

Florida's First Union Charter Schools Reach Historic Contract Agreement

Pembroke Pines, Fla., June 15, 2007 – Following a 15 hour marathon negotiations session on Thursday, negotiators representing Pembroke Pines Charter School teachers and city officials will reach an historic tentative contract agreement today.

After becoming Florida's first charter school system to vote for union representation in January, Broward Teachers Union Chief Negotiator Mark Richard and Pembroke Pines charter school teacher representatives have negotiated their first contract agreement that will govern their working conditions until 2010. The teachers voted for union representation in order to have a greater voice and job security in the workplace – two of the many issues the agreement addresses.

Richard said the new contract agreement provides teachers with a formal work agreement that gives them seniority rights based on years of service and the ability to file grievances in order to resolve disputes. Previously, the charter school teachers worked as "at-will" employees with no legal right to voice concerns about professional or administrative issues that impact them.

"We view today's tentative agreement as a historic opportunity for our new charter school members to take greater control of their professional lives," Broward Teachers Union President Pat Santeramo said. "The charter school teachers should serve as a shining example for their colleagues throughout the nation, demonstrating what professionals can do when they stand together."

Richard said while teachers and city officials agreed to contract language that will govern the employees' working conditions, they also decided to re-open and negotiate salary increases each year after the BTU completes negotiations with the School Board of Broward County. Once BTU and SBBC representatives determine salary increases for the county's 17,000 traditional public school teachers, city officials have always in the past matched the increase for the charter school teachers.

He said other issues negotiated included procedures for dealing with vacancies, promotions and transfers, evaluation protocols and employee protections as well as new regulations that will determine the number of hours employees are expected to work outside of the normal school day.

After signing the tentative agreement today, City Manager Charlie Dodge will present the tentative contract agreement to Pembroke Pines city commissioners at their regular monthly meeting on Wednesday, June 20. The city commissioners will have the opportunity to discuss and vote whether to ratify the agreement during their meeting.

BTU representatives will schedule a meeting in the City of Pembroke Pines area to present the tentative agreement to all teachers in the near future. The complete tentative contract agreement will also be posted on the union's website

for teachers and the public-at-large to read. Due to Broward schools being in summer recess, each teacher will be mailed a summary of the agreement with a ballot and unmarked return envelope at their home address.

“Our negotiations team worked hard to arrive at the best contract agreement possible,” Charter School Teacher and Negotiations Team Member Khea Davis-Benony said. “We think this first contract is a good start and will provide a solid foundation for future negotiations and agreements.”

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