

For Immediate Release

WCASD Announces Wage Freeze Agreements Saving Taxpayers \$1.4 Million
Salary freeze part of one-year contract extensions

April 11, 2011, West Chester, PA – The West Chester Area School District has reached agreements with its collective bargaining units to establish one-year contract extensions calling for a wage freeze as part of a shared budget-reduction effort. Each of the three unions representing teachers, support staff, and custodians voted over the course of the previous week to keep wages at current levels for the 2011-12 budget year. District administrators covered under the Act 93 agreement also agreed to a one-year hold on salaries.

Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Jim Scanlon, indicated there was broad support for the freeze on the part of district employees by saying, “Our staff truly understands the difficult economy, but more importantly they are doing whatever it takes to keep the focus on students and learning during this time of financial hardships.”

During the term of the one-year contract extension and wage freeze, other aspects of the existing contracts will remain in place. As the district struggles to fill a \$5 million budget gap while maintaining the integrity of classroom programs as much as is possible, the employees demonstrated a spirit of shared sacrifice that will save \$1.4 million.

In speaking for the teachers, Debbie Fell, President of the West Chester Area Education Association, said, “The teacher’s union has worked collaboratively with the district over the past few years to dramatically reduce expenses, and this proactive and voluntary act on the part of the membership represents our commitment to our resident’s children, as well as our own. We fully recognize that budgetary constraints presented at this time require significant contributions by everyone in our community, and we’re proud to take the lead in this effort.”

The proposed Pennsylvania State budget includes cuts that would reduce WCASD allocations by \$3.4 million more than had been anticipated. The District had already planned for a reduction in state revenues by \$1.1 million, rolling back to 2006-07 levels. The proposed reductions will reduce state funding for WCASD programs to 2003-04 levels. By agreeing to the one-year wage freeze, WCASD employees have signaled a willingness to do their part in helping to manage the unexpectedly large budget gap. The 2011-12 wage freeze will also help to address the even larger deficit forecast for 2012-13. It remains critically important that every means is identified and used in the upcoming budget that can help to reduce the 2012-13 funding gap.

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The School Board places a high value on the dedication to the community shown by the district's employees. Dr. Ricky Swalm, Board President, said, "We in the West Chester Area School District are blessed to have quality people who are also dedicated professionals. Their commitment and resolve to help the children, our district, and the community in these trying times is remarkable and too often goes unheralded. In my 35 years of education I have never witnessed a collective, unselfish act such as this. On behalf of the Board of School Directors I wish to express our gratitude and appreciation."

Salary freeze agreements with district employees in addition to teachers were achieved through representation by Lana Wilkerson for the West Chester Area Education Support Professionals Association; for custodial staff in the West Chester Service Support Professionals Association through Jodi Hoover; and with the Act 93 Administrators' Compensation Plan members through Le Roy Whitehead and Dennis Brown.

Because of the extraordinary work done last year by the Community Budget Task Force, a significant number of sustainable cuts were submitted to and adopted by the School Board for the current 2010-11 budget. That effort prevented next year's funding gap from being even greater. The process allowed the district to pursue a range of reductions that did not directly impact classroom programs. The transportation plan going into effect in 2011-12 will save taxpayers nearly \$1 million, and that also came from the work of the Task Force. The one-year wage freeze agreed to by district employees is an extraordinary step that presents one of the last available means to reduce expenditures without cutting educational programming.

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