According to the American Medical Association, healthcare spending in the U.S. reached $4.3 trillion or $12,914 per capita in 2021. This is just over 18 percent of our nation’s GDP. On average, other developed countries – nations like Germany, France, Australia, and Canada – spend about half as much per capita on healthcare in comparison to the U.S. The U.S. is an outlier when it comes to healthcare spending.

A similar story could be told about healthcare benefits in our own school district. Ever since the District and Association reached an agreement on a “soft cap” on health benefits in the 2010-11 school year, our District’s contributions for healthcare have escalated at a predictable rate. Article 14 of our contract guarantees that the District will increase its maximum contribution for health insurance premiums by 8 percent over the previous school year. In the 2023-24 school year, GUSD’s contribution was $34,114; in 2033-24 this contribution would be $73,665.

While this 8 percent soft cap has been a benefit for our members who depend upon affordable, quality healthcare, the ramifications of this soft cap also put our district on a spending trajectory that may not be sustainable if our members also demand reasonable class sizes and comparable salaries – both of which are significant costs.

I don’t raise these issues to cause alarm nor to suggest that our members don’t deserve affordable, high quality healthcare. As public employees who make less than many in the private sector, our members should be offered excellent health benefits.

Our district’s Employee Benefits Committee (EBC) takes these challenges seriously, which is why the committee, which includes members from each of the three labor groups in our district, has been working diligently this school year to identify how our district can maintain quality healthcare options while cutting costs.

Why does the work of this EBC matter? Data from the 2021-22 school year from 40 unified Los Angeles County school districts makes clear that GUSD spends a lot on healthcare, and any savings that can be generated can potentially be redirected towards salaries and/or lower class size.

Here are some numbers worth considering:
- GUSD ranks #1 in average district cost per FTE for healthcare: $21,116
- Long Beach is #2: $21,054
- Downey is #3: $20,132
- Eight out of 40 unified school districts spend more than $17,500 per FTE on healthcare.
- Average spent per FTE among the 40 unified school districts: $13,657
- GUSD spends almost $7,500 more per FTE for healthcare than the average unified school district in Los Angeles County.
- GUSD’s healthcare cap was $31,587 in 2021-22 (#1 in the county)
- Downey’s cap was $28,162 in 2021-22
- Long Beach’s cap was $27,954 in 2021-22
- Average healthcare cap among the 40 unified school districts in 2021-22: $17,182

This is the backdrop against which the EBC operates.

Continued on page 7
It’s great to be back working with GTA, even if it’s only for a short time. I was last here as your CTA Executive Director from 2013-2015. I’m currently working here and in Burbank, until a new CTA staff person is in place, which will probably happen sometime in May.

So, let’s talk state budget. As you may have heard back in January, the state is projecting a budget deficit of around $22 billion. While this is a significant amount of money, it should be remembered that 2022-23 saw a record state budget. So much in fact, that many of us received one time inflation relief checks. School Districts also received a record boost in LCFF funding of 13.26% — an amount that varies by district based on a variety of factors — as well as one-time dollars in record amounts.

In January, Gov. Newsom proposed to close the projected $22 billion budget deficit for next year mainly through the elimination of one-time funds and through cuts to block grants. He did not propose reaching into the state’s reserves of approximately $38 billion to preserve the reserve for future years, as needed. He also proposed a COLA for school districts next year of 8.13%. This is on top of this year’s ongoing COLA of 13.26%.

While next year may not be as good as this year’s record budget, it should still be a decent year for school funding. It’s important for GTA members to get good raises in pay, because with inflation still running hot, raises are needed just to try and keep up. With rising rents and expenses, new educators are becoming choosy about where they work and live, and districts must stay competitive to attract and retain the best and brightest.

State budget growth cools a bit

GTA organizing efforts matter!

Over the past three months, GTA members were in escalation mode! Our rallies, marches, school board meeting actions, and site-based actions had a positive impact on the outcome of our tentative agreement reached on Feb. 28.

These sites had exceptionally good participation in our organizing actions: Glenoaks Elementary (thank you to reps Matt Hamo and Tina Grigorian!), Edison Elementary (thank you to reps Andrea Reuter, Rosemarie McCabe, and Araceli Tiscareño!), Lincoln Elementary (thank you to reps Nikki Danilov and Angelina Thomas!), and Glendale High School (thank you to reps Taline Arsenian, Joseph Benkovich, Sarah Kleinberg, Hector Martinez, Sarah Morrison, and Greta Sukazian!).

