



Emergency Action Checklist for Defending Public Contracts

Meet with Members Immediately

Call an emergency meeting or reach members in small groups. Key points to discuss:

- Management is trying to strip numerous articles from our long-standing contract (review management's proposal). Unless we act quickly, this will have serious, permanent impact.¹
- Public employers DO still have the power to retain "permissive" topics in the contract. Stripping permissives is a *choice*, and there's still time for our local leaders to make a better choice.
- Throwing out a contract that reflects decades of discussions is extreme and destructive. Hundreds of residents/students/families rely on the quality services we provide. Eroding our contract, making it harder to recruit and retain staff, is bad for everyone in our community.
- Union members have the power and legal right to organize and speak up – and this is a critical time to do it.
- In order to turn the situation around before it's too late, we must start talking immediately with elected officials and allies in our community.

Write Down your Public Message, Stating Clear Expectations

Draft a short version (for Facebook post or short email) and longer version (resolution or press release length), as well as key talking points. *SEE EXAMPLES ON ATTACHED PAGES*

- **DO** Focus on dedicated frontline workers and quality services: "we're speaking up because we value the people who make sure students get healthy meals every day"
- **DON'T** use jargon (most members of public are not familiar with terms like "permissives" or even "collective bargaining")
- **DO** talk like **you expect to win**: "our local officials have the power to do what's right" / "our community expects leaders to act quickly to fix this situation"
- **DON'T** sound defeated ("this is just another example of union busting").
- Decide which members know the message well and can be good spokespeople.

Plan Next Steps, Based on Available Time

BEST OPTION: Build up to a successful public show of support in the next scheduled council/board meeting by starting with individual outreach. Public local government meetings are not the ideal place to begin education about this complicated issue, so meet with elected officials *before* the next public meeting, meet with local allies, ask for calls/emails to officials, send letters to the editor, hold a press conference, *then* pack the next public forum and have many members and supporters speak.

SECOND BEST OPTION: If the contract deadline or next public meeting is less than a week away, plan to pack the chambers and have people speak during the public comment period of the next council/board meeting. Try to have as many individual discussions as time allows before the public meeting.

¹ Under Iowa public sector bargaining law, employer and union opening proposals must be presented in public. Subsequent meetings may not be public, but you are under no legal obligation to keep any proposals secret, even if that has been your practice in the past.

□ **Start Meeting with Local Officials ASAP**

Contact local officials individually as soon as possible and schedule meetings with each one. If you don't yet know the local officials, find other labor or community leaders who do. **If an elected official says they've been advised not to talk to you about bargaining, make sure they understand they have been given inaccurate legal advice, and that in fact they have a responsibility to meet with concerned constituents about this important issue.** Informing elected officials about how management is approaching bargaining and why it's wrong is NOT prohibited by law (as long as no one present is making bargaining proposals or trying to get agreement on contract items).

Ideally, a small delegation of members and community supporters can meet with each elected official. Face to face discussions are best; if this isn't possible, try phone calls or email. Key points to discuss:

- What do they know about past and present contract bargaining
- What do they know about the employees covered under the contract and the essential services they provide
- Because the new state law puts critical decisions in the hands of each community, it is forcing all local elected officials to learn more and increase their role and oversight of bargaining
- Local councils/boards are responsible for setting the parameters administrators use in bargaining, and for the outcome of bargaining. It is local council/board members who will bear any political consequences that result from how bargaining is handled at the local level.
- Management's opening proposal was a shocking, disrespectful signal to local employees, and has already damaged long-standing positive bargaining relationships. The community is counting on local leaders to recommit to a positive bargaining relationship with employees, and to act quickly to state clear expectations for the rest of bargaining.
- The new state law means a few items (like health insurance) can't be bargained, but still allows public employers to maintain the vast majority of language in existing agreements, and to continue negotiating about most items.

□ **Reach out to Allies, with a Message and an "Ask"**

Prioritize groups who have some existing interest in this issue:

- Leaders from the local labor federation and other area unions
- Iowans for Public Education, a statewide Facebook network of public school advocates.
- Local people who care about the services your members provide (parents, clients, residents). Try interfaith groups, political activists, groups like Indivisible Iowa or Democratic Socialists of America.

