



THE ADVOCATE

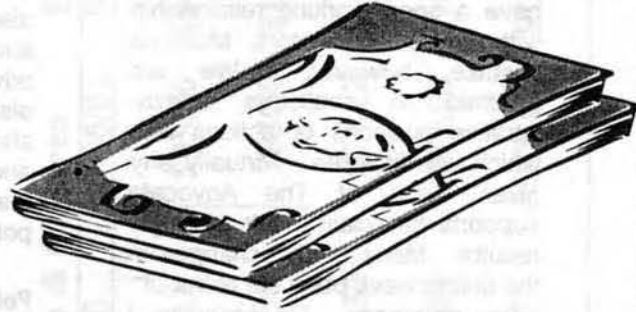


Volