By Jan Schultz
The Imperial Republican

Negotiations are just starting on a new salary/benefits contract for teachers at Chase County Schools.

The first session between the school board and teacher negotiating teams was held Saturday.

The school board also met in closed session at the conclusion of last Tuesday's school board meeting on the subject.

In addition to salary negotiations, one other item among the negotiation topics will be the 6.4 percent average increase board members were told to expect for Blue Cross Blue Shield health and dental insurance for 2013-14.

In addition, the deductible in the current CCS plan will rise from $800 to $950 next school year.

Supt. Brad Schoeppey informed board members at last week's meeting of the impending insurance increases.

Currently, as part of their benefit package, the district pays 100 percent of the monthly insurance premiums for teachers which range on the low end for single policyholders from $467.69 up to $1,277.09 for those with family coverage.

Of the current $800 deductible, those covered in the plan pay $350. The additional $450 is reimbursable by the school if the employee shows proof of payment. After the deductible is met, employees pay the 80/20 co-insurance costs up to $2,000 for single policyholders and up to $4,000 for those on family coverage.

Also on the table for discussion will be the 2012-13 $31,t400 base salary for teachers.

Members of the school board on the negotiations committee include Gregg Smith, Karl Meeske, Penny Strand and Tom Gaschler.

Negotiating for the Imperial Education Association, which has been recognized as the exclusive bargaining agent for the contracts, are chairman Jason Speck, Kim Wilson, Arlys Cupp and Becky Odens.

Others who receive the same insurance package include administrators, the school nurse and fulltime, year-round classified employees.

Classified staff salaries

Also on the agenda at last week's board meeting was discussion on guidelines for setting individual classified employee wages

Members of that group include secretaries, custodians, kitchen staff, aides and bus drivers.

Supt. Schoeppey said when it comes time to hire a classified employee, there is little to go on currently to determine a starting wage for a new hire.

"It's difficult for me to set wages for them," he said.

That does not include bus drivers, he noted, because the school does have a pay scale established for that group of employees.

He asked the board for permission to pursue some type of standards for setting wages. The board okayed it.

Schoeppey said he'd like to start with job descriptions that would list various responsibilities of the position such as expectations, education requirements, possible physical requirements and scope of their authority, as examples.

Schoeppey said once job descriptions are established, the individual job could be rated in categories, followed by grades of compensation with scales for low and high pay.

"Now we have nothing" in place, he said.

While a superintendent can look at what the previous employee earned, it is complicated when the employee leaving has 15 years experience compared to a new employee who has none.

Some positions also have more responsibilities than others, he noted.

Other school board business

- Newly hired personnel at the school, all approved on 9-0 votes, include Tawnya Jensen, library aide; Ismael Lopez, bus driver; Alan Sargent, custodian; and Crystal Peterson, secretary/payroll.
- A correction on the levy amount to be assessed to district taxpayers will be made which actually lowers the figure. Supt. Schoeppey said a slight error was made on the valuation figure submitted to the county, which was caught by the county assessor. The change will lower the levy from .894931 to .889641 for the General Fund.
- As the administrator who also interviews candidates, Supt. Schoeppey was given formal approval to hire local substitute teachers. Before, each substitute teacher's name came before the board for approval.
- The annual audit of the school was completed recently, and Supt. Schoeppey said they came out well, with nothing written up except what usually is—not enough personnel to verify the school's income from such events as athletic contests which is the case in many smaller schools. He said it was an "intense process" for a few days but CCS came out "with flying colors."
- At the request of Principal Mike Sorensen, high school teacher Renae Bottom gave a presentation on the school's one-to-one laptop program and the benefits to students, saying in the job market today, it's expected that prospective employees know how to operate a computer. She said they can be a powerful tool to students because of the 24-hour access to online resources, allowing them to submit homework from anywhere. Other pluses include online news, downloads of classic books and other digital resources. Principal Sorensen acknowledged the dollars it takes for the program, and expressed their appreciation for the program.
- Activities Director Troy Hauxwell reported on a District 5 NSAA meeting he and Sorensen attended recently in McCook. One of the proposals up for a vote there involved changing Class C to three divisions (C1, C2, C3) for football instead of two as it is now. When it came to state playoff brackets, there would be three brackets with 16 teams in each versus two brackets now with 32 teams in each. Chase County would have been in C2 in that scenario, but the measure failed. Another proposal to change how volleyball subdisticts are set up also failed.