

# **AEA negotiations chair issues statements in response to superintendent's letter to parents**

by Dan Brannan, Content Director  
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ALTON - Alton Education Association negotiations chairperson Jason Chapman issued some statements in response to Superintendent Mark Cappel's March 13, 2018, letter to parents Wednesday morning.

"Mr. Cappel takes great pains to outline the District's dire financial situation," he said. "But teachers' salaries are not to blame for the District's financial woes. The teachers have made concession after concession to help the district: From 2008-2011, our salaries were frozen; in 2012 we agreed to reduce our step raises from \$1,600 to \$1,196 because, we were told, "We can afford to give you that each year." In 2015, they broke their promise, offering only \$975. Since 2012, we have never received more than a step."

Chapman continued: "It has taken us five months of negotiations to get to the level of the district's current offer:"

## **2017-18, 2018-19**

\$100 raise plus a step for certified staff

\$.35 per hour raise for non-certified staff

**The Alton Education Association is currently seeking:**

## **2017-18**

\$800 raise plus a step for certified staff

\$.40 per hour raise plus \$.25 step for non-certified staff

"To put this in perspective, the Alton School District's starting certified salary is \$3,500 below the area average," Chapman said. "Highest certified salaries in the District are \$7,500 below the area average. We are falling behind.

"Mr. Cappel also makes the assertion that 100 percent of employee healthcare costs are covered. This is incorrect. Employees who add family members to their plan must pay an additional \$600 per month for coverage.

"In addition, while bemoaning rising healthcare costs, the Alton School District has NOT made an effort to shop for more cost-effective healthcare. Instead, they've stuck with the same healthcare insurer for the past two decades. Employee co-pays have risen to \$50 for specialist visits, and \$350 for ER visits.

"And support staff must pay the District for insurance coverage during the summer months that they don't work. Support staff checks in August are \$2.00 - the remainder of their pay going to summer healthcare insurance costs."

Chapman said the truth is most school districts pay for most - or all - of their employees' healthcare costs.

"The Alton School District is not unusual in doing so," Chapman said. "Where Alton falls short is in paying for its employees' retirements: 10 percent comes off the top of each employee's check and is paid to the Teacher Retirement System (TRS) of Illinois. Unlike many area school districts — and all private employers — the Alton School District pays ZERO towards its employees' retirements.

"In his letter, Mr. Cappel blames much of the District's finances on the State of Illinois. But the state has never failed to meet their financial obligations to the Alton School District.

"So we, the employees of Alton School District would like to know: Where has the money gone? Alton ranks 15th in teachers' starting pay, and 15th in teachers' top pay out of 16 local districts. Only in Brussels are teachers paid less than the teachers of Alton.

"Mr. Cappel is correct about declining instructional costs: teacher and support-staff salaries in Alton over the last 3 years were 2016-\$29,306,965; 2017-\$28,450,789; 2018-\$26,659,489. This is a decrease over the last three years of nearly \$3 million. But he fails to point out that administrative costs over the same time span have increased each year: 2016-\$3,298,018; 2017-\$3,349,637; 2018-\$3,940,483. According to publicly posted salary information Alton has 35 administrators with a combined salary of \$3,261,171. Edwardsville — a comparable district — has 33 administrators with a combined salary of \$2,726,073. A difference of \$535,098. Clearly, The aforementioned cost reductions have not been extended to District administrators."

Chapman continued: "The employees of Alton School District have consistently agreed to take less because, we are told by District Administration, we have less to give you. We are hearing it again. The bottom line is, the Alton School District — because of their self-imposed financial problems — is unable to offer competitive salaries. We are being out-paced by surrounding districts. As a result, we are unable to recruit the best, most qualified new teachers.

"And those employees that the district does manage to recruit often leave after a few years to receive a higher salary elsewhere. In the end it is the education of our students, and ultimately the community that suffers. We, the teachers and support staff of the Alton School District, are committed to offering the best education to our students and will continue to bargain with District Administration to ensure that Alton is able to recruit and retain quality teachers for this task."