



Year Starts Strong With New Teachers' Collective Bargaining Agreement

The monthly School Board meeting was held on Tuesday, August 11 at the Administration Building in Harvey. The meeting began at 6pm and adjourned at 8:30pm. All Board members were present, as well as Superintendent Isaac Joseph. The room was almost entirely full.

Teachers Regain Dignity and Voice in Their Schools With New Contract

Over 3 years ago, the business-backed School Board majority voted to dismantle the teachers' collective bargaining agreement (CBA), resulting in a hostile work environment for many teachers across Jefferson Parish. Teachers began to see their co-workers leaving in larger numbers than ever before; class sizes increased for many; students' test scores became the basis for half of a teacher's evaluation; and overall, career dissatisfaction rose.

In November and December of 2014, the teachers, other school employees, JFT leadership, and community members worked tirelessly to elect School Board members who would listen to their many concerns. The union-backed candidates won a majority of the 9 seats.

At a ratification meeting on July 25th, JFT leadership presented a new CBA that would allow teachers to reclaim their professional dignity in the Parish. The teachers unanimously approved the contract.

The new union-backed School Board reviewed the CBA at the August meeting after a year-long wait by the teachers. JFT President Cathy Johnson declared the contract, "Gives our teachers voice and dignity

and respect in their profession. We hope this is the beginning of the professionalism that they deserve. The teachers are the experts in education and we need to allow them to do what they do best, and that is serve the Jefferson Parish schools."

Larry Dale (District 6) was a business-backed candidate who won reelection in 2014, claiming he "respects all teachers and school employees" but then went on record to oppose the CBA.

"Coach" Bonura (District 8) has been one of the greatest advocates for teachers, and echoed Johnson's sentiments, saying "we've been through hard times with Katrina, and I can tell you, if not for the teachers, these schools would've never re-opened within 2 months. Not long after, the [business-backed] school board decided — instead of honoring the teachers — to take something valuable away from them." He continued, "We're not asking for a lot. If we're going to move this system farther, we need to keep the people we have, and the best way to do that is to give them their dignity."

Marion "Coach" Bonura
School Board Member, District 8

By a vote of 5-4, the teachers' contract was approved to widespread applause from the audience.

You can view an electronic copy of the contract on the JFT website at: www.jft.org

How They Voted On the Contract			
District	Representative	For	Against
1	Mark Morgan	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
2	Ricky Johnson	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
3	Ray St. Pierre	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
4	Melinda Bourgeois		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
5	Cedric Floyd	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
6	Larry Dale		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
7	Melinda Doucet		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
8	Marion "Coach" Bonura	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
9	Sandy Denapolis-Bosarge		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Discipline Task Force Begins Implementing Changes

The Jefferson Federation of Teachers distributed a survey last year. The results indicated that discipline issues were a major concern in schools. The JFT pushed to create a Discipline Task Force, which met this summer on June 5, June 24, and July 7. The Task Force was composed of stakeholders from around the Parish, including School Board members, teachers, law enforcement, paraprofessionals, and JFT leadership. The Task Force split into subcommittees around communications, law enforcement, policy & procedure, and professional development. A student advisory board has been created, as well as a pamphlet for law enforcement practices. Restorative practices that decrease harm to students are being explored, and professional development for assistant principals will be implemented.

Partnership Teams Aim to Better Struggling Schools

Teams composed of principals, central office, external consultants, and more will work on bettering the 11 lowest performing schools, including Catherine Strehle Elementary, Miller Wall Elementary, Thibodeaux School of Music, Vic A. Pitre Elementary, Gretna Middle, Livaudais Middle, Theodore Roosevelt Middle, L. W. Higgins High, and West Jefferson High. The main focus will be to increase academics and improve instruction. They hope to maintain a positive and safe learning environment, assess data and offer feedback, and use targeted professional development (among many other goals). School observations, leadership meetings, and plan implementations will happen from August 24 to March 4.

Assistant Principals to Work 11 Months

Larry Dale (District 6) proposed extending Assistant Principals' work schedule from 10 months to 11 months at a cost of \$160,000. This is in an effort to help with registration and relieve clerks and secretaries who are over-worked. The Board unanimously approved.

JFT Addresses Dress Code During Heat Advisory

JFT President Cathy Johnson brought up the school employees' concern over hot clothing despite the often unbearable heat. She said that some have to go outside or do duty or address special needs of students in ankle-length pants, and shirts and ties. Capris are particularly debated over. As regulations for students have become more relaxed, she requested a similar leniency until October 2nd. "Some principals are unyielding," she said. Bonura agreed, saying, "There is nothing immoral about capris." Mark Morgan (District 1) didn't want to change the policy, but said he would be fine with a memo to principals recommending more relaxed standards until the heat subsides. The Board voted 9-0 to allow relaxed standards for students only.

Students Need Covered Areas to Address Heat, Rain, Overcrowding

The School Board discussed using Alice Birney Elementary as a showcase for a new pavilion covering over the blacktop where students play and have PE classes. Many schools need covers for the heat and the rain, and to address overcrowding. Airline Park Elementary even explored its own fundraising methods. By 9-0, the Board approved moving forward with Birney as the showcase school.

Changes Come For Educational Diagnosticians and Psychologists

Melinda Doucet (District 7) asked that Educational Diagnosticians and Psychologists be moved from 9 months to 10 months of service. Doucet commented that "This would be very beneficial to our special education department. This is the only department that we are able to bill and they actually bring in revenue." The Board also unanimously approved this.

The next School Board meeting will take place on September 2nd, 6:00 p.m., at the Administration Building (501 Manhattan Boulevard, Harvey)