

JCTA, JCPS enter third-party mediation

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The state's largest school district and the county's teachers union are bringing in a third party mediator as negotiations continue on into the start of the new school year.

"The typical negotiations have broken down," Brent McKim, president of the teachers union, said following a negotiation meeting with Jefferson County Public Schools on Monday.

He said that bringing in a third-party mediator is part of the labor agreement between JCPS and the Jefferson County Teachers Association "if we cannot resolve our differences in negotiations." He said the two groups have not needed to bring in a mediator during negotiations for "probably 20 years."

McKim said the two groups still have a "significant" difference in their compensation proposals, although "it's not the Grand Canyon of a difference."

McKim said that the union provided a new proposal to the district on Monday that "we felt ... made some significant movement toward common ground." He said he expected the district to reciprocate, but that "as soon as the district received our offer, they said they were done and that we needed to move on to mediation."

JCPS spokeswoman Allison Martin said it was a mutual agreement to go to a media-



JCTA president Brent McKim, foreground, thanks teachers for attending the "walk in" Monday at Crosby Middle School.

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Superintendent Donna Hargens said in a statement that the district has "offered a fair and equitable proposal that responsibly manages the district's resources while recognizing the dedication and expertise of our employees."

She said the district's offer included full step increases and a salary increase, as well as proposals to help subsidize National Board Certification and "an innovative plan" to create a pool of up to \$4 million for school supports that would be managed jointly by JCPS and JCTA.

Hargens said the district also discussed adding an incentive to recruit teachers from outside the district in high-needs areas such as math, science, dual certification and priority schools.

But in an email to members, JCTA said the district also proposed "unacceptable terms such as: significant take backs on the use of sick leave and unpaid medical leave."

JCTA has already sued the school board and Superintendent Donna Hargens for breach of contract, saying that teachers should have automatically qualified for their step raises at the beginning of the 2016-2017 school year. JCPS has said it is holding off on most step increases and raises until negotiations are complete, and that raises would be given retroactively to the July 1 start of the school year.

The school district is also still in the midst of negotiations with the two other large unions representing JCPS employees: the local teamsters union and the local chapter of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees.

The unions said Monday that they are encouraging their members to either "wear red for ed" or to wear their union shirts on Wednesday, the first day of school.

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