



Welcome back VEA Members!

It’s hard to believe that summer break has come and gone. It’s even harder to believe that we are already midway through August and less than two weeks from the start of another school year. The VEA Bargaining team was back at the table early in August. We have reached tentative agreements (TAs) on several proposals (33 to be exact), including an agreement this past week regarding professional development funds. There have already been multiple bargaining sessions this month and additional times are scheduled for next week.

What’s still on the table?

Our member-directed priorities remain open for negotiations, along with several other proposals.

JOB SATISFACTION

Rank in order with 1 being your top priority, the following items that you think would have the biggest impact on achieving job satisfaction for you.

- #1 Lower Class Size/Caseload
- #2 Support for Students with Special Needs
- #3 Salary/TRI Compensation

- Article 1.4 – *Duration of Agreement*
- Chapter 7 – *Professional Placement*
- Chapter 10 – *General Provisions of Employment (including class size, overload, conferences, and so much more)* – **Priority #1**
- Article 11.3 – *Salary Schedules*
- Article 10.23 – *Support for Special Education and ESAs* – **Priority #2**
- Article 12.1-12.4 – *TRI responsibility list* – **Priority #3**
- Chapter 14 – *Layoff, Leave, and Recall Procedures*
- Appendix E – *Stipends and Extended Year Days*

Class Size MATTERS!



While District representatives have said that they are “sympathetic” to concerns around class sizes, they have rejected all attempts to lower class sizes or to establish caps for classrooms. As members return to buildings and gain access to class rosters, members are making it clear that it isn’t the District’s sympathy we need – it’s for leadership to take action before school starts.

Class size matters because student safety MATTERS. Access to adequate learning space for our students MATTERS. The ability to connect with our students MATTERS and it is harder to develop a genuine sense of belonging for our students in overloaded classrooms.

Based on our January 2024 Bargaining survey:

- 66% of members strongly agreed or agreed that class sizes are unreasonable (as of January 2024)
- 78% of members strongly agreed or agreed that class sizes should be **capped** at no more than 3 over the current class size
- 56% of members strongly agreed or agreed that overload (secondary) should be based on individual class sizes, *not* an aggregate total
- 82% of members strongly agreed or agreed that current overload pay is insufficient

Special Education

Lake Shore Elementary Learning Support teacher, and VEA Bargaining Chair, Amy Spofford, has made it clear to the district that improvements for the working conditions of Special Educators and ESAs and support for inclusionary practices remains a key member priority.



VPS proposals have demonstrated a desire to improve caseload and staffing ratios for Special Educators and ESAs, there is still a lot of ground to cover between what has been offered and what our members and students need.

Executive Board Directive & Next Steps

The VEA Executive Board met on August 15, where Board members were given a comprehensive update on bargaining to date, outstanding proposals, and asked to provide additional directives for bargaining team consideration. The Board also determined next steps in the upcoming weeks to help direct the VEA Bargaining Team. **Board members made it clear that without improvements to class size, overload protections, and Special Education supports, they would not be willing to recommend a “last best offer” to members for ratification.** The Executive Board will be updated next Friday, August 23, via email with any progress made during bargaining sessions scheduled for that week.

If a “last best offer” is not reached within 48 hours of contract expiration (August 31, 2024), the Executive Board may opt to hold a strike authorization vote (per [Standing Rule Policy 402.2](#) and [WAC 180-16-163.](#)) If at any time prior to this the Bargaining Team believes a “last best offer” will not be reached before the start of school or contract expiration, they may request that the Executive Board conduct a strike authorization vote.

A tentative Executive Board meeting has been scheduled for Monday, August 26, for further Board discussion.

The Board has identified **Thursday, August 29**, as a “save the date” for a General Membership meeting to be held via **Zoom**, starting at **6:00 PM**. At that time, members will either be presented with the terms of a “last best offer” for ratification OR they will be asked to authorize a work action.

What can members do?



Members have reached out to ask what they can do between now and the end of August. The Executive Board has made this list of suggestions:

- **Write to the [School Board Directors](#)** outlining your projected class sizes or caseloads – be specific about any hardships or safety concerns it creates – stay focused on the **facts** and not on emotions (much easier said than done),
- If families or other community members ask about your class sizes, **be honest**. While it is great to be optimistic about a new school year (because it's exciting!), it's also okay to admit that you are nervous about the uncertainties moving forward,
- **Partner with your administrator** – if there are ways you can work with your administrator to advocate for our members and students, do it. Encourage them to continue to advocate for additional FTE for class overloads. They have the right to ask for adequate staffing so that students are supported.
- **Be patient** with yourself and your colleagues – everyone is feeling the stress of the new year starting – we are in this together and we are #BetterTogether.

Upcoming Bargaining Dates

August 16, 19, 20, 23

Save the Date!

General Member Meeting
August 29, 6:00 PM (ZOOM)

VEA Bargaining Team members: Amy Spofford (chair), Sunny Selders (Intermediate Elementary) Keith Lloyd (Middle School), Charlotte Lartey (Specialist), Andrew Wicklas (High School), Jamie Anderson (President), and Graham Picklesimer (Executive Director).

VPS Bargaining Team members: Jeff Fish (Director of HR), Brett Blechschmidt (Chief Operating Officer), Jami Phelps (Director of Special Education), Heath Angelbeck (Principal – Salmon Creek), Allison Watson (Assoc. Principal – Skyview), Jim Gray (Executive Director of High Schools & Safety).



Make sure VEA has your non-school contact information for sharing bargaining information! Send any changes to your home email to cbrown@washingtonea.org

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