

MERIDIAN EDUCATION ASSOCIATION IEA/NEA

Public Posting Document Submitted to the Illinois Educational Relations Board on July 1, 2025

The Meridian Education Association (MEA) represents hard-working part-time and full-time teachers, custodians, cooks, and secretaries who have and continue to sacrifice for the children of Mounds and its surrounding communities. Some long-time employees have endured low wages, building closings due to mold exposure, and many transitions in administrative staff and supervisors.

The MEA has been negotiating a successor contract agreement since April 18, 2024, and has been working without a contract since the start of the 2024-2025 school year. The Meridian Unit School District has a history of being unable to hire qualified teachers and has had approximately 15 positions filled with non-licensed employees. Teaching salaries, historically, have trailed behind forty-four (44) school districts in southern Illinois, which continues to contribute to their inability to hire licensed teachers. Because the MEA recognizes that children in Mounds and its surrounding communities deserve to have a school staffed with qualified teachers and educational employees, their primary goal for bargaining has been to negotiate salaries and benefits that would both attract and retain qualified teachers and support staff.

The MEA negotiating team has met with the Board on ten (10) different dates and has always come to the bargaining table prepared and ready to make concessions. However, the MEA team has been met with hostility, criticisms for utilizing contractual benefits, criticized for expecting raises comparable to those of neighboring districts, and with a Board team that was rarely prepared or willing to make concessions. Early on in the bargaining process, the parties enlisted the help of a federal mediator but ultimately were unable to negotiate a fair contract that met the goals of the

MEA. On March 18, 2025, the Board served its Last Best Final Offer on the Association, shutting down negotiations and reinforcing its position that teachers and support staff in the Meridian Unit School District do not deserve to earn a teaching salary that is comparable to their peers or to earn a living wage. Our students deserve to return to school in August with licensed and highly qualified educators ready to provide them with a positive learning environment in which they can thrive.

The information listed below provides the rationale for each of our proposals, which are designed to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers and educational employees and increase student success.

Rationale for proposals

Non-certified Salaries and Benefits

One of our primary goals for this negotiation has been to secure a contract that enables the district to **recruit and retain** high-quality educational employees. Our educational support employee positions were never meant to be minimum wage jobs. They were meant to be careers that attracted a population of workers who were skilled at supporting the educational goals of the district, who cared about the welfare of the students, and who were dedicated to remaining a part of the school community for many years. Due to a contract that offered minimal compensation to educational employees, Meridian Unit No. 101 became a place where employees turned over frequently and students no longer had the opportunity to build lasting relationships with those who brought them to school, greeted them when they arrived and departed school, served them lunch, and made sure they had a clean and safe school in which to learn.

Certified Salaries and Benefits

Another primary goal for this negotiation has been to secure a contract that enables the district to **recruit and retain** high-quality teachers. Our students, unlike students in neighboring schools, have

been forced to sit in classrooms with unqualified, non-licensed teachers year after year. In tracking one student from kindergarten to fifth grade, we discovered that there was only one of these years that the student had the opportunity to learn from a teacher with an Illinois Professional Educator License. Over the life of this past contract, the district employed approximately fifteen non-licensed teachers from 2020 through 2025. According to the Illinois School Report Card, 24% of Meridian's teachers are non-licensed, with 9% of those teachers beginning their teaching career. Meridian has about a 70% teacher retention rate, which means 30% of its teachers are leaving each year. Children in Mounds and its surrounding communities are suffering because the district is unable to attract and retain qualified teachers. Out of 46 southern Illinois area schools, Meridian Unit No. 1 ranks number 44 in starting teacher salary compensation. Teachers in this district have been underpaid and overworked for many years and have only received salary increases as required by recent legislation setting the minimum teaching salary at \$40,000. For these reasons, the MEA has stood firm throughout this negotiation process on accepting raises that were comparable to those of their peers throughout southern Illinois and those that would enable the district to attract and retain qualified teachers.

Health Insurance

Health insurance costs have continued to rise throughout the term of this past contract. Negotiated raises between 2020 and 2025 were consumed by increases in health insurance premiums. Premium increases proposed by the union will not eliminate the inflationary cost of accessing district-offered health insurance programs, but may lessen the out-of-pocket costs employees experience over the life of this contract.

Elementary Scheduling and Planning Time

Another primary goal of this negotiation has been to acquire contract language that mandates the district to provide a minimum of 45 uninterrupted minutes of daily planning time for each teacher

within the district. Currently, the contract does not require the district to provide adequate planning time. Elementary teachers receive less planning time than their middle and high school colleagues. Elementary teachers must plan for all academic areas taught in the lower grades and must adapt educational materials to a diverse group of learners. Research shows that increased planning time allows for more effective lesson planning, the differentiation of instruction, and addressing the needs of individual students, which ultimately leads to improved student outcomes. In addition to reduced planning time, according to the Illinois School Report Card, Meridian Elementary teachers have a student/teacher ratio of 24.2:1 while their high school counterparts have a student/teacher ratio of 7.7:1.

MERIDIAN EDUCATION ASSOCIATION IEA/NEA

Last Proposal Submitted to the Meridian CUSD No. 101

Board of Education on December 19, 2024

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Note: New language items are underlined. Sections that are not underlined are currently in the contract. Sections that have a strike-through are sections we are proposing to remove.

