

FOP & PCS Negotiations Minutes

Date: August 7, 2025

Location: Pinellas County Schools Administrative Building

2:00 PM

The meeting was attended by representatives from both the Pinellas County Schools bargaining team and the FOP bargaining team. Present were Laurie Dart, Michael Vigue, Carly Spicer, Dena Collins, Stephanie Woodford, Gary Jeppesen, Officer Dan Churchill, Alex Morton, Zach Huff, Officer Cal Gordon, Officer Varner Webb, and Officer Gerald Niles.

Meeting Overview

The session was opened by Officer Dan Churchill, who began by expressing appreciation to the EWBS subcommittee for their contributions. Michael Vigue introduced the EWBS proposal, which is intended to be signed and brought back to the larger group for further discussion. He noted that the district's CFO would begin the financial portion of the meeting.

FOP Concerns and Requests

Officer Churchill presented the current pay scale in comparison to surrounding districts, acknowledging the specialized nature of the district's law enforcement unit. He clarified that the officers are not seeking parity with other districts, as their responsibilities differ significantly—they do not respond to domestic street calls, for example. He emphasized that if they were employed by the Sheriff's Office, they would be working nights and weekends, and therefore are asking for a fair compensation adjustment this year.

A major concern raised was the unattractiveness of the 10-month position. The FOP team is advocating for more 12-month positions to be filled, which would help retain officers at high-need schools such as Calvin and Sanders. Churchill noted that no new officers are hired without prior experience, as the district prefers seasoned professionals who are better equipped to work with students. He described the position as "the best kept secret," explaining that new officers typically seek more traditional law enforcement roles. In response to a question from Stephanie Woodford, Churchill shared that approximately 50% of the officers are retirees from other organizations.

District Financial Overview

Gary Jeppesen provided a detailed financial overview of the district's current situation. He began by discussing property tax values and the impact of declining enrollment. Student populations now include traditional students, charter students, and Family Empowerment Scholarship (FES) students. The growth in FES participation has reduced available funding for the district.

As a result, staffing reductions have occurred across support, instructional, and administrative roles. Jeppesen presented a table showing annual CPI increases, which demonstrated that the district's salary increases have exceeded the cost of living. He also shared a funding comparison document that broke down the budget by student count, revenue, categorical allocations, and other metrics. Notably, the district faced an additional \$2.1 million in cuts this year, and the funding provided by the state was insufficient to cover even a 1% salary increase.

Stephanie Woodford added that the district has made \$51 million in reductions, which equates to nearly 700 eliminated positions.

FOP Response and Proposal

Officer Churchill acknowledged the district's financial challenges and reiterated the officers' willingness to collaborate to make the budget work. He noted that Major McBride is currently serving as interim Chief, with two open sergeant positions and additional vacancies.

Churchill presented a proposal on behalf of the FOP unit, which includes a single annual salary bump. This would average a 3.25% increase and add a 0.75% adjustment to the salary schedule across all levels. The proposal involves moving a bump and applying it to the salary grid. Churchill expressed confidence that the contract could be signed before September 1st, with full support from his team.

District's Position on Referendum and Budget

Gary Jeppesen highlighted that all support employees will receive an additional \$2,900 this school year due to the referendum. The average increase for the FOP unit was approximately 6%.

Stephanie Woodford emphasized that the referendum already provides a 5–8% increase for the group. She acknowledged the difficulty of balancing the budget this year and noted that adding to the operating budget would be extremely challenging. The district team will take the FOP proposal back for further review.

Meeting Concluded 3:10 PM