with 25 or more years of service to the district who have declared for retirement will be eligible for \$4,000 per year in non-matching 403(b) contributions in each of the last four years before they retire.

There were also changes made to the insurance for retirees. Retirees will be shifted from the district's insurance plan to the insurance offered by the Teacher Retirement System (TRS). However, even with the shift to a different plan, the board will continue to contribute to the insurance for retirees for a maximum of four years or until the teacher reaches Medicare eligibility.

Insurance

There were a pair of changes made to the provisions related to insurance for teachers that will benefit both the district and its employees. These changes include:

- Transition from a system where the board paid for the first seven percent of any annual increases to one where there is a set percentage based on the type of plan (e.g., PPO, HMO, etc.). This will enable both the board and teachers to benefit from decreases in insurance premiums, and may result in savings for the district.
- Beginning in 2019-20, contribution sharing will be based on the tier of coverage (e.g. employee only, employee plus child, family). This means that teachers will pay less for family coverage, but more for other levels of coverage.

Professional Development and Planning Time

There were several changes made to positions, payments, practices and procedures in an effort to better ensure that teachers have the necessary time and training to meet the needs of all students. These changes include:

- Allotment of 60 minutes of collective planning time that will help support the work being done by grade level and department teams.
- Establishment of a teacher co-chair position on the district's Professional Learning Committee.
- Expansion of membership on the Professional Learning Committee to include special area teachers.
- Adjustment of stipends to more accurately reflect responsibilities and time commitments.
- Establishment of a common schedule for teacher Institute Days that includes a start time of 8 a.m., an end time of 2 p.m. and 30 minutes for lunch.

Teacher Leadership

Changes were made to create new leadership opportunities for teachers, to ensure fair compensation for the work associated with those opportunities, and to better maximize the time, knowledge, talents and experience of the individuals holding leadership roles. These changes include:

- Identification of opportunities for teachers who are National Board Certified (NBC) or hold an equivalent certification to lead various activities such as:
 - Piloting innovative practices and new resources;
 - Mentoring other NBC teachers and new staff;
 - Serving on curriculum committees;
 - Presenting at Institute Days;
 - Engaging in action research;
 - Serving as the cooperating teacher for student teachers; and
 - Designing and leading parent workshops.
- Creation of a group to explore the development of career pathways for teachers within District 97.
- Addition of tiers of compensation for more challenging leadership roles.
- Recognition of all teachers (except those in retirement queue) for additional degrees earned after the ratification of the contract.

Additional Provisions

Below are several of the other provisions that were added to the contract.

- OPTA and the district will work together to better address the needs of English learners, including providing translation and interpretation services when needed.
- While not an official part of the contract, the negotiating teams believed it was both important and necessary to work together to revise the Special Education Workload Plan as part of the bargaining process. The updated plan can be accessed by visiting <http://www.op97.org/hr/collective-bargaining-agreements>.
- Several sections of the agreement were revised based on changes in the law, including the need for evaluations to comply with the Performance Evaluation Reform Act.

Joint Statement Regarding New OPTA Collective Bargaining Agreement

The Board of Education, district administration and Oak Park Teachers' Association (OPTA) are pleased to announce that we have reached an agreement on a new teacher contract that aligns with the shared vision we have for our schools and students. This contract was the product of five months of hard work by both negotiating teams that included 81 hours of discussion at the bargaining table. It also helped strengthen the partnership and solidified the mutual respect that exists between our groups.

Through our collective efforts, we were able to accomplish a number of important goals that include, but are not limited to:

- Refining our compensation structure so that we can continue to recognize and reward our teachers for their dedicated service, while also maintaining our commitment to fiscal stewardship.
- Increasing instructional time for our students by changing the length of the school day at the elementary level and reducing the number of staff meetings that are held during the year.

- Identifying ways to further foster the ongoing professional growth and development of our staff.
- Generating additional opportunities for teachers to engage in individual and group planning time.
- Addressing important issues related to topics such as leaves of absence, retirement benefits and insurance.

We thank the members of the negotiating teams for the time, effort and energy they invested in the creation of this important document. We thank Rosa Tiscareno from the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service for expertly guiding us through the completion of this critical process. We thank our District 97 colleagues for helping us successfully fulfill our duties and responsibilities away from the negotiating table. We thank the community for its passion for learning, steadfast belief in the value of education and tireless support of our schools—all of which provided a strong foundation upon which we constructed this contract and the various elements that compose it. More importantly, we thank the children of Oak Park for serving as the motivation and inspiration not only for our work on this agreement, but also for everything we strive to accomplish both in and out of the classroom on a daily basis.

We are incredibly proud of what we have achieved, and look forward to working together in the years ahead to help our students realize their full potential.