



Questions and Answers about your new PGCEA contract

You've got questions about how the new contract will benefit you and your students. We've got answers!

First, let's talk about Compensation

Q1: I've heard that the new contract ignores members at the top-of-pay scale (Step 21) and others are getting more. Is that true?

A1: No. Step 21 members are a major focus of this tentative agreement.

Over the next three years, the agreement includes cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs) and top-of-scale differentials totaling **\$66.4 million** for Step 21 members — **42.8% of the entire \$155 million economic package**, even though they make up less than 38% of the membership.

This agreement ensures that veteran educators at the top of the scale see steady, competitive pay increases that recognizes their service and it fairly compensates educators who are new to this profession. It's a contract that works for all of us.

Q2: Shouldn't our COLA be higher — like in the 2022–2025 contract?

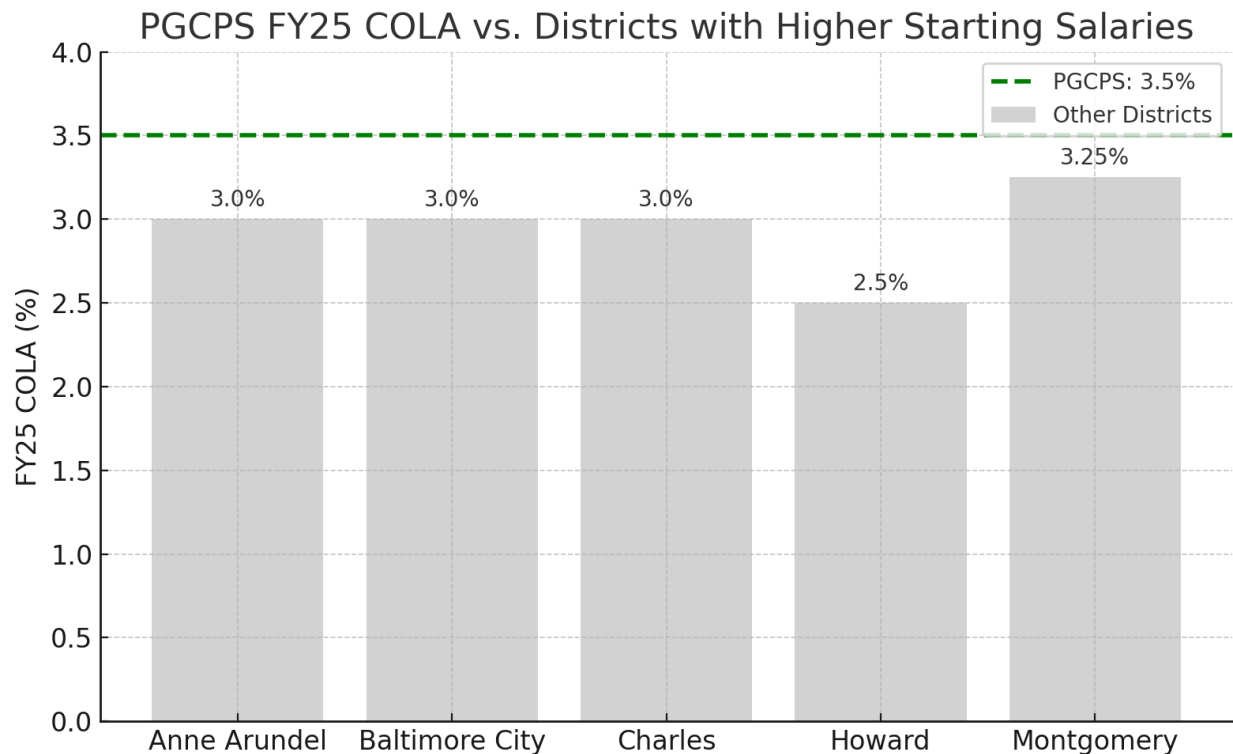
A2: The COLA in this tentative agreement is strong — higher than the historical average and better than any district with a higher starting salary.

Here's why:

- Over the past 19 years, the average COLA was **1.5%**. After the last contract, that average rose slightly to **1.95%**. Each year in this new agreement beats those averages.
- The unusually high COLAs in FY23–FY25 were driven by the state's **Blueprint for Maryland's Future**, which mandated a rapid 10% salary increase. That was

a one-time requirement — the state has not budgeted to repeat it.

- In FY25, our negotiated **3.5% COLA** is higher than what any district with a higher starting salary is offering. That means we're catching up to peers and improving our competitiveness.



Remember: PGCPS already ranks near the top for advanced degree salaries (#2 for Doctorate, #2 for Masters+60, #4 for Masters+30). This agreement keeps our raises strong while building starting pay to attract and keep great educators.

Q3: Isn't the top-of-scale differential of 3% / 1% / 1% too low for veteran educators?

A3: A top-of-scale differential is rare — most Maryland districts offer nothing like it — and it exists to recognize and reward veteran educators.

When pay freezes hit during the housing market crash, educators lost steps. Later, the FY2020–22 contract let many catch up by granting two steps a year — but those already at the top (Step 21) had no way to recover that lost income. The differential was created to fix that.

- Originally, Step 21 educators missed about **\$7,500** in lost steps.
- Adding Step 21 plus the differential (1% / 2% / 2%) in past contracts helped make educators whole.
- In FY23–FY25, the 1% annual differential totaled more than **\$10,500** — more than the original loss — and now every Step 21 educator gets it, even if they weren't here during the freeze years.

This contract continues that recognition with **3% in year one, 1% in year two, and 1% in year three** — on top of COLAs — ensuring veteran educators see meaningful, dedicated raises that most districts don't provide.

Q4: There should be more steps. Why should a teacher remain at Step 21 for 10 years before retirement?

A4: Because in our strong contracts, we keep negotiating higher compensation that helps retain talented educators.

According to the annual salary reports published by MSDE, Maryland's top-of-scale master's salary ranks 6th highest at \$109,679—but it only has 20 steps. Many districts offer more steps but lower top salaries, including:

- Cecil (40 steps)
- Frederick (35 steps)
- Garrett (35 steps)
- Wicomico (35 steps)
- Allegany (32 steps)
- Baltimore County (30 steps)
- Caroline (30 steps)
- Harford (27 steps)

- Anne Arundel (25 steps)
- Dorchester (25 steps)

Even among these districts, many (6 of the 10 listed) do **not** provide a salary increase with each step. For example, a teacher may move a step but earn the same salary for five years.

Adding more steps does **not automatically** mean higher lifetime earnings. Educators benefit more from reaching a high salary at Step 21 sooner, and maintaining it for 10 years, than from reaching a high salary at Step 30 and only having it for only one year.

Now, let's look at the contract ratification process

Q5: Why is a contract ratification vote important?

A5: A ratification vote is crucial because it gives union members the power to vote on the tentative agreement our bargaining team negotiated on behalf of all members. Once ratified by a majority vote, the contract is final.

This democratic voting process ensures that the contract reflects members' interests regarding wages, benefits, and working conditions. Your vote is your voice in shaping a strong future for PGCEA members and students.

These are just a few of the reasons why we are encouraging all PGCEA members to make a plan to vote on your new tentative agreement.

The ratification voting period will run from Tuesday, August 19 through Thursday, August 28.

Contact Us:

Should you need assistance, we're available by phone at 301-736-2700 from 9 a.m to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday. Or, just share your question via this [form](#).

