

CANTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS



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To develop students who are competent and creative thinkers, curious and confident learners, and compassionate citizens.

Contract Negotiation FAQs

January 4, 2023

Q. *What is being negotiated?*

A. The Canton School Committee, Superintendent Derek Folan and the Canton Public Schools leadership team have been negotiating new contracts with the Canton Teachers Association (Unit A and Unit E) **since December 2021.**

The existing contracts, which ran through Aug. 31, 2022, **remain in effect** until new agreements are reached.

Q. *What are Units A and E?*

A. Unit A has 281 teachers and other state-licensed faculty. Specifically, Unit A is comprised of classroom teachers, counselors, school adjustment counselors, speech and language pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, school psychologists, high school and middle school department heads, preK- 12 coordinators, CHS and GMS librarians, coaches, teachers of extra-curricular activities, and school nurses.

Unit E has 91 members and is composed of our Educational Support Professionals(ESPs) which include educational assistants, certified occupational therapist assistants, school aides (who most commonly serve as part-time recess and lunch monitors), speech and language pathologist assistants, applied behavioral analysis tutors and our athletic trainer.

Q. *What is the process?*

A. Our first bargaining (negotiating) session began on December 7, 2021, and since that time, we've held 14 multi-hour negotiations sessions, presented multiple proposals and provided a myriad of responses. Despite our best efforts and shared interests to support students, faculty and the district, we were still apart on a few key issues.

With no concrete progress being made, and with the School Leadership Team wanting a resolution and pay issued to educators before the holidays, the School Leadership Team filed for mediation in October 2022.

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We are committed to a mediation process that allows for the flexible and creative thinking necessary to find solutions that benefit our educators, our students and the community as a whole.

Q. What is mediation?

A. Mediation involves engaging a State-appointed neutral third party, known as a mediator, to assist in achieving a mutually beneficial resolution, in the form of a settled contract. **The first mediation session was held on December 20, 2022.**

The School Leadership Team continues to seek a resolution with urgency, and has offered to meet even before the next scheduled mediation meeting on January 24, 2023.

Q. Who's on the School Leadership's negotiating team?

A. Superintendent Derek Folan, Assistant Superintendent Sarah Shannon, Director of Finance and Operations Steve Marshall, School Committee Chair Kristian Merenda, and School Committee member Nichola Gallagher.

Q. What are the key issues that remain for the School Leadership Team?

A. Two of the key issues that remain are based on **salary increases** and improving the **use of personal days to align with industry standards.**

The School Committee Team has made approximately **40 concessions** to address issues raised by the CTA in an attempt to expeditiously reach an agreement.

Q. What is the School Leadership Team's financial offer?

A. School Leadership currently has offered significant raises to employees in each bargaining unit.

Unit A: The current financial package offered to teachers is a 7% base raise over three years. The total result of these increases will be 10%-14% raises for many teachers, depending on their years of service to the town and post-graduate work.

The package also includes an additional "super step," or longevity bonus, for teachers who have worked in Canton for 20 years or more.

By the third year of the contract, the package offers an increased salary range that begins at \$58,112 for new teachers and goes up to \$116,728 for our most experienced teachers.

Unit E: The current financial offer for our Educational Support Professionals (Unit E) represents a minimum of a 16% increase and a much greater increase for many. These increases will grow the salary schedules for ESPs over time.

We are working hard to provide what we believe is fair compensation given the limited number of hours worked, comparable districts, and the economy.

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FY23 Proposal going into mediation on December 20:

- For all Unit E members, the SC proposal includes a minimum of 16% over the course of the contract
- Top steps according to this proposal were:
 - Educational Assistants in FY23 is \$26.34 per hour
 - ABA tutors is \$36.62 per hour
 - COTAs and SLPAs is \$43.85 per hour
- Additional details:
 - For Educational Assistants at Step 5, a new Step 6 results in an additional 4% for a total increase of 14% in year one
 - Given the Team's agreement to add compensation for holidays and vacation days for ABA tutors, the increase for this group is even greater, ranging from 20.6% to 26% in year one
 - Years 2 and 3 each provide a 3% increase for all

A key consideration in raising the rates of ESPs is ensuring that the rates of pay offered to our ESPs do not approach that which we pay our teachers, who, unlike ESPs, must have a four-year degree and licensure and are salaried employees who must often work well beyond the onsite work day in order to fulfill their professional responsibilities.

Q. What concessions have been made?

A. For our teacher unit (Unit A), this includes, but is not limited to:

- Increased paid time off, including adding four weeks of leave for all new parents
- Increasing the hourly rate paid to teachers for extra class coverage/after school work
- Increasing common planning time and guaranteeing unassigned time during the day (beyond the preparation periods already in the contract) for the elementary level

For our Educational Support Professionals (Unit E), this includes, but is not limited to:

- Increased pay for ESPs who provide substitute coverage for teachers
- Added extra pay for Educational Assistants who provide substitute coverage for Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) tutors
- Creation of a sick bank
- Increased paid time for family sick leave
- Multiple new leaves, including enhanced bereavement leave, religious leave, military leave and parental leave for all new parents, which provides additional time off for Unit E members who do not work the requisite number of hours necessary to qualify for FMLA (Family Medical Leave Act)

The team earnestly believes that these enhancements and benefits are the right thing to do for our District's educators, to keep Canton competitive, and to retain the best talent, all while keeping within the bounds of the funding set aside by the Town and State to sustainably operate the District.

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Q. *Why has personal day use been prioritized and how does it impact learning?*

A. School Leadership would like to bring the use of personal days by Units A and E into line with the industry standard which is that personal days be used for personal business which cannot be conducted outside of the school day.

