

## Press Clippings 6/21/2018

---Daily Herald--- 6/21/18

### **'We demand respect'**

U-46 paraeducators pack school board meeting call for an hourly raise of 80 cents in next contract

BY MADHU KRISHNAMURTHY

Elgin Area School District U-46 paraeducators are demanding respect and higher wages.

More than 100 members of the District U-46 Educational Assistants union attended Monday's school board meeting where representatives said they weren't getting paid enough for dealing with students' academic, social and emotional needs.

The district and union have been in negotiations for a year. The previous three-year contract, which expired a year ago, granted a 55-cent hourly raise across all levels in fiscal year 2016 with an extra 15 cents per hour for home school liaisons. In fiscal year 2017, hourly rates increased by 2.75 percent across all levels. Union members want an hourly raise of 80 cents.

Union President Sara Moeller, a U-46 paraeducator for 20 years, said more than 80 percent of members live in U-46 communities, 40 percent are primary income earners and 31 percent are sole income earners.

"The median wage of our members is \$18,407," she said. "Some members go to a food pantry to put food on their tables, and their children are on free and reduced lunch at school. Support from other government agencies are often needed as well. The district is literally nickelling and diming us. We know that the district has money to meet our request without raising taxes."

Moeller said workloads are increasing, and health insurance costs have been skyrocketing the past several years.

"Our paychecks have not been keeping up with those increases," Moeller said. "The district has proposed to cap salaries at \$22,080 and that's after 10 years of service. Poverty level is \$24,000 for a family of four. We are worth more than poverty-level wages."

School board members did not publicly respond to their concerns.

Paraeducators are required to have an associate degree or equivalent college credit hours or pass a test and be licensed by the state.

"We are not unskilled labor," Moeller said. "We impact the lives of students of U-46 and we demand respect and value for what we do."

Norma Bandel, a home school liaison at Bartlett High School who has been with the district 16 years, said her job is translating for teachers, counselors, social workers, nurses, parents, and students helping them communicate.

"We are the people that speak another language and we are customer service to everybody," she said.

Lynn Sotomayor, who has spent 24 years working in 14 schools, said her work goes beyond the job description.

"I'm a surrogate mom or grandma to some children. I am their confidante ... I'm the cleaning crew ... I am the supply and snack provider sometimes paying my own money. I am their cheerleader. I am their disciplinarian."

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## **Acting superintendent now officially the boss in Des Plaines District 62**

BY CHRISTOPHER HACKER



Paul Hertel

Longtime educator and school administrator Paul Hertel has been named superintendent of Des Plaines Elementary School District 62, district officials announced Monday.

Hertel, who has served as acting superintendent since former Superintendent Floyd Williams Jr. resigned amid sexual harassment allegations in November, will remain the head of the district through 2020 after a unanimous vote by the district's board of education Monday.

"I have always been thankful to the board of education and have appreciated the opportunity to support the school district during this time," Hertel said in a news release. "I will continue to do what is best for children and what is best for the district in the years to come."

Hertel's salary is \$207,185. The contract includes opportunities for performance-based salary increases. He also will receive a \$500-per-month vehicle allowance.

Hertel joined District 62 in 2006 as the human resources director and was named assistant superintendent a year later. During that time, he spearheaded negotiations with labor groups and helped oversee a \$109 million district renovation. Before becoming an administrator, Hertel spent 19 years as a third- and sixth-grade teacher in **Elgin Area School District U-46**.

He taught for a year at **Abbott Middle School** in Elgin, where he later became assistant principal before working as principal of **Wayne Elementary School** for about seven years.

"Under Dr. Hertel's leadership, the district created a well-defined strategic plan that will drive the district's vision for the future," Board President Stephanie Duckmann said in the news release. "The board of education appreciates Dr. Hertel's continued focus on doing what is best for staff and students as he supported the district this fall during a time of transition."

Hertel lives in Geneva with his wife, Kathy, and has three adult children.

- Staff writer Chacour Koop contributed to this story.

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## **Elgin HS teacher fired after being found asleep, apparently drunk at school: district records**

BY RAFAEL GUERRERO

In [Elgin](#) High School teacher found asleep and believed to be drunk during school was fired earlier this month by the School District U46 board, according to district records.

The situation was discovered when social studies teacher Robert Brault failed to show up for his sixth-period class April 24, and couldn't be reached by phone or email, according to district records. The resolution approving his suspension and termination and accompanying investigation records were obtained by The Courier-News through a [Freedom of Information Act](#) request.

According to investigation records, Brault was found asleep in an office and administrators reported that he appeared intoxicated. He was described as seeming confused, slurring his words and, according to the social studies division chairman and an associate principal, smelling of alcohol, documents said.

Brault denied being drunk, but did say his behavior stemmed from being upset because his girlfriend had left him and taken his car, documents said. He apologized for mixing his professional and personal lives.

Associate Principal Alan Flota asked Brault take a sobriety test but Brault said he wanted union representation before he would agree to do so, according to investigation records. When Brault did take two tests at a clinic outside the school, both showed he had a blood-alcohol content of 0.60, far higher than the .08 legal level for intoxication.

After the labor relations specialist relayed the test results to Brault, he admitted to having a problem with alcohol but denied drinking or being under the influence of alcohol while at school, according to the investigation records.

Brault was placed on administrative leave following the incident, and a formal investigation was started. In an interview with Melanie Meidel, U46 assistant superintendent for human resources — also attended by Elgin Teachers Association President Richard Johnson and district staff attorney/labor relations specialist Scott

Hadala — Brault said he did not drink alcohol during school hours but had been drinking the night before, records said. He said he also took a cold medicine gel cap prior to leaving for work that morning and again in the late morning, when he went home to get one, accidentally consuming one that causes drowsiness and is meant for night use, records said.

Brault also admitted he is an alcoholic and that he sought counseling for the problem the day after he was put on leave, according to the investigation.

According to the investigation cited in the resolution, U46 officials recommended his dismissal because Brault repeatedly denied being intoxicated and failed to acknowledge “the seriousness of (his) misconduct,” the resolution said. He also should be fired because he had previously been disciplined by the district after being charged with DUI in November 2007. That incident occurred near Elgin High School and during school hours, although it was reported at the time that Brault took personal time and not working when the arrest happened, according to a story in The Elgin Courier-News.

Administrators gave Brault a “notice to remedy” in early 2008, meaning he could remain employed as a U46 teacher as long he could “conduct (himself) in a professional matter” and not be associated with controlled substances or alcohol while at school, on U46 property or performing work for the district. The 2007 story in The Courier-News said Brault was hired by the district in 1996.

Brault declined to discuss his termination Tuesday, and said he has not made a decision as to whether he would appeal the district’s decision to the Illinois State Board of Education, which is allowed under the state school code.

School District U46 spokeswoman Mary Fergus said the district would not comment on Brault because it was a personnel issue.