

January 2026

# THE SWARM



## President's message

Remember to take some deep breathes now and again.

## Executive Board

February 4th @ 4:30pm

## Representative Council

February 11th @ 4:30pm

## In this newsletter:

- "Intent to Return" Letter
- Sick Leave Cash Out and VEBA Funding

## Weather Make Up Day

School will be in session Friday, March 22, 2026 in order to make up for the closure day on Wednesday, December 17, 2025

## "Intent to Return" Letter

Every year around December, the District starts to plan for the next school year. One way they do this is by sending an "Intent to Return" letter/form to get an idea about who is returning for the next school year and who might be resigning, retiring or taking a yearlong Leave of Absence. I received a notice on December 16, 2025. For employees who know they will be resigning or retiring before the start of the next school year, NTPS offers a day's worth of pay as an incentive. If you intend to work during the 2026-2027 school year, there is no cash incentive for letting the District know you plan on returning. The deadline to be able to get the days' worth of pay is January 30, 2026. To receive the incentive, a letter or email stating your intent to retire or resign, along with the final date of your employment, must be received in Human Resources on or before January 30, 2026. If you are elementary staff, submit your notice letter to Ann Marie Casner (acasner@ntps.org). If you are secondary staff. Submit your notice letter to Kristi Ashmore (kashmore@ntps.org).

Every year, I get questions about this "Intent to Return" letter/form and if completing it is required. It is not required. And completing it, if you check that you plan to return for the next school year, does not make it an employment contract. Employment contracts (now digital documents) are made available to sign in May.

Members also tell me that they are reluctant to complete the "Intent to Return" letter/form and mark "Return for the 2026-2027 school year" because they may still want to wait to be to announce retirement or resignation later in the current year. Completing the "Intent to Return" letter/form stating that you plan on returning for the next year does not remove your CBA-stated right to tell NTPS later that you have changed your mind and will not be returning or even request to be released from the next year's employment contract, even if you do sign it in May. Employees have until the last student day of the current school year to request to be released and the District must honor that request. In

summary, the “Intent to Return” is voluntary and designed to help NTPS with its planning. Unless you are certain that you are not coming back to NTPS for the next school year, PLEASE sign your 2026-2027 Employment Contract within a few days after it is offered to you. You can get out of it before the last student day of this school year.

### **Sick Leave Cash Out and VEBA Funding**

To be completely transparent, VEBA is one of the topics I have dreaded. But after several years of asking questions, getting asked questions, conducting votes, re-conducting votes, and making plenty of mistakes, I think I now understand enough to be able to guide members and leave a document for the next NTEA President.

VEBA stands for Voluntary Employee’s Beneficiary Association and is a health reimbursement arrangement you can use to reimburse out-of-pocket medical expenses and premiums. For more information about the specifics of VEBA, go [here](#).

According to our Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) in [Article 23 – Sick Leave Conversion](#), VEBA accounts are funded by contributions from cashed out sick leave (and Personal Leave) and only if the annual vote of the NTEA membership allows. The simple explanation is that if the membership agrees (through the annual vote) that cashed out sick leave goes into employee’s VEBA accounts, then that is what should happen. But then the complexities kick in!

First, an employee must meet certain eligibility requirements to be able to cash out sick leave. Obviously, an employee must have unused sick leave to be able to “cash out”. Another is that only if you have 60 sick days or more remaining in your account can you cash out any unused sick leave from the previous calendar year. Full time certificated employees get 12 sick days each school year. There is a wrinkle in that cash out is based on the calendar year, not the school year, but let’s not stress about that here.

If you are eligible to cash out sick leave, you should consider long and hard about whether you should do so. Things happen. And having a stash of sick leave can be a beneficial thing. The other consideration is, the longer you wait (with a caveat or two to come later) to cash out sick leave days, the more value you will likely get from those sick days. This is because your per diem pay typically increases every year. One more consideration that I just learned about is that, while a question on the ballot may ask if you want to fund VEBA with annual cashed out sick leave (up to 12 days) and you are not retiring or leaving NTPS, even if the vote from members is “Yes”, you must also have a minimum of 180 days (1350 hours) of accrued sick leave on your record. Only then will cashed-out sick leave go into a VEBA account. If you are not at 180 sick days, at least, but you complete a sick leave cash out form in January, that money will be taxed and go into your February paycheck, regardless of what the annual VEBA vote result. If for some important reason you need 12 unused sick days from the previous calendar year transformed into a bit of money that goes into your pocket and you do not have 180 accrued sick days or more, then you can cash out for cash in your pocket. AGAIN, I ask you to think about your older years when your per diem is more valuable and cashing out unused leave has much more benefit for you.

Keep in mind that upon retirement from NTPS, you will be able to cash out up to a maximum of 180 days of sick leave. Remember that the cash out rate is one day’s pay for four days of sick leave accrued. If you can build up that 180-days of sick leave, you can make a significant contribution to VEBA. That is, if the vote goes that way. And it usually does.

Think strategically about your sick leave and cashing out unused sick leave when you are eligible. If you want some additional personal guidance, please reach out to me. Ray Nelson