

MEA Bargaining 2025-2026

Session #4

Tuesday, September 2, 2025

Those present: Pat Barber, Christina Britton, Valerie Finnegan, Silvana Ianinska, Derek Jensen, Joanna Keovilay, Helen King, Brian Kirchberg, Rob Lyons, Gina Maliniak, Kevin Pendley, Bruce Proud, Sharon Scarbrough, Rachel Sellers, Jon Syre, Evelyn Townsley, Dawn Walker and Mark West.

Meeting began at 5:25 p.m.

BP -You received the minutes. Any issues with minutes from last time or time before that?

MW – Good. No issues.

BP – At the end of the meeting last time the conversation was about no room in the budget. You are where you are authorized to go. Concern that there wasn't a lot of room in your proposal from previous one. So, I did exercises with budget, Annual Financial Report (AFR), not everything, to get an idea of your perspective that there wasn't money. Read language from legislative session. Looked at FEFP. FEFP and dollars provided to districts wasn't overwhelming. In this district significant things have occurred and have been occurring. Clear trends in the way this district budgets. Concern that heavy emphasis in negotiations is in the referendum being a major portion of negotiations. Looked at other comparable districts (contiguous and similar size) which is ~~the~~ what a special magistrate would look at. Quite concerned about where we're going in negotiations. We have a proposal. Want to get clarity based on what I've looked at. I have been looking at budgets here since 2013. Have data back to that point. I went back to 2020. Trends in what has transpired. 1 – General Fund (GF) 2 – Reserves. The other is in the category of the GF in instruction. Looking for clarity and data around comparable districts. (salary and salary increases in general). MEA handout (packet) – GF Instruction trend.

BP – I know that budgets are a guideline but somewhere there has to be a way of looking at it and what's really happening. Instruction is what's most connected to teachers and paras (T&P). Look at beginning budget, final Budget, and difference between those and what happens; as well as the actual end of year budget to get look at what's happening. Some blanks because it's zero or haven't seen documents yet. Also, there's a reason why we did use the AFR. Not here to debate growth. It doesn't really matter a whole lot. That line changes in budget from beginning to final budget. Can see it has changed. Went up in 23-24 and stayed same last year. The significance is that the actual is what's reported and should be projected from final budget for what has actually been spent and become actual. I know some money is transferred to special funds because that's how the budget works – not just here. It is significant that the actual expenditures were \$8M less than last year. Now the current year proposal is \$30M more than what it was last year. There is an increase in instructional budget from last year's actuals. We are wondering what happened? What changed? The number of teachers and paras didn't change that much. So it begs the question – why is Instructional budget increased when the number of people isn't growing so rapidly? What's causing it to grow? That's one point in the budget. Next page (general fund balance) – data that connects concern with what's happening in GF reserves. I know there are certain categories that are not expendable. They're small. GF reserves from 2019 to 2020 grew by

\$17M. The next year it grew by \$23M. Then it grew by \$54M in 23-24. \$69M in 23-24 and then 24-25 \$34M. Actual being in tentative budget is \$120,470,000 in GF reserves. Most is Unassigned. Didn't dig down to the parts of reserves, but I can because I have the data. This is in all the documents. It is what it is. This year's beginning budget reserves started at \$60M. That is a change from June to August. So, where is the \$58M that was in reserves and now is in the budget? Last year I believe we used 2950 teachers in negotiations. This year 3000. That doesn't equate to \$58M. I know that's not it. Teachers are the largest group. Looking at allocations of staff - don't see a large change. Where is \$58M being spent in the budget that was not in the end of the year report? Having a hard time when district is claiming it doesn't have money. Every year district rationalizes that reserves are not going to be that big. Millions of dollars in changes. It was always said that it is going to change because it has to be dispersed in other places. I've looked at other places around state - this is not the norm of a budget pattern. Pinellas is cutting staff because they don't have reserves. Pretty sure you wouldn't be cutting staff with this kind of reserves because it would be too easy. That's what you reported. That's what you have. Even at \$60M - that's a considerable amount more. That's 9%. State requires 3%. Last year 21.2%. District has said it wanted 5%. Somewhere it was said 8% in desired. If you're using that instead of paying employees shame on the school board. Instead of using it to retain and recruit employees. (Referring to handout's last page) - comparable teacher salary increase 2020-2024. All have referendums. Manatee is at the bottom of the list. Might be higher up without referendum but some others might move up as well. Even small counties like DeSoto and Hardee recognize the importance of compensating employees. As much as thousands of dollars. We'd like to know some answers. Don't see a need to change a lot in our proposal. More than happy to make a proposal but not going to deviate that much from our previous.

MW - Give us an opportunity to talk about the budget

RS - Last year 1 - high vacancies. That accounts for that difference. There were pay increases. Don't show referendum. Restricted programs carryforward - some of that has gotten larger than in the past. Teacher positions - 50 allocations added budgeted at \$77,000 each. You did see cuts this past year in some other school districts that you mentioned.

GM - More than 50 positions.

BP - Where?

GM - At schools for teachers

BP - That doesn't equate with the number you gave us. It says 3003. Last year you used 2950 and something.

GM - 2950 to 3003 this year.

BP - That was pretty close to 3000

GM - That's about \$3.9M. At an average cost of \$77,000 with benefits - all benefits including health insurance.

GM - I'm sure you understand restricted funds, AICE . . .

RS – That alone was \$24.4M this past year. Restricted grants - \$3.5M

BP – Wouldn't they be in restricted and not unassigned?

RS – No, those are separated.

BP – Anything else?

GM – Every year we do budget for entire district to receive increase so that draws down entire budget.

