SCUSD, teachers agree to lower K-3 class sizes

New two-year agreement also sets path to new teacher evaluations, more collaboration in district

September 12, 2014 (Sacramento): Negotiating teams for the Sacramento City Unified School District and the Sacramento City Teachers Association have agreed to a new two-year agreement that will lower class sizes in kindergarten through third grade classrooms in high-needs neighborhoods.

The agreement calls for a reduction of K-3 class size limits in schools where 75 percent or more students qualify for a free or reduced price lunch, the federal poverty threshold. Over the next two years, the maximum student-teacher ratio will be lowered in these schools to 29-to-1 for kindergarten and 28-to-1 for grades 1-3.

SCUSD’s and SCTA’s ultimate goal is to lower class sizes throughout the district, said Superintendent José L. Banda. The district will start the process with schools located in high-poverty areas and continue adding schools in other neighborhoods as state funding allows.

“Smaller class sizes allow teachers to focus more time and attention on individual student needs,” Superintendent Banda said. “This is especially important in schools where there are high concentrations of students who live in poverty or are struggling to learn English.”

SCTA President Nikki Milevsky applauded the agreement as a win for students in the district.

“Overcrowded classrooms greatly impact our students’ ability to learn and our ability to give them the individualized attention they need to help them succeed,” Milevsky said. “That’s why reducing the size of our overcrowded classrooms in the lower grades has been a big issue for us in negotiations. We’ve even gone so far as to contribute funds out of our own pockets in order to keep class sizes from increasing in past years. We will continue to advocate for a reduction in class size across all the grades.”
In addition, teachers will receive an increase of 2 percent on the salary schedule this year and a 1 percent increase next year. The salary schedule for teachers has been unchanged since 2008-09. During the worst years of the recession, when hundreds of teachers received pink slips, SCTA members agreed to furlough days, health benefit cost increases and monthly payroll deductions to support class size reduction and to address unfunded liabilities.

“This agreement represents a lot of hard work and progress on the part of both negotiations teams considering where we were when we first started the process,” said Milevsky. “But in order to attract and retain quality educators for our students, we have to do better.”

The new agreement is being forwarded to teachers for a ratification vote and, if passed, will be presented to the Board of Education for approval in October.

In addition to lowering class sizes, the agreement also creates joint district-SCTA committees to collaborate on such important issues as special education supports, student calendar adjustments and a new teacher evaluation tool.

“SCUSD and SCTA are committed to a framework for discussing how to use student growth data to best support our teachers,” said Superintendent Banda. “Our goal is to develop a comprehensive new evaluation instrument that effectively measures teacher performance, provides supports and further raises the effectiveness of all teachers to provide high-quality instruction to SCUSD students. This marks the most progress toward changing the current evaluations in years.”

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