

# **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **Collaboration and Negotiation Leads to Labor Peace for Community as South Fayette School Board Approves Contract for Teachers and Support Staff**

*South Fayette Township, PA* – Last night the South Fayette Board of School Directors voted to ratify the professional agreement between the District and the South Fayette Education Association (SFEA). The vote came this week after the union approved the contract with 118 members in favor, 12 opposed, and nine members choosing not to vote at a March 8th meeting.

The teachers and District officials have been negotiating since January 2004 and the teachers have been working without a contract since August 2004. In January 2005, talks between the two groups came to a standstill. As Board members considered other strategies, they gave District administrators and the teachers four weeks to attempt to come to an agreement. A small contingent of administrators and SFEA negotiators then communicated around the clock through e-mails and phone conversations to work out the details of the salary and health care contribution issues that had previously stalemated negotiations.

"The Board negotiators, administrators and teachers worked many hours at night and on weekends over the past 15 months to reach this agreement," said Leonard Fornella, the Board's Chief Negotiator. "We have obviously seen numerous peaks and valleys along the way, but the Board is now pleased that we have finally arrived at a new agreement that is reasonable, fair and equitable for all parties concerned – the District and its administrators, the teaching staff, the students, and the community of South Fayette."

Fornella stated further that, on behalf of the Board, he wishes to "thank Dr. Linda Hippert and Mr. William Harper, Mr. David Taylor, Mr. Greg Young and the rest of the teachers' negotiating team, for working diligently over the last few weeks to bring the negotiations to a successful conclusion."

The new agreement, which extends until 2010, stipulates a health care contribution of 10% of the premium or 6% based on a maximum increase of 3% in the first two years and 10% thereafter. This change results in a savings to the District of approximately \$500,000. Additional changes increasing the step structure of raises will also result in a total savings to the District of over \$100,000. The average raise for teachers is less than 4%, resulting in a net expense to the District of only 3.1% given the health care contributions.

The new agreement includes 5 additional work days, as well as an increase in the amount of staff development time for teachers. One Monday each month, students will report on a two-hour delayed schedule providing additional hours to regularly engage the faculty in training throughout the school year instead of intermittently as in the past, leading to a corporate style model used in most businesses.

Earlier this year, the School Board pledged that there would be no increase in millage for the 2005-2006 school year. Now that contract details are finalized, District Administrators are preparing a budget to present to the Board within those parameters. The preliminary budget will be presented to the Board in April and must be approved by June 30.

“We know the staff contributes greatly to the excellence in performance of our students,” said Dr. Linda B. Hippert, Superintendent of Schools. “This contract represents fair compensation for their contribution and acknowledges the need for ongoing staff development to meet the continuous challenges that are faced as we attain the high academic standards that have been set for all students.”

On March 13, members of the South Fayette Education Support Professionals Association (paraeducators, custodians, transportation and food service personnel) also voted to accept the extension of their contract for wages only with a vote of 35 in favor and 22 opposed. The original contract was set to expire in 2006-2007 and will now extend to 2010. The extension will allow for an average 3% increase in salary for the additional three years of the contract.

"These agreements represent collaboration and negotiation combined with commitment to excellent service to the students of this community," Hippert added. "It wasn't easy, but we are dedicated and worked together to achieve common goals."

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