Ask allies to help in specific ways: "Will you come with us to meet with Councilman Smith tomorrow?", "Will you speak at the Board meeting?", "Will you send out announcement to your email list?" Find out what relationships allies have with elected officials. Give them a flyer, email, or Facebook post to share, that clearly states your message and call to action.

□ **For Each Meeting or Action, Take Turnout and Preparation Seriously**

- Personal commitments are the most reliable. Keep track of who made a clear commitment to attend and/or speak; remind people 1-2 days before the event.
- Boost turnout with a Facebook event. Be sure you have made the event "public" on its privacy settings so that people can share it. Use the "invite" function to be sure that your Facebook friends see it. Post it to other likely allies' pages. Send emails to all the ally networks in the area.
- Bring press materials to the event, and have spokespeople ready to talk to the press.
- Consider visuals – signs, t-shirts, stickers – that emphasize your message.

Sample Short Messages for Email or Facebook

Pack the Board Meeting: Support County Workers!

Tuesday, March 1, 6pm.

123 North Main Street, Anytown.

County administrators have proposal radical changes to the longstanding labor agreement with the employees who work hard to maintain and plow our roads. The current proposal would eliminate nearly everything from their contract, including health and safety provisions, hours of work agreements, procedures for resolving disputes. Our county is better than this. Join us Tuesday as we stand with roads workers and call on our elected officials to honor their existing contract with these dedicated workers.

STAND with OUR SCHOOL SECRETARIES

Tuesday, March 10, 6:30pm

111 Oak Street, Rapid City

Please plan to attend the upcoming school board meeting on Tuesday to stand up for our school clerical workers. In recent negotiations, the school district announced a shocking proposal to eliminate nearly all of their most basic workplace protections. They work hard for our children – now it's our turn to stand up for them.

STAND UP FOR OUR DEDICATED COUNTY WORKERS!

Thursday, March 2 at 2pm

County Administration Building, 2 West 5th Street, Mytown

Corrections officers in our county jail work hard and take serious risks to provide safe and well-maintained jails. But county administrators recently unveiled a proposal to strip away all the basic protections they've established through 20 years of union talks with the county. It's time to protect the people who have kept our community safe, and defend quality jobs in our community. Join us at Thursday's County Supervisors' meeting!

Sample Talking Points for Speakers, Letters, Press

- We represent ____ [teachers/custodians/snowplow drivers] in [Anytown].
- They are the dedicated people who go above and beyond what's minimally required each day, to provide high quality [services/schools] in our community. People like _____ (name, years of service, example of impact)
- For ____ years, administrators have met with these essential staff members collectively through their union to discuss important issues that impact them and their services – like health and safety, hours of work, procedures to resolve disputes. And through those negotiations, they established longstanding agreements in secure contracts that they could count on even as administrators came and went.
- Last year, the Iowa legislature made sweeping changes to the law, and dramatically reduced the list of workplace issues public employers are *required* to negotiate with employees. A few topics like health insurance are now prohibited. But for the vast majority of contractual agreements negotiated over decades with staff, it's left to local public officials to choose. Will they continue to show staff the dignity of honoring the longstanding agreements in their contracts, or will they take the low road and use their new discretion to strip away years of labor relations progress?
- This month, administrators opened negotiations with proposals that eliminate almost every agreement from employees' contracts: fair procedure for resolving disputes; respect for years of service; assurance of sick leave, in the midst of a flu epidemic. Many of these issues are not economic. They are about respectful, transparent procedures.
- Moving these items to handbooks or policies is not a solution. Handbooks and contracts are not the same. We sign contracts for every significant financial transaction we conduct, so that both parties have the security of knowing that their agreements will be upheld - not policy statements subject to unilateral change. Our workers deserve the same respect.
- Our community is better than this; and the good news is that our local officials have the power to choose a better path. In fact, in communities across the state – rural and urban, across party lines – have chosen to respect their staff, honor longstanding agreements, and negotiate to the full extent allowed under the law.
- Our public servants routinely do far more than is minimally required of them – they do what's right for our community and what our community needs. Public officials should make the same choice when dealing with them.

