



Board of Education Column

By Seth Holden, Board of Education

2021 Negotiations Update

Given that this is my first column in these newsletters, I would like to take a moment to introduce myself. My name is Seth Holden, and I was elected to the Fargo Public Schools (FPS) Board of Education (BOE) in 2020. Last year, I was an alternate on the Board's Negotiations Committee and this year, I have the privilege of serving as the committee's chair. I am excited to have this opportunity to share some of the results of this year's teacher contract negotiations.

As many of you know, the Board and the Fargo Education Association (FEA) engaged in contract negotiations this year. We began negotiations in April, and we had a contract prior to the beginning of the 2021-22 academic year. This is an accomplishment that everyone involved should be proud of. Several of the topics we negotiated were as simple as minor changes in contract language and others were not so simple.

One of the topics that took a great deal of time and energy was recess. Our elementary teachers valiantly stepped up when they were needed during the 2020-21 school year to provide recess supervision during a pandemic. Although classroom teachers were not expected to supervise recess prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the need for qualified staff to supervise our students still exists and finding those individuals proves difficult.

While trying to solve this problem, we questioned what exactly FPS' philosophy on recess is. As part of the negotiated contract, a Memo of Understanding (MOU) was agreed upon that created a commission of board members, administrators, and FEA members to study and bring forth recommendations on our district's philosophy on recess.

Another topic of great importance during negotiations was our current salary matrix. Initially, the Board presented a completely new salary structure, but after several meetings it became clear that adopting a new structure was extremely complex and required much more collaboration. As part of the negotiated agreement, a Memo of Understanding was created for this topic as well. Much like the MOU regarding recess, this one created a commission of board members, administrators and FEA members to study new salary structures that the district can adopt.

As of today, both commissions have begun their work and have conducted several meetings each. It is my hope that not only will these commissions succeed in their goals and produce strong, well thought out and applicable recommendations, but it is also my hope that the work these commissions do can be a solid foundation on which continued successful and collaborative negotiations can be built. I would like to close by expressing my utmost gratitude to the FEA members, the administrators, and my fellow board members for the work they did during this year's negotiations and all the work that they continue to do. I look forward to seeing what we can accomplish together.