GTA’s Organizing Committee members also deserve a round of applause for their commitment and time spent spearheading our recent actions: Rosemarie McCabe, Andrea Reuter, Lisa Jenks, Kim Balcomb, Gagik Galfayan, and Kathi Chaplar-Beerman.

Our membership greatly owes gratitude to the many parents and community members who spoke at Board of Education meetings and offered other support, including the following:

- Nancy Zambrano, Edison parent
- Saro Bedikian, community member
- Brent Phillips, Edison parent
- Brandy Phillips, Edison parent
- Iham Bazoon, GHS parent
- Paxton Taylor Aguilera, student at La Crescenta Elementary
- Telly Tse, Monte Vista parent
- Rafael Amador III, Verdugo Woodlands parent
- Susan Jekarl, GHS parent
- Désirée Bartlett, Edison parent
- Michelle Miranda, Edison parent
- Amy Sanchez, Edison parent
- Chulee Techopichetwongsa, Edison parent

GTA organizing efforts matter!
A new start with no more strings

It has been a month since Feb. 28, the day that GTA and GUSD’s bargaining teams signed a Tentative Agreement (TA) for 2020-21 and 2021-22. Since then, GTA members ratified the agreement with a 99.4% approval vote, affirming that our hard-fought TA is supported by membership.

However, GTA’s Bargaining team recognizes that we have no time to celebrate. Upon news of the ratification vote outcome, GTA’s president Chris Davis sent a “sunshine” letter to the District to trigger the start of 2022-23 negotiations, with the first bargaining date scheduled for April 20.

With 2022-23 negotiations in mind, I share below the transcript of the public comment that I gave at the March 7 Board of Education meeting (just one week after the TA was signed). At the end of this statement I make a request of the Board of Ed: I ask that future GUSD wage proposals do not include non-financial contingencies. On April 20, we will see if this request will be fulfilled.

Good afternoon Dr. Ekchian, Ms. Nahabedian, Ms. Freemon, Mr. Sahakian, Ms. Gunnell, and Ms. Cross,

I am Sarah Morrison, the proud Bargaining chairperson for the Glendale Teachers Association. I am here – at last – to make a public comment in celebration of the agreement that we reached a week ago today, late at night, during our 5th mediation session for the 2020-21 and 2021-22 school years.

This was not an easy agreement to reach. But we have a tentative agreement now! And we appreciate everything that must have happened behind the scenes to make an agreement with teachers a reality.

Earlier today, GTA’s Board of Directors hosted an informational meeting for our members where we recommended that members vote YES to ratify this tentative agreement because it includes:

- a wage increase with no strings attached;
- and many other contractual changes that are good for students, such as an expanded investment in extra curricular programs and a smaller class size ratio for transitional kindergarten.

The TK part is especially exciting! The Transitional Kindergarten program is growing in GUSD—and securing a small student to adult ratio will benefit our youngest students for years and years to come. We hope that you will continue to find ways to invest in our TK students who, in time, will grow up to be all of our students.

For many of us educators, reaching this agreement feels very emotional because this agreement represents a closure to the HARDEST, most EXHAUSTING, and most DEVASTATING two years to be a teacher: the years of distance learning and hybrid learning. During these years, many GUSD educators, and many of our students, lost loved ones to the pandemic and in war.

We are very ready to focus on recovering. And as professionals, we want to look forward, not backwards—especially with regards to the relationship between classroom educators and YOU who sit at the highest level of district leadership. TOGETHER, let’s commit to move forward.

Realistically, forward thinking needs to start now because other districts have been negotiating for 2022-23 (in fact, many have already reached agreements), and we have been stuck two years in the past. It’s time to catch up, and get back to the bargaining table promptly… and “do it better” this time.

So with that in mind, I want to offer a thought for your consideration…

We just made it through an ugly and unhappy chapter in GUSD. And in the end, the agreement that we signed last week COULD have been reached seven months ago, in September. This chaos could have been avoided. Where did things break down?… It was the contingencies! Attaching non-financial contingencies to a wage proposal was demeaning, harmful to morale among educators, and unacceptable to parents and community members who expect GUSD teachers to be respected and supported in our classrooms. But we can rebuild now. And we want to rebuild now.

So as the Bargaining Chairperson for the Glendale Teachers Association, I request that when we return to the Bargaining table for 2022-23 negotiations, that wage proposals DO NOT INCLUDE non-financial contingencies.

And I also request that, going forward, whenever you think it might be a good idea to change conditions within classrooms, that you talk to teachers honestly about WHY the change would benefit students, and that you listen to how we respond. You will find that NO ONE cares about student wellness, campus safety, or student opportunity more than the teachers and educators who have made our careers in GUSD classrooms.

