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Wrestling tackles state championship

The Comets, newly-crowned district champions, wrestled in the state tournament last Saturday, March 14 with a record eight wrestlers. Check thecspn.com for results.



Photo contributed by Craig Murnan
Homegrown wrestling team hoists district title.

MHS Music Department Collaborative Concert

Honors Symphony, Honors Wind Symphony, and Honors Concert Choir will combine for the first time to perform Beethoven's Ninth Symphony on Monday, March 23 at 7 p.m. The ensembles will perform alongside professional soloists. Check thecspn.com for coverage.

Prom Fashion Show

Upperclassmen will model the latest trends on Thursday, March 26 at 6 p.m. Check thecspn.com for pictures.

compiled by Jessica Sommerville

CONTRACTS & COMPROMISES

Mason Education Association and School Board reach agreement over contracts after turbulent summer relationship

Abbey Marshall | Staff Writer

After months of negotiation, the Mason City Schools Board of Education and the Mason Education Association came to a compromise regarding teacher contracts.

At the school board meeting on February 10, the Board announced a two percent teacher raise on a base salary, as well as a \$1,000 stipend into employees' health care savings accounts. In this one-year agreement, everything from their previous contract remained the same.

"The previous contract was a struggle. It is, by definition, a negotiation...I think it's definitely, clearly moving in the right direction."

— MARIA MUELLER
MEA VICE PRESIDENT

After a rocky relationship between the School Board and the MEA this past summer, MEA Vice President Maria Mueller said she believes the contract resolution is the first step in the right direction.

"The previous contract was a struggle," Mueller said. "It is, by definition, a negotiation. You have different perspectives on how things should work, so that was a significant struggle...Certainly, (there were) concerns about the way things were pretty antagonistic last time...We spent some days figuring it out and talking it through and people on both sides were willing to give it a try and were willing to have a good conversation and a direct conversation about the issues at hand and about what were the needs and how could they best be suited. It was nice that by the end, it was a real group agreement...I think it's definitely, clearly moving in the right direction."

According to School Board President Courtney Allen, the MEA and School Board agreed to go into a one-year contract rather than a three-year contract to allow decisions regarding health care to be made.

"The reason we went into a one-year agreement after what is typically looked at to be a three-year agreement is because there's a health care committee and there's a lot of work being done..." Allen said. "There needs to be changes made to the health care here, but it's taking time and they need additional time to make the right decisions there, so the agreement was a one-year and allow that work to continue to happen."

Through negotiations last year, a sub-commit-

tee was created in order to collaboratively assess health care needs within the district, Mueller said.

"The committee (includes) people from the Board, naturally teachers, but then other people representing the other areas of employment here like bus drivers or custodians, that kind of thing," Mueller said. "All the various groups of people are represented and that committee's job is to examine health care...First, they're assessing where are we at, and then okay, how might we improve this...They will come up with some ideas or some proposals and when we renegotiate the contract, we can commit to an idea for a longer term."

According to Mueller, the Board exceeded teacher expectations in their decision to contribute a stipend to health care savings.

"This year, the Board, once again, made a tremendous gesture to say, 'We do value you. We want to have a great relationship. We want, truly, for the Mason schools to continue to be phenomenal and we want to be a team with this,'" Mueller said. "They actually then, this time, actually increased this stipend to \$1,000, which once again, was not something we had even asked for. It was nice for them to take their own initiative to express that sentiment to us...It wasn't really about the \$200 increase, it was about taking the initiative that I think that has gone so far in helping to rebuild (our relationship). It was an awesome gesture of respect."

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Allen said she is hopeful for further collaboration with the MEA in order to accomplish other goals, beyond the topic of teacher contracts.

"We're also addressing together, as a whole public school, teacher advocacy efforts out there," Allen said. "There's a lot of legislation and a lot of stuff going on in general for public education, so that's also a collaborative effort...We have administrators, we have Board members and we have MEA teachers that are a part of that effort so we're working collaboratively on that too."

Mueller said she anticipates a favorable relationship between the MEA and the School Board in the future.

"I can't emphasize enough the positive ripple effect I think will come from this negotiation," Mueller said.