As it stands right now, **Canton educators can schedule any number of personal days they have accrued, in a row, without limitation**, by giving their supervisor three-days' notice.

A number of employees are taking personal days consecutively and/or using them to **extend long weekends, holidays or school vacation weeks**.

The classroom teacher being absent after a break, vacation or holiday greatly impacts educational continuity and learning for each of our students, which directly impacts overall student performance and the **operation/culture/morale** within the school buildings. The School Leadership's goal is to **minimize instances of students in classrooms without their usual teachers** or other **educational support professionals**.

School Leadership identified this alignment with **industry standard** as a top priority, largely in part to hearing from many families, students, and educators within the District about this disruptive factor. As much as the District routinely reminds families and students of the importance of timeliness and attendance, the same is true for all to **optimize learning and progress**.

It should be noted that with regard to proposals on this issue, there has been some discussion in the community about mental health and the importance of being able to take days off for overall wellness. Paid sick time has and will continue to be allocated for that very important need.

Q. *How does the School Leadership Team determine its financial offer to the CTA?*

A. School Leadership works closely with the Town of Canton's finance director and town administrator **to offer financial packages that are respectful of our educators and financially responsible for the town**.

Offers are based on town tax revenues and state aid for Canton that's included within the State's budget, which won't be released until March 2023.

Q. *Why did the School Leadership Team file for mediation?*

A. Negotiation can be a lengthy and thorough process, but that can be **necessary to ensure a fair result for all**. Although the School Leadership Team made a number of concessions, the parties negotiated for 10 months without progress on specific key issues. This Team sought the assistance of a **mediator appointed by the state**, who then works with each team to develop and adjust its proposals to assist the parties in reaching agreements.

The Team has moved with urgency and sincerity in seeking an agreement, meeting on multiple occasions, offering packages with substantial concessions in March with a goal of reaching a resolution by the close of the school year, offering to meet over the summer with a goal of reaching a resolution by the start of the new school year, and seeking mediation in early October with a goal of reaching a resolution before the winter break. The

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Q. What happens if mediation doesn't work?

A. If mediation is unsuccessful, **Massachusetts law provides for a non-binding “fact-finding” process where each team presents data and information to a neutral state-appointed fact finder.** This neutral party then makes a “finding of facts” and gives recommendations as to how the disputes might be resolved and an agreement reached.

Q. Are School Committee members paid?

A. No. The five members of the School Committee are volunteers who are elected by the voters of Canton to oversee the running of the Canton Public Schools. They don't receive any compensation, payments nor stipends for their time. **School committee members often dedicate 5-25 hours each week** to the vital operations of the school district.

Q. What licenses and/or degrees are required for the staff in Unit A and Unit E?

A. Unit A members must carry a valid Massachusetts educator license from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) or other state agency. Teachers must hold at least a bachelor's degree with the educator certification and are required to professionalize and renew their licenses through experience and additional coursework. Many Unit A members hold multiple Master's degrees, advanced degrees and/or credits beyond a Master's degree, as part of advancing their professional learning and licensure.

In Unit E, ABA tutors are expected to have a bachelor's degree, and COTAs and SPLA must have a certificate. There is no degree or certificate/licensure requirement for Educational Assistants or School Aides.

Q. What are some other differences between the roles?

Unit A positions are responsible for all aspects of a student's education. They plan, implement and adapt lessons, curriculum and assessments. They are responsible for grading, communication with caregivers, completing student-related paperwork (ie. IEP and 504 related documents, health inventories, private school applications, etc), professional learning, professional collaboration, and maintaining their licensure. As salaried employees, teachers are often required to work beyond the onsite work day to fulfill their professional responsibilities, and this expectation is factored into their regular salaries.

Unit E positions are responsible for supporting students in the classroom based on services outlined in a student's IEP or by the special or general education teacher. Some Unit E members, especially at the elementary level, are general classroom support. In this case, they perform duties outlined by the teacher designed to support all students. Their responsibilities are isolated to the contracted hours they work. of their regular onsite workday. In the event additional work time is authorized, a Unit E member must receive additional compensation based upon their hourly rate.

Q. How has the district created opportunities for professional development for Unit E members who would like to increase their credentials on the path toward becoming a teacher or other licensed professionals?

A. We strongly support the professional development and growth of our Unit E members. The District has partnered with Curry College to provide a pathway for our Unit E members to obtain their teaching license and/or Masters of Education. Through this partnership, staff are enrolled in a cohort that offers a supportive environment, a 20% tuition discount and, through the current contract, a \$350 course reimbursement per school year. In addition, we have committed through this partnership to provide student teaching and field placements in our schools and with our teachers.

Q. In what other ways can educators increase their earnings?

A. Beyond their primary role, educators have a myriad of opportunities to increase earnings throughout the school year. Some of these include:

- Advising student clubs, organizations, and activities
- Coaching
- Stipended committee work
- Tutoring hours through our student services department
- Summer programming (both regular and general education)
- Paid (and pre-approved) summer curriculum work
- Other stipended roles per the contract

Q. What about administrative assistants, custodians/maintenance, food service workers, and others?

A. Many other Canton Public School staff are covered in the AFSCME Unit which reached agreement with the School Committee in spring of 2022. **They are not part of this negotiation process as their contracts have been settled.**

Q. How does what is happening in Canton relate to trends across the State?

A. In recent years, there has been a strong push from the MTA, the umbrella state-wide union associated with the CTA, for local associations to engage in the types of work actions we've seen in Canton, and these actions are increasing in volume and intensity across the state.

We remain committed to developing a contract that works for the students, educators, and Canton community as a whole.