Section 17.3 RETIREMENT

IMRF: Non-Certified Employees

~~The non-certified employee is responsible for paying 4.5% rate for IMRF or what the law requires. The Meridian Board will pay the employee member contribution rate for IMRF.~~

Section 17.4A CERTIFIED EMPLOYEE LEAVE DAYS

Certified Employee Leave

Certified Employee Leave

SICK LEAVE

Each full-time regularly employed certified staff covered by this Agreement shall receive the following sick leave:

1. The school board shall grant each full-time certified employee 15 days of paid sick leave each school year. Unused sick leave shall accumulate to a maximum of three hundred and sixty (360) days.
2. Sick leave shall be charged in increments of no less than one hour.
3. Sick leave shall be interpreted to mean personal illness, mental or behavioral health complications, quarantine at home, or illness or death in the immediate family or household. If the school board does require a certificate from a physician, mental health professional, a chiropractic physician, a licensed advanced practice registered nurse, a licensed physician assistant, a spiritual advisor, or practitioner of the teacher's or employee's faith for absences of 3 consecutive days, the employee will be responsible for the cost of obtaining the certificate.

PERSONAL LEAVE

Each full-time certified employee shall be granted four (4) days of personal leave with pay per school year. Any of the four (4) unused personal leave will be added to sick leave accumulation. Notification for personal leave shall be directed to the Superintendent.

Full-time certified employees may carry over one (1) personal day a year, up to a total of (5) total personal leave days. For example: if an employee only used 1 personal day in the 2024-2025 school year, the employee would start the 2025-2026 school year with five (5) personal days.

BEREAVEMENT LEAVE

If an employee is absent from work due to a death of an immediate family member, as defined by the School Code, the employee will be granted two bereavement days per death without loss of pay and will be charged sick leave for bereavement purposes for each day after the first two days.

Immediate family member, as defined in the School Code, includes parents, spouse, brothers, sisters, children, grandparents, grandchildren, parents-in-law, brothers-in law, sisters-in-law, and legal guardians.

Employees who are eligible for leave pursuant to and consistent with the Illinois Family Bereavement Leave Act, 820 ILCS 154/1, effective January 1, 2023, shall have their use of paid bereavement leave and paid sick leave for the death in the immediate family count toward the number of unpaid leave days the employee is eligible to use under the Illinois Family Bereavement Leave Act.

Section 17.4B NON-CERTIFIED EMPLOYEE LEAVE DAYS

During the first year of employment, non-certified employees will receive their days as follows:

- o After month one of employment ~~three (3)~~ five (5) sick days will be credited and available for use.
- o After the third month of employment five (5) additional sick days will be credited and available for use.
- o After sixth month of employment ~~six (6)~~ five (5) additional sick days will be credited and available for use.
- o Upon reaching the second year of employment, non-certified employees will receive ~~thirteen (13)~~ fifteen (15) sick days at the beginning of the fiscal year.

Section 17.4C NON-CERTIFIED EMPLOYEE LEAVE DAYS

Non-Certified Employee Leave

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Section 17.8 INSURANCE CONTRIBUTION

The Board contribution to medical, vision, and/or dental insurance shall be a maximum of the following amounts per employee per month:

<u>2024-2025</u>	<u>\$700.00 per month</u>
<u>2025-2026</u>	<u>\$750.00 per month</u>

Section 17.17 PLANNING PERIODS

All teachers district wide will receive equal planning periods. "Planning Period" is defined as duty-free uninterrupted plan time no less than 40 minutes ~~time~~ on a normal student attendance day for certified employees to plan, prepare, and fulfill position responsibilities. This does not include lunch, recess, or passing times.

APPENDIX A: LONGEVITY

Any teacher whose rate of pay does not increase as a result of his or her step movement will receive a percent raise equal to the raise of those advancing a step on the salary schedule.

LONGEVITY:

Any ESP whose rate of pay does not increase as a result of his or her step movement will receive a percent raise equal to the raise of those advancing a step on the salary schedule.

APPENDIX A: EXPERIENCE CREDIT/SALARY SCHEDULE PLACEMENT:

For salary schedule purposes, a newly employed teacher who possesses a valid Illinois Teaching License will be awarded a full year of credit for all prior teaching experience earned at an accredited public school. For teaching experience to be awarded, said teacher must have held a valid Illinois Teaching License or a valid teaching license in another state at the time the teaching experience was earned.

For those years in which salary schedule credit is sought, the teacher must provide a written record of the service credit as listed with the Illinois Teachers' Retirement System (TRS) or an appropriate out-of-state accredited public education system by September 1.

Additionally, any TRS service credit equal to or greater than .5 shall be awarded a full year of service credit on the salary schedule.

Appendix E: EXTRA-CURRICULAR SCHEDULE INCREASES

Add Stipends:

- a. Assistant Cheer Coach (Jr. High) (4% of base teaching schedule)
- b. Intramural Basketball Coach (2.5% of base teaching schedule)
- c. Increase stipend for Substitute Caller to 2% per quarter

SALARY COMPENSATION COST BREAKDOWN

APPENDIX A: CERTIFIED STAFF

2024-2025, Year (\$40,000 Starting Salary)

Salary New Money	\$136,679
TRS New Money	13,518
Total New Money	\$150,197

2025-2026, Year 2 (\$41,000 Starting Salary)

Salary New Money	\$110,234
TRS New Money	10,902
Total New Money	\$121,136

APPENDIX B: NON-CERTIFIED STAFF

2024-2025, Year 1 (\$16.00 Starting Hourly)

Salary New Money	\$50,028
IMRF District/Employee	\$ 5,578
Total New Money	\$55,606

2025-2026, Year 2 (\$16.50 Starting Hourly)

Salary New Money	\$28,782
IMRF District/Employee	\$ 3,209
Total New Money	\$31,991

Total New Salary/Retirement Money, Year 1 \$205,803

Total New Salary/Retirement Money, Year 2 \$153,127

INSURANCE

2024-2025, Year 1	\$48,000
2025-2026, Year 2	\$24,000
Total New Money	\$72,000

TOTAL COST OF SALARY & COMPENSATION PACKAGE

Year 1	\$253,803
Year 2	\$177,127