BP – So what you've placed on the table would be in reserve? \$5.8M?

GM – Would be in ending fund balance.

BP – Last year it was \$120M.

Rs and GM – That's correct.

BP – 21%

GM – Much of which is restricted funds, too. Increases in utilities every year.

BP – How much was budgeted for utilities from last to this year?

GM – 6%. And from what we're hearing it could go higher. Opened 2 new schools. Increases in substitute budget. Increases in utilities just for that.

BP – I could add it up, but that's not going to get to \$120 or \$60M.

GM – Would have to go back and verify those. Included family empowerment scholarship. That may be what big numbers are.

Bp – And that would increase reserves?

GM – No, that's a passthrough. Have transition schedules. A lot is vacancy. A lot of it is restricted carryforward.

RS – They're unassigned.

GM - Vacancies are unassigned and would fall in ending fund balance.

BP – This is what legislators talk about. Why would you need more money from them if you have this money in reserves? They keep piling up money!

GM – ESSR could have helped us for a couple of years.

BP – Everybody had that. But there are not districts that have \$120M. Many don't. Can only think of one. Somehow your numbers still don't add up. Money is growing every year. Money is not being spent. It's still there and there is more at the end of year. Explain that it is going back into budget but it is still there at the end of the year.

GM – Restricted and unassigned still have to go back into budget as per state statute.

BP – The unassigned reserve number - that is significant.

GM – As the district grows with student growth. In the 3rd calc. state gave us educational enrollment stabilization as a one-time to help school district. That will not be repeated in future years according to the state. \$5.078M

BP – So now \$62M in reserve for this year?

GM – For this year.

BP – What will it go to?

GM – Raises, utilities, new schools we opened?

BP – Aren't they already operating? Why would it be in reserves? In budget already included increase in instruction which is larger than it was last year.

GM – Significant part is restricted and assigned funds.

BP – Maybe we'll take a caucus and will look at that specifically.

MW – Comparable counties page – difficult to compare apples to apples – as opposed to looking at average salary. If you look at the referendum supplement – in 2020 it was \$4728. It is now almost double. Bumps it up to 2 or 3. Hard to look at data and boil it down to exactly how it compares. Can look at it more and see

BP – Guess other places would have similar concerns.

MW – Possibly so.

BP – And where has referendum gone for this year?

MW – There wasn't an increase for this year.

BP – Can't rely on it for this year. even if you change all the numbers.

MW – It's a supplement. So, we'll take a look at the numbers. Will try to answer your questions as best as we can. Do you want to give us your proposal and we can look at that while we caucus?

MEA handouts. New hire schedule and MEA proposal.

BP – Haven't changed a whole lot of things. Modified new hire proposal that we had previously. Keep it at \$49,702. 0.21% differential. Last time yours was a 0.15% differential. Continued degree supplement at 6% because that's what's built into the grandfathered schedule. Don't see a need to not increase in the same way as other employees. Numbering – when it comes to next year. Don't want someone who comes in with a great deal of experience and that they would move wherever things were in the old schedule because that's not how we propose it and don't think it would work with your proposal that way. It would create issues with where people would move to a different schedule. That would not be the case. It would be quite confusing. Need to transition away from the numbering system.

JK – It is possible to implement 2 separate tables. 1 is to separate those that are not to receive increases go to decompression. Those eligible receive increases.

MW – Once we give them an initial placement on this salary schedule, whatever we negotiate is what they would move to.

BP – My concern is that they won't see that unless they see something else. Base rate – seeing same numbers – would have to be an invisible system that does that. Now it's on their paycheck.

GM – We can do mapping behind the scenes. Can talk about that.

MW – Your concern is that it's done behind the scenes?

BP – Yes, last time we heard we couldn't do this in the system. Don't have a problem happening behind the scenes.

CB – Joanna can assign pay schedules.

MW – We got clarification after last meeting. This is possible.

BP – 0.15 won't work with this schedule. That's just to say that this hiring schedule and the pay increases are connected. Going back to proposal – know every year there are about 300 not eligible for an increase. Do know that those hired at 1c there is no increase. No expense for those individuals in our proposal. Expense comes from hiring at that point. If you have data on this that might help to get to a better number.

MW – Without benefits?

BP – Correct. All without benefits. Easier to calculate 22.6% at the end. Some would not get 6%, only those who were here and worked 99 days or more last year would be eligible for 6%. Performance pay is same. Current retention eligibility. Removed 10+ longevity from our proposal. 669 was the number of people not currently at 16 or 25. The number is different from last time. Irrelevant because not there anymore. Increase all supplements by 6%. Para language continues step and \$0.70/hour and para longevity at 10+. Longevity at 25+ has been removed. Had a long conversation about health insurance. Short version – believe district should pick up the full increase at 7.2% which is about \$1.03M for both bargaining units. This is the amount of money that the district didn't pay in premiums based on fewer number of people being covered and fewer dependents covered. That's without any changes in benefit design. Every employee has the same budgetary concerns that the district has. The referendum wasn't intended to take away from cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) increases. 2.5% is not what COLA is. Cost of living continues to rise. 3.3% for last month. Not covering COLA in your proposal.

MW – Any questions? Let's caucus for a few moments. We will leave.

Caucus at 6:14 p.m.

Reconvened at 6:45 p.m.

MW – Your proposal is significantly different from ours. We need to meet with the board. Will try to have executive session before 9/18/25 and will give the new superintendent the opportunity to be involved as well. Will do our best to set up between now and then. Next time – 4:45 p.m. on 9/18.

Adjourned at 6:46 p.m.