So, as a celebration of the Tentative Agreement that we reached last week, let’s recommit ourselves to working together, collaboratively and respectfully, to make the GUSD experience the best one for our students. Thank you again.
USD stakeholders, including GTA’s Health Benefits Committee members, meet monthly to review and discuss employee benefits issues such as wellness programs, pharmacy benefits, member education, and open enrollment. This year, the GUSD Employee Benefits Committee has decided to go out to bid for medical insurance plans. This means that we will be receiving proposals from various insurance carriers and pools via our consultants, Burnham Benefits.

The GTA Health Benefits Committee and our Board of Directors will be looking at the options presented to us before making decisions on whether we wish to negotiate changes to Article 14 (Health and Welfare Benefits). GTA leadership will take into account the responses and data from the Health Benefits survey that was sent to members in March.

Here is some of the data our members shared:

The following questions asked members to express their level of satisfaction on a scale from 1-5, with 1 being “not at all satisfied” and 5 being “highly satisfied.”
How satisfied are you with the health benefit choices being offered by GUSD?
434 responses

How satisfied are you with the network of health care providers included in your plan?
434 responses

How satisfied are you with the amount of out-of-pocket costs you must contribute towards your healthcare?
434 responses

How satisfied are you with the pharmacy benefits plan provided by the district (Medimpact)?
434 responses
Our GTA members and community and parent supporters stayed strong throughout the 2022-23 school year to advocate for a fair contract agreement for our members. Our resolve was strong, and our voices were heard!
Member Spotlight: Allison Stewart

POSITION / WORK SITE: photography and art history teacher, Hoover High School (since 2001)


RECENT FOCUS: the archetype of the hero and the effects that war and guns have on our culture.

QUOTE: “I always wanted to be an artist. As soon as I started teaching, I realized that the classroom was where I wanted to be. Teaching photography has helped me grow as an artist, and I’ve been able to help students learn about historical figures and events that are not included in their textbooks through photography.”

Health benefits conundrum

Cost alone does not solely determine our Association’s interest in considering changes to our healthcare options. I read through the comments of our more than 400 members who provided input in the recent health benefits survey.

These things were clear:
- Our members want our district to maintain the current Blue Shield PPO plan that provides members with doctor/provider choice, low copays and reasonable deductibles.
- Many members would like more healthcare plan options, including Kaiser.
- Our current plans’ mental health care and prescription benefits need improvement, and many members have concerns about their dentists dropping out of the Delta Dental network.
- VSP (vision) and dental benefits need to be improved.

Rest assured that the Association will not bargain away hard fought for healthcare benefits that our members need. Our elected Board of Directors and our Health Benefit Committee listen to you, our members, to ensure that your voices are heard on the EBC and at the bargaining table when we have opportunities to cut healthcare costs while still maintaining the level of health benefits – and seeking to improve them where possible – our members deserve.

Just as the U.S. should not boast about its high healthcare spending, our district should not boast about its own high spending for healthcare.

How about boasting about high-quality healthcare our members expect, but at the lowest cost possible? Now, that is something worth trumpeting.
Opportunities to get involved!

April 2023
- 4/3 GTA Board of Directors meeting
- 4/4 GUSD Board of Education meeting
- 4/6 Fremont ES Site Visit
- 4/13 Clark Magnet Site Visit
- 4/18 GUSD Board of Education meeting
- 4/20 Columbus ES Site Visit
- 4/24 Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day
- 4/25 GTA Rep Council meeting @ Hoover HS
- 4/27 Jefferson ES Site Visit

May 2023
- 5/2 GUSD Board of Education meeting
- 5/4 Mountain Ave. ES Site Visit
- 5/9 GTA Board of Directors meeting
- 5/11 Muir ES Site Visit
- 5/15 GTA Rep Council meeting (Zoom)
- 5/16 GUSD Board of Education meeting

Name or Address Change?
Please notify the GTA Office of any name, address or phone number changes. You may send in the form below to the GTA Office via school mail. GTA will update our records and notify CTA of any changes.

Name: _______________________________________
New Name: ___________________________________
Address: ______________________________________
City, State, Zip Code: ___________________________
Telephone: _________________________________
Email (Non-GUSD): ___________________________
Work Site: _________________________________

You can email the above information to Aline @ glendaletaoffice@gmail.com.

THANK YOU FOR ALL YOU DO TO SUPPORT GUSD FAMILIES AND STUDENTS!

GTA ADVOCATE STAFF

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