

Unions object to JCPS bargaining approach

Allison Ross, @allisonSross

11:32 a.m. EDT August 16, 2016



Buy Photo

(Photo: Maggie Huber/Special to the C.J.)

A coalition of unions that represent Jefferson County Public Schools employees sent a letter to the school board objecting to the approach the district has taken to this summer's salary negotiations.

The letter was signed by representatives from the teachers union, the teamsters union and local chapters of both the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees and the Service Employees International Union and sent to board members Monday, according to Bo Johnson, a representative of the local AFSCME chapter.

The letter urges the school board to provide more oversight and direction to JCPS's negotiating team and asks the district to provide "raises large enough to at least keep pace with inflation."

It raises complaints about the negotiation tactics of JCPS Chief Business Officer Tom Hudson, in part repeating concerns raised previously that the district had made some offers that did not recognize experience step raises that employees get for certain years of service.

"After repeatedly disrespecting our members with these proposals, Mr. Hudson has abandoned the no step approach and offered each of us a proposal that is at least legal because steps are recognized," the letter said. "So we have to ask, other than making nearly every JCPS employee feel disrespected and not valued, what has been gained by offering these divisive proposals?"



THE COURIER-JOURNAL

JCPS hires new chief academic officer

The letter also discussed some contention over how much step increases would cost the district in total, arguing that the cost of such raises are offset more than the district has said by turnover from higher-paid employees retiring and being replaced by lower-paid staff.

Brent McKim, president of the Jefferson County Teachers Association, said his union is making progress with JCPS on negotiations "but we have not reached a tentative agreement. All JCPS unions are collectively expressing to the school board our frustration with the district's approach to negotiations."

JCTA has [already filed a lawsuit](#) against the school board and Superintendent Donna Hargens over breach of contract, saying that teachers should have automatically qualified for their step raises at the beginning of the 2016-2017 school year.

JCPS said earlier this summer that it is holding off on most raises and step increases until agreements are reached in contract negotiations with its unions. The new fiscal year began July 1. JCPS said any raises would be given retroactively once negotiations were settled.



THE COURIER-JOURNAL
JCPS proposes slight decrease in tax rate

The district and the teachers union also said earlier this month that they are [bringing in a third-party mediator](#) to help with the negotiation process.

Negotiations appear to be moving more slowly than in recent years. McKim has said that JCTA tried to start negotiations earlier in the year but that JCPS held off on beginning negotiations until June.

JCPS spokeswoman Allison Martin said Tuesday that "the district has worked diligently over the past several weeks with union representatives to reach an agreement and expects an agreement to be reached soon."

JCPS board member Chris Brady, who said he hadn't received the letter from the union coalition yet but read it after it was forwarded to him, said the concerns raised in the letter are not surprising, as he'd heard the same concerns before.

"There are concerns on all sides of how this round of negotiations have taken place," Brady said. "In my view, it's taken entirely too long."

Brady said the district is working on how to get more resources into the classroom and how to appropriately shape the budget to do so. He said that "change can seem chaotic; we're trying to best manage and deal with that change."



SCRIBD
Signed Labor Coalition Letter

Reporter Allison Ross can be reached at (502) 582-4241. Follow the Courier-Journal's education team at [Facebook.com/SchooledCJ](https://www.facebook.com/SchooledCJ).