

PFF Negotiations Update

7/23/2007

“District Logic”

Dear Colleagues,

When Bob Deegan took over as president of Palomar College we all breathed a sigh of relief. The nightmare that was Amador was over and this new likable guy readily portrayed himself as faculty friendly. On multiple occasions since then, Bob Deegan, John Tortarolo (VP of HR and the Districts Chief Negotiator), and Bonnie Dowd (VP of Finance) have all made both public and private promises that they are committed to delivering a fair and equitable compensation package for all faculty members at Palomar College. Although some of us were reluctant to do so, we nonetheless took all of them at their word.

At the end of negotiations last year, there was a bit of foreshadowing of things to come. As is typical, salary and benefits were the last to be discussed. As is typical, the District was crying poverty. We weren't asking for much, just \$136,000 for a watered down health care package for some part-time faculty. Jack Myomoto was still the chief negotiator but both John Tortarolo and Bonnie Dowd had been recently added to the District team. For 3 weeks of negotiating they wouldn't budge. They just kept saying: “We just don't have the money”. Just to clarify, in a \$100 million dollar budget, they were claiming that they couldn't find \$136,000 to offer health care to a small group of quite desperate individuals. During the fourth week, while adding multiple restrictions to the health care package, they relented. Three months later, in August, the District showed a surplus ending fund balance of over \$12 million dollars. They indeed had the money, and plenty of it, all along.

During this round of negotiations, Bob Deegan and his representatives continued to state their commitment to a fair and equitable compensation package for all faculty members. But when the time came for the District to put some action behind their words they failed to deliver as promised. The Article 15: Compensation counter proposal that was offered by the District during the last round of negotiations was a categorical rejection of our fair and equitable compensation proposal. They simply said “No” to our restructured full-time salary matrix. They simply said “No” to our proposed preparation pay for part-time faculty. They simply said “No” to agree upon releasing any COLA we might receive for next year and the year after. And they even introduced regressive language that would strip the minimal part-time faculty office hours from non-instructional faculty. There is

absolutely nothing in this District compensation counter proposal that would fulfill any of the promises made by Bob Deegan or his representatives to move towards a fair and equitable compensation package for all faculty members. It is hard to believe that a fair-minded individual could even see this District compensation counter proposal as bargaining in good faith.

In addition to the rejection offered for salary enhancement, the District's compensation counter proposal fails to grant release time for several faculty who have for many years been working for free to maintain and grow successful programs that benefit hundreds of Palomar students. The decision they make in this counter proposal will essentially destroy each of those programs.

The District's strategy truly puzzles us. With a new president and several new administrators all making promises for fairness and equity for faculty, in a financially robust year for Palomar College, including a rare \$2.7 million in equalization money, and after the faculty played a critical role in securing the bond measure, this District chose to erase all of that good will by failing to even offer their version of a fair and equitable compensation package for all faculty members. Based on these actions, it is truly difficult for us to maintain any trust in the word of Bob Deegan and his District representatives.

When we ask Bob Deegan or his representatives why we can't get our due portion of the \$2.7 equalization money his response does not waver. First he will tell you that the District already spent \$1.3 million of the equalization money hiring the 16 new faculty members. He will proudly point out that this generous commitment of spending allows us to now have 8 additional full-time faculty members above our obligation. This logic may appear sound, but it is flawed. If you compare the number of full-time faculty today compared to the number we had in the fall of 2001 we are actually down 8 full-time faculty members. Bob Deegan's logic overlooks this fact. He really can't claim to have used the \$1.3 million dollars of the equalization money to hire the 16 new faculty members last fall since the Palomar budget, prior to equalization, had already proved to be sufficient to support that many full-time faculty and more. This is the District's main argument against giving you a fair and equitable compensation package.

The District's logic against not offering release time to well deserving faculty members most likely involves their concern over violating the 50% rule. This rule mandates that the District spend no less than 50% of its budget in the classroom. This rule was initiated by the state legislature to prevent districts from getting top heavy with administration and

offering less for the students. The portion of a faculty member's salary paid for release time is considered to fall outside of the classroom. The argument was made by Bonnie Dowd during negotiations this year that we are so close to violating the 50% rule that increasing faculty release time would disrupt this delicate balance. At first glance this logic seems fairly sound and believable. But if you look at the numbers involved, this District logic is also flawed. If we are close to this ratio then we are spending a little more than \$50 million in the classroom and a little less than \$50 million out of the classroom. The cost to this ratio of an average full-time faculty member taking 20% release time should be around \$16,000. We are asking for about \$100,000 worth of release time. We think it is a bit of a stretch to believe that this small increase will disrupt the delicate balance of the 50% rule. The District's logical argument gets even weaker when you review current budget proposals. Many administrative areas show a dramatic increase in spending. In a budget report presented by Bonnie Dowd at the last RAC meeting she showed an increase in discretionary spending in the Administrative Services department alone of \$1.5 million dollars. This District's logic does not appear to be sound in claiming that our ~\$100,000 increase in out of the classroom spending would even compare to the disruption of the 50% rule caused by the District's multi-million dollar increase in administrative spending.

It seems to us that Bob Deegan and his District representatives have a simple view about faculty raises: if we get growth we might be able to give the faculty a raise. It seems that that is the only way he will offer the faculty a salary enhancement. He has told me and others that he would be willing to set up an algorithm into the contract so we get an automatic percentage of COLA and growth. Setting up that algorithm is simple if you really are committed to a fair and equitable compensation package for faculty – 100% of COLA when available, 100% of growth when available and our fair share percentage of any new monies, either one-time (in the form of bonuses) or permanent (like the \$2.7 million in equalization money this year) whenever we receive it. Each employee group on campus should be requesting the same thing. That would truly be fair and equitable.

I believe Bob Deegan is a decent man who is getting some bad advice. If he truly knew how destructive to morale his negotiations tactics were, then I believe he would alter those tactics for the good of the college. We need your support to help him realize the consequence of his actions. Our union is only as strong as the support shown by its members. Please question Bob Deegan and his representatives when something they present doesn't seem correct. Ask for details and clarifications. Send your questions or comments about statements made by any administrative official to anyone on the PFF Executive Board or to myself if you have them.

Please know that we will not waver in fighting for a truly fair and equitable compensation package for all faculty members at Palomar College. If you have any questions about the contract or negotiations, please don't hesitate to contact me directly at rmorrisette@palomar.edu.

Thank you for your patient support.