

Ponca City Public School Board of Education Voices Support for Ponca City School Teachers and Discusses Possible Teacher Walkout

The Ponca City Public School Board of Education will vote on a resolution at their March 12 meeting to support a salary increase for public school teachers and hereby encourage the Oklahoma Legislature to find a dedicated source of revenue that can be utilized to fund a much needed, reoccurring salary increase that will be provided to public school teachers in Oklahoma.

The resolution says in part that, "The Board of Education understands that Oklahoma's public school teachers are frustrated with the lack of pay, and, as a result, the state is experiencing an extreme shortage of qualified teachers throughout Oklahoma. Districts have been forced to use long-term substitute teachers and emergency certified teachers to education students. The low pay provided by the State of Oklahoma for public school teachers has led to students not being able to receive an education from highly qualified and standard certified teachers."

Superintendent Shelley Arrott will discuss the possibility of a teacher walkout at the board meeting Monday night. The walkout is a teacher-driven movement, not an administrative or Board of Education initiative. If teachers walk out on April 2 school officials will have to determine whether the walkout will debilitate the operations of the district. If the district does not have enough staff to support students, all PCPS schools will have to close.

Arrott stated she will be working on developing a plan if the walkout does occur and result in school closure. She will be meeting with other state superintendents to discuss options and provide legal guidance. The district will be sending a letter home to parents before spring break that will include the district's plan if the walkout does occur. It will also encourage parents to make childcare plans in preparation for the possibility of a walkout and school closure.

The PCPS district is working on providing resources for parents to help them plan in case of the school closures. A document answering frequently asked questions will also be sent to school employees.

If a walkout is imminent, a Town meeting will be held at 6 p.m. on March 29 to give parents and community members the latest information. The meeting will be led by a representative of the OEA and will be held in the West Middle School Auditorium.

As many of you know, the Oklahoma Education Association has issued an April 1 deadline for lawmakers to adopt a plan that includes teacher and support pay raises. OEA President Alecia Priest Reported in a state-wide press conference held on March 8, "Lawmakers have three weeks to approve over \$800 million in new funding, including raises for educators and school staff, or teachers will walk off the job on April 2."

Ponca City Public School teachers, along with teachers all across Oklahoma, plan to walk off the job on April 2 if Oklahoma lawmakers do not meet the demands of the OEA.

OEA demands include a \$10,000 pay raise for all Oklahoma teachers and a \$5,000 pay raise for all support staff. They explained that the raises can be funded over the course of three years with a \$6,000 of the teacher pay raise to be funded the next coming fiscal year. They are also asking the Legislature to increase public school funding by \$200 million, \$213 million for state employee raises and \$255.9 million in additional health care funding.

The OEA has reported that lawmakers have ignored repeated advocacy efforts by OEA members – including thousands of emails and phone calls to lawmakers, days of action at the Capitol, and community forums across the state. This has led educators to take drastic efforts to

save public education and ensure students receive a quality education that prepares them for the future.

Survey results from the Oklahoma Education Association showed that 80 percent of its 10,000 members supported a shutdown of schools to force Legislators to act on increased investments in schools.

State employees recently announced their plans to join Oklahoma teachers in walking off the job next month if lawmakers don't give them a pay raise. Neither teachers nor state workers have received across-the-board pay raises since 2008.

The Ponca City Association of Classroom Teachers held a meeting on March 9 after school to discuss concerns raised about how a school closure would affect students. President of the Ponca City Association of Classroom Teachers (ACT) Zach Murray told all PCPS employees, "We would like to identify those community groups that can provide support for our students. We will need the help of our community partners to take this on."

The Ponca City Association of Classroom Teachers plans to hold an all employee meeting on March 13 to discuss many of the questions that have been asked regarding the possible walkout. In a memo to PCPS employees, ACT President Zach Murray said, "By State constitutional law the Legislature must pass an education budget by April 1. If the Legislature fails to pass legislation that would raise revenue to pay for teacher pay raises, support staff pay raises, and increased education funding, teachers across the state will walkout and schools will be closed. We will be required to make up the time required to meet our 185-day contract. Employees were asked to complete an online survey indicating if they would support a walkout prior to the scheduled ACT meeting on March 13.