

Sucking the Life Out of America's Public Schools

The Expense of Teachers Union Contracts



Part 7

United Teachers of Dade Contract

EAG
news.org

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Fall 2012

Miami-Dade school leaders push for higher taxes despite runaway labor costs

The Miami-Dade County school board is asking voters to approve a \$1.2 billion bond referendum on the Nov. 6 ballot, to fund upgrades to facilities and district technology.

There's no doubt that repairs are needed to many buildings in the nation's fourth-largest school district, and computer upgrades are always crucial. Students and staff at a recent school board meeting shared tales of crumbling buildings, broken air conditioning units, leaky windows, termites and crash-prone computers, according to media reports.

But voters can be hard to convince when they're asked to raise their own taxes, even by modest amounts. As board member Martin Karp was quoted as saying, "We're going to have to have an open conversation" with the public.

Perhaps that conversation could begin with the topic of runaway labor costs, particularly in an era when the district budget has shrunk by millions of dollars and massive spending cuts have been implemented.

The district has cut tens of millions of dollars from special education and gifted student programs, laid off hundreds of maintenance employees, closed down several alternative schools, cut after school programs for thousands of students, increased some class sizes, downsized student transportation services and made deep reductions in the administrative staff, according to various media reports.

But at the same time the district has continued to spend hundreds of millions of dollars every year on questionable labor costs, many of which originate from provisions in the teachers union collective bargaining agreement (CBA).

We studied the union's CBA that was in effect between 2006 and 2009, then was amended and extended through June of this year. Then we submitted an open records request to try to measure how much the district spent on various provisions in that contract in the 2010-11 school year, which was the last completed academic year at the time of our submission.

While we were only able to obtain a small sampling of contractual labor costs, the results of our research made one thing clear: Unnecessary union labor costs have been siphoning millions of dollars from Miami-Dade schools every year, at a time when the district can least afford it.

For instance, the district spent \$270 million on employee health insurance premiums in 2010-11, while employees only kicked in a combined \$36 million, or about 12 percent of the cost. The district also spent more than \$21 million for substitute teachers, due to a very generous paid absence policy and high compensation rates for classroom subs.

Our favorite was the \$347,000 spent on "supplements for office employees who had the primary responsibility for arranging temporary instructors." Isn't that something that administrators should do as part of their jobs, without any extra pay?

Some of the expenses we found could probably be defended, to some degree, during normal economic times. They cannot be defended during a sustained period of financial emergency.

Not long ago Superintendent Alberto Carvalho was quoted as saying, "Our 2011-12 budget takes us all the way to the bone." That means, in his view, the district has cut as many expenses as it can possibly cut. We wonder if that's really true, or if there's still a lot of fat in the labor budget that could be eliminated. Taxpayers and other residents may be wondering the same thing.

The following dollar figures were provided by Miami-Dade County Public Schools.

EMPLOYEE HEALTH INSURANCE

The union CBA states that “health insurance benefits will be provided to all eligible full-time employees. The school board will negotiate annually with (the union) to determine plan design and employer contributions levels.”

Miami-Dade County Public Schools paid out \$270 million toward employee health insurance premiums in calendar year 2010, a total of 88 percent of the cost. Employees contributed a combined \$36 million toward their own coverage, which was just under 12 percent of the cost. Contribution breakdowns were not available by collective bargaining group, so the above numbers represent insurance figures for all employees.

TEACHER TUITION REIMBURSEMENT

The CBA says that “all full-time certificated employees ... shall be eligible to receive tuition reimbursement payments for up to (12) graduate semester hours per year from an accredited institution of higher learning at a rate not to exceed \$150 per semester hour up to a total of 36 graduate semester hours.” Several studies have suggested that advanced degrees have little or no correlation to teacher effectiveness in the classroom.

Miami-Dade County Public Schools paid out \$1.3 million in tuition reimbursement for 1,166 teachers in 2010-11.

OFFICE EMPLOYEES TUITION REIMBURSEMENT

The CBA says “tuition reimbursement is available to office personnel who take college credit courses when such courses are part of a formal program leading toward a Bachelor’s degree in education or in a critical staff shortage area or in a job-related area and when such courses strengthen professional skills and improve effectiveness in performance of employee’s primary job assignment.”

The district paid out \$141,738 in tuition reimbursement for paraprofessionals, office personnel and support staff in 2010-11.

SUPPLEMENTS FOR OFFICE PERSONNEL

The CBA says “office employees who are designated by the principal as having the primary responsibility for arranging for temporary instructors on a regular basis shall be paid an annual supplement ...” The supplement rates range from \$800 to \$1,500 per year.

Miami-Dade County Public Schools paid out \$347,000 in supplements for office employees who had the primary responsibility for arranging temporary instructors in 2010-11.

SUBSTITUTE TEACHER COSTS

The CBA is stuffed full of expensive provisions that almost certainly drive this cost up.

For instance, all full-time instructional personnel start their careers in the district with four paid sick days, then earn one additional sick day for each month of employment every year. That means each employee can use up to 13 sick days per year if summer vacation months do not count toward the monthly sick day accrual, or 16 sick days per year if summer vacation does count.

Sick days can be used for “illness of self or illness and/or death of” a long list of 24 types of family members or other acquaintances, including foster children, step-parents, nieces,

nephews, uncles, aunts, foster parents, mothers-in-law, fathers-in-law or anyone who resides at the same address as the person requesting sick leave.”

