

Fresno Unified teachers turn up heat over contracts

BY HANNAH FURFARO

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<http://www.fresnobee.com/2014/03/26/3844971/fresno-teachers-rally-outside.html?sp=/99/217/&ihp=1>



Fresno Unified teachers protest outside the district headquarters in downtown Fresno on Wednesday, March 26, 2014.

HANNAH FURFARO — The Fresno Bee

Fresno Unified teachers and union leaders locked horns Wednesday with district Superintendent Michael Hanson over ongoing contract talks, following a rally in downtown Fresno where teachers held signs calling for higher pay and smaller class sizes.

Teachers spoke at the district's school board meeting, pleading with trustees to raise wages and reconsider parts of a contract proposal that would ask some teachers to work longer days. The district would pay teachers for the extra work.

Wearing stickers and holding signs reading "count me in" to show their support of the Fresno Teachers Association, more than 20 teachers showed up to protest the plan. "When Fresno Unified cares more about huge financial reserves than providing every student what they need for the future, students lose," said Tish Rice, a Fresno High teacher.

Mai Summer Vue, a teacher at John Muir Elementary, directed her comments to Hanson. "You say the real success begins in the classroom, yet you are not willing to honor the proposal our negotiating team presented to the table," she said.

Hanson insisted that the district's salary plan -- which would increase pay by 8.2% over the next three years -- is fair. In fact, he said, the proposal is far higher than what other California districts are bargaining.

"No one has come close to the total package we are offering," he said, addressing the crowd following the teacher speeches.

The exchange comes after months of contract negotiations between the local teachers union and school district. Those discussions are deadlocked -- the district declared an impasse in February, which means a state mediator will now help smooth out the dispute. Both sides met for the first time with the mediator last week, Hanson said. Talks will continue on April 9.

The district is proposing to extend the class day at some schools and lower class sizes in certain elementary school grades. Also in the plan: add 10 professional development days for teachers and offer a stipend for employees willing to oversee after-school programs.

Teachers want a 15.5% increase over two years -- plus a retroactive 2.7% increase for the 2012-13 school year -- and lower class sizes in all grades.

Earlier in the evening, teachers rallied on M Street outside the district's headquarters.

Holding signs reading "Honk for teachers" and "No to unfair contract," teachers from schools that included Fresno High and Hamilton Elementary waved at evening commuters and passers-by.

Bob Hoe, a Fresno High history teacher, said the district's proposal amounts to asking teachers to work more hours each day without a fair wage increase.

"Now that the district is in a better position financially, we would expect some kind of fair remuneration," he said.

The reporter can be reached at (559) 441-6412, [hfurfaro@fresnobee.com](mailto:hfurfarofresno@fresnobee.com) or @hannahfurfaro on Twitter.