

## **Comprehensive and Final Settlement Offer to the Board of Education November 13, 2017**

The staff for the A-C Central School District are dedicated to the students, the schools, the parents and the entire communities of Ashland, Chandlerville and the surrounding areas. We live here, we love this community and we treasure its children. We are proud to be a part of a quality school district that combines communities and bonds the residents of both, that dedicates itself to students' success, and that creates such strong relationships among its employees that certified staff are willing to join arm-in-arm with non-certified staff to make sure those who have traditionally given so much and earned so little, may finally be paid what they're worth.

This long overdue adjustment can be accomplished with no new taxes and without jeopardizing the financial health of the schools.

In the past, the certified staff (40 employees, mostly teachers) and the non-certified staff (another 40 staff of bus drivers, bus monitors, cooks, classroom aides, secretaries and custodians), had two separate unions. But, over the course of the summer, our two unions decided to merge into one – *because we are one* – every single day. We all work as one to do our best to educate each and every child of the A-C Central School District. We give the best of our abilities to help students reach the best of theirs.

The certified staff began negotiating a contract last spring and have reached a tentative agreement, but the non-certified staff began negotiating in August and haven't reached the same result. All we are asking for is a living wage.

We have met eight times with support personnel and an additional 10 times with the certified staff. In all those times, we agreed with the board on several financial points because we understand the board is trying to be good stewards to our communities. We live here, too. We have a vested interest. Thankfully, the district has been very good at saving money and now has a healthy \$2.1 million in savings, enough to run the district for more than a year without any new money. But, our non-certified employees start at a very low wage, have no salary schedule, and therefore no vision for what their future employment holds. These dedicated staff have no health insurance and no employer pension payment. All of the districts around us offer more. As a result, it's hard to keep support personnel employed at A-C Central, and studies show that the more stability children have in their school environments, the happier they are and the better they perform.

In fact, a custodian who has worked more than 20 years in the district makes only \$12.25 an hour; a classroom aide with 23 years' experience makes \$14.10 an hour; another with 26 years' experience makes \$14.40; a custodian who works eight hours a day and has been here nine years earns \$12.26 per hour. It's not hard to see why most of the non-certified staff have been here three years, or less, causing a disservice to students, teachers, parents and the school environment. Here's how non-certified staff stack up against area districts. For instance, here is how a teacher's aide might fare:

	<b>A-C Central</b>	<b>PORTA</b>	<b>Virginia</b>	<b>Franklin</b>	<b>Pleasant Plains</b>
<b>Starting pay</b>	\$9-\$11/hour	\$13.07/hour	\$12.22/hour	\$11.06/hour	\$12/hour
<b>Insurance contribution</b>	\$0	\$5,184/year	\$3,800/year	\$5,400/year	\$5,400/year
<b>IMRF contribution paid by district</b>	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	4.5 percent payment to IMRF
<b>Maximum pay</b>	\$14.41 after 26 years	\$13.47/hour after 10 years and \$13.87 after 20 years	\$18.33/hour after 15 years	\$13.50/hour	\$15.75/hour after 22 years

The board is offering only a 3 percent raise to these dedicated employees. For staff earning \$9 an hour, it amounts to only \$9.27 an hour; for members earning \$10, it's \$10.30; and for those earning \$11, it's \$11.33 – all of which fall well below any semblance of a living wage. Instead, we are seeking a starting wage of \$12.50, \$13.50, \$14 and implementation of a salary schedule, so employees can better plan for what their future economic conditions will be, just like what teachers do. Being able to plan for a future means more stability for employees and schools, longer-term employees, and better services to children and schools. This kind of stability is an important factor for student success.

Even better news is that our request puts the divide between ACCEA and the district's last offer at only \$73,000 – so little when the district has so much in savings and is expecting an influx of more than \$80,000 extra per year as a result of the new school funding formula.

There are a few other things to be addressed that don't involve future pay, but they shouldn't be so contentious to solve:

- Process to be used to merge the two contracts: The ACCEA has submitted a clear and concise outline on how every section on both contracts should be merged. The board has responded that this should be done in committee and should take the rest of the school year to complete. We disagree.
- A safety issue for night custodial work: In both buildings, a single night custodian is assigned. If that custodian is injured or incapacitated, there is no way of knowing until the next morning. We have asked the board to help solve this issue. The board has refused.
- Summer work: We have proposed a \$15/hour rate of cleaning, repairing and organizing the physical buildings to start the next school year. The board has proposed at \$9.79/hour wage, an increase of only 29 cents/hour. Our proposal is a living wage.

Our economic proposals have been made to achieve three reasonable goals:

1. The elimination of an arbitrary, non-competitive entry wage scale that has not increased in 12 years.

2. Two, comparable wage levels that are in line with what surrounding districts are using to attract and retain skilled employees.
3. Three, creation of wage schedules for each category of work which approaches a living wage for educational employees.

Our proposals are affordable and will not cause the district to raise taxes. Our proposal will cost \$103,000 more than what the board is spending now. The board is proposing a \$30,000 increase in wages. We are \$73,000 apart.

The Ashland and Chandlerville area has seen its share of economic struggles. The district's free and reduced lunch population runs at 45 to 55 percent. Studies show that when people earn more, they spend more – boosting the local economy. And, when people earn more, they stay in their jobs longer, providing more stability for students and fewer dollars spent on training new employees. Settling this contract with ACCEA is the best thing that could happen for school employees, but also the best thing that could happen for the district, for the communities of Ashland, Chandlerville and the surrounding area, the local economy, and most importantly, for all of the students of district.

We are open to more talks. We sincerely hope they will lead to a fair agreement that works for everyone. Let's do this!