The number of actual sick/personal days taken by teachers in 2010-11 was not available.

The salary schedule for temporary instructors (emergency, paraprofessional and pool) ranged from \$60 to \$120 per day.

Miami-Dade County Public Schools paid out \$21.1 million for substitute teachers in 2010-11.

PAID LEAVE TIME FOR UNION OFFICERS

The CBA allows the teacher who serves as the union president, as well as four other union designees, to be released from their duties with full pay and benefits for indefinite periods of time to perform work for the union. The union is expected to reimburse the district for the cost of the salaries and benefits, but there is no mention in the contract of reimbursement for the cost of replacement/substitute teachers.

Miami-Dade County Public Schools paid out \$68,492 in salary and benefits for one teacher to work as full-time union president in 2010-11. It also paid out \$59,300 in salary and benefits for other teachers to have union “leave time” in 2010-11.

ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION STIPENDS

According to the CBA, teachers (\$1,217), paraprofessionals (\$401) and office staff (\$305) who work at one of 16 alternative education sites receive this annual stipend. Office employees must receive an “acceptable” annual evaluation to receive the stipend.

Miami-Dade County Public Schools paid out \$506,963 in alternative education stipends in 2010-11.

PRORATED CREDITED SUPPLEMENTS FOR INTERPRETERS

The CBA provides financial incentives for “qualified speech/language pathologists” who provide direct services to students. Those with a Bachelor’s degree earn an extra \$2,000 per year while those with a Master’s degree or higher earn an extra \$4,000 per year. Those hired to work on an hourly basis are paid \$50 per hour.

Miami-Dade County Public Schools paid out \$255,800 for “prorated credited supplements” for full-time interpreters for deaf and hard of hearing students in 2010-11.

SECRETARY SUPPLEMENTS

According to the CBA, “employees who pass the National Certified Professional Secretary Examination shall be eligible for a supplement of \$1,100.” The contract also says “upon completion of the (professional secretary training) program, the participants will receive a certificate of completion and will be eligible for the annual \$275 Professional Secretary supplement.”

Miami-Dade County Public Schools paid out \$64,850 in supplements for national certified professional secretaries and professional secretary supplements in 2010-11.

CREDENTIAL PAYMENTS

The CBA says “the purpose of the credentialed payment is to enhance the quality of education for students in Miami-Dade County by providing employees increased financial incentive for the pursuit of further study and expertise in respective fields.” That sounds a lot like tuition reimbursement, a program described above.

Miami-Dade County Public Schools paid out \$42,779 for credential payments for employees who occupied instructional positions in 2010-11.

URBAN EDUCATION PROGRAM

The CBA says “an Urban Education Program has also been developed which will lead to advanced degrees for which credentialed payments shall be made, if special provisions are met. A stipend of \$1,000 shall be paid, provided special provisions are met.” Participating teachers must agree to teach at a selected Title 1 school for at least three years and receive acceptable evaluations.

Miami-Dade County Schools paid out \$42,170 in stipends to employees who completed the urban education program in 2010-11.

HOW THE DISTRICT COULD HAVE SAVED MONEY

In his 2010-11 budget proposal, Superintendent Alberto Carvalho wrote that his goal was to eliminate \$80 million from the district budget. If the school board had turned its attention toward cutting labor costs, and the teachers union would have cooperated, we believe the district could have saved nearly half of that amount without laying anyone off or cutting anyone’s base salary.

Increase employee contribution toward health insurance from 12 to 20 percent	\$25.2 million
Cut substitute costs by 1/3 by cutting half of paid sick days and reducing sub pay	\$7 million
Eliminate teacher tuition reimbursement	\$1.3 million
Eliminate office employee tuition reimbursement	\$141,738
Eliminate supplements for office personnel	\$347,000
Eliminate alternative education stipends	\$506,963
Eliminate supplements for interpreters	\$255,800
Eliminate secretary supplements	\$64,850
Eliminate credential payments	\$42,779
Eliminate urban education supplements	\$42,170
TOTAL SAVINGS	\$34.9 million

ABOUT EAGNEWS.ORG



EAGnews.org is a service of Education Action Group Foundation, a Michigan-based 501(c)(3) non-partisan non-profit organization. It has been researching and promoting school spending reform for more than four years.

Originally focused solely on Michigan schools, EAGnews.org has since begun analyzing school spending and education reform across the nation. The organization has three regular publications: **Focus on Reform** (national), the **Ed Reform Radar** (national) and **Wisconsin School Reformer**. The newsletters focus largely on the agenda and tactics of the national teachers' unions, as well as reform efforts around the country.

EAG's research and writing are regularly seen on websites such as Breitbart.com and Townhall.com. Kyle Olson, publisher of EAGnews.org, appears in a weekly segment on **Fox & Friends** called "The Trouble with Schools" on the Fox News Channel.

EAG recently published a book, "**Indoctrination: How Useful Idiots Are Using Our Schools to Subvert American Exceptionalism**," which can be purchased at Amazon.com.

EAG also produced a short documentary film, "**A Tale of Two Missions**," with Fox News analyst Juan Williams, which examines the fight for school choice in Chicago. It can be viewed at **TwoMissionsMovie.com**.

EAGnews.org is currently producing a series of reports exposing school spending habits tied to teachers contracts from large districts around the country.

Visit **EAGnews.org** for more research, reporting, analysis and commentary.