Sample Statement of Support from Community Allies



Statement Regarding Collective Bargaining in the Iowa City Community School District

IOWA CITY, February 10, 2018

During the opening of contract negotiations with school secretaries on Thursday, February 8, the Iowa City Community School District proposed gutting secretaries' existing contract by striking language on work hours, breaks and lunch periods, job postings, vacations, leaves of absence, bereavement leave, health and safety, and dozens of other aspects of working conditions. The District also signaled that they plan to present similar proposals to Physical Plant and Nutrition Services employees when their negotiations start on February 27. In a progressive district with a long tradition of excellent staff and stable labor relations, these actions are gravely concerning.

WHAT THIS MEANS: The District's proposal seeks to eliminate long-standing contractual agreements governing secretaries' work lives, whittling the contract down to a single paragraph setting base wages. The District's opening proposal represents an extreme refusal to discuss key terms and conditions of work with frontline employees. Under Iowa's recently revised public sector collective bargaining law, school districts and employee unions are required to negotiate about base wages, and can also agree to maintain and discuss nearly all other existing contract language covering "permissive" subjects. The law says such items can remain in contracts as long as both parties agree. Instead, the District is attempting to completely eliminate full pages of the contract that currently cover these items, without discussing any of them with employees.

WHY IT MATTERS: When topics are removed from the contract, employees lose their voice in setting policy regarding their working conditions. They are at the mercy of the employer and can have the terms of their employment changed at any time, with no notice, voice, or recourse. Contracts, unlike employer handbooks, provide both parties the assurance of knowing that their agreements about working conditions are secure.

Gutting contracts and refusing to discuss working conditions is damaging to our District and demoralizing to our hardworking school district staff. We want to retain reliable and high quality secretaries, lunch workers, janitors, and other staff who help run and maintain our school buildings while protecting, feeding, and serving as role models for our children. These faithful, hardworking members of our school communities are our friends, neighbors, and family members. Many of these workers have received District "Shine Awards" for their contributions to our students and their school communities. We are disappointed that a district that values attention to the whole student and recognizes that every staff member contributes to creating a positive learning environment would consider diminishing the job quality of these valuable workers.

We and our school board have a critical choice to make. Even under Iowa's newly restrictive collective bargaining law (Chapter 20 of Iowa Code), school boards retain the power to seek agreement with employees on maintaining and improving existing contract language on most

working conditions. The importance of these actions reaches beyond our local district. Since the gutting of Chapter 20 a year ago, the rest of the state has looked to Johnson County to set an example for how to maintain productive employer-employee bargaining relationships, treat workers fairly, and continue providing high-quality education and public services even in this new legal landscape. With assaults on working and middle class families and public institutions coming down almost daily, we are left with a choice: Will we allow divisive, irresponsible state policies to undermine our high local expectations for quality schools and fair treatment? Or will we stand together and say NO MORE? Let's send the message that Iowans continue to fight for working families and stand up for quality public education.

Iowans for Public Education calls on all community members to stand with public workers at the next ICCSD school board meeting: **Tuesday, February 13, 6 p.m., Education Services Building, 1725 N. Dodge Street, Iowa City.** Bring a sign and "wear red for public ed." We also call on each member of the ICCSD school board to release a public statement regarding their position on the gutting of worker contracts before Tuesday night's meeting.

About Us

Iowans for Public Education is a nonpartisan, grassroots movement to defend and support Iowa's public schools. Beginning as an online discussion group in the wake of the 2016 election, I4PE has grown to a statewide organization of more than 13,000, including a local chapter here in Johnson County. Learn more at iowansforpubliceducation.org.

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For more information, contact Shawn Harmsen, Johnson County Chapter of Iowans for Public Education, (319) 325-0163, shawnharmsen@hotmail.com.

Sample Coalition Statement of Support and Action

For Immediate Release CONTACT:

For BEA: Andrew Isaacson xxx-xxx-xxxx

For Teamsters: Tracy Leone xxx-xxx-xxxx

For AFSCME: Amber Moats xxx-xxx-xxxx

For Iowans for Public Education: Laura Blanchard xxx-xxx-xxxx

CALL TO ACTION FOR SUPPORTERS OF THE BURLINGTON SCHOOL DISTRICT

(Burlington, Iowa) February 9, 2018 - A coalition that includes public school educators, support staff, bus drivers, parents, and supporters of public education are planning to attend the next Burlington School Board Meeting.

The coalition wants to bring attention to what it considers broad overreach by the school board on budget and contract issues. We are asking the community to demonstrate their support for students, teachers, support staff and bus drivers by attending the board meetings on Monday, February 12, 2018, 7PM. Board Meetings take place at the Administration Building 1429 West Avenue, Burlington, Iowa.

Monday's Board agenda (see attached) includes a discussion and vote for certified and support staff cuts, a request for a public forum on Chapter 20 and reinstating language to collective bargaining contracts, and a request for a public forum on declining enrollment.

The District's budget and enrollment projections are based on continued anemic funding from the state legislature and extreme projections of declining enrollment - neither of which is certain. We feel the District should do more to lobby for increased funding from Des Moines and involve the community in discussions that will affect a generation of students.

As well budget issues are no excuse to gut union contracts. These contracts with the Burlington Community School District have created stability and good wages for the employees of the district. For decades these contracts have been improved, expanded, and adjusted, each time addressing a problem and negotiating a solution. These are not arbitrary documents, but a roadmap for a well-run school district. As workers and administrators have come and gone, as board members have served and retired, these contracts have remained to guide quality, efficient labor management relations: BEA - since 1975; Teamsters Bus Drivers - since 1977; AFSCME Custodians - since 1988; Food Service - since 1991; Support Staff - since 1989.

Despite the many changes to Chapter 20, the district is still permitted by law to negotiate most subjects of bargaining. Even excluded topics may still be discussed in a "meet and confer" situation, and districts still have wide ability to formalize policies in a contract.

Join us on Monday to bring these and other issues to the attention of the Board.

Sample Agenda for Meeting with Elected Officials

I. Introduction

- We represent # ____ [teachers/custodians/snowplow drivers] in [Anytown or Anyschooldistrict].
- These are the people who go above and beyond what's minimally required each day, to provide high quality services in our [schools/community]. People like _____ (name, years of service, example of impact) who is here today.
- We're here to talk about management's recent approach to negotiations. We want you to hear from the front line employees who understand the serious impact proposed drastic changes would have. We want to hear your thoughts, and discuss next steps in preserving quality jobs and services.

II. Build a Connection

- Ask questions to learn about how the official is connected with these workers or services. For example: Do you have children? Did they go to school here? Did you need to travel during that last big storm? Have you talked with corrections officers at the county jail?
- Ask questions to see what they know about the union contract and the administration's proposal. For example: Are you familiar with the current union contract? Are you aware of the administration's recent proposal to workers?

III. Educate

- For ____ years, administrators have met with us to discuss important issues— like health and safety, hours of work, procedures to resolve disputes. Through those negotiations, we established longstanding agreements that we could count on even as administrators came and went. Our contract helped recruit and retain a team of quality, dedicated staff.
- We are shocked that administrators started negotiations by proposing to throw away our positive history by eliminating almost everything from the contract. This is an unnecessary and unacceptable threat to local families, to morale, and to our services.
- It doesn't have to be this way. The new state law says a few topics (like health insurance) can't be bargained. But for the vast majority of topics, the law gives employers a choice: they can maintain or negotiate over existing contract language, or take the extreme step of stripping the contract.
- Many cities, counties, and school districts, both in cities and rural areas, have already opted to maintain good employee relations and high standards by maintaining their contracts.
- Because the new state law puts critical decisions in the hands of each community, it is forcing all local elected officials to learn more and increase their role and oversight of bargaining.

IV. Next Steps and Commitment

- You have an incredibly important role. Elected board/council members are responsible for setting parameters and expectations for the administrators/attorneys who represent you in bargaining.
- Local councils/boards are responsible for the outcome of bargaining. And local council/board members will bear any political consequences that result from how bargaining turns out.
- Our community is counting on you to recommit to a positive bargaining relationship with employees, and to act quickly to make sure bargaining resumes on a better footing.
- Will you:
 - Direct management to withdraw its extreme proposal and return to bargaining with a commitment to preserve permissive items in contracts
 - Publicly state your commitment to retaining permissive items in contracts, and speak to fellow council/board members to affirm their commitments
 - Prepare the board/council to make a clear statement of your intent to preserve employee contracts at your next public meeting and/or pass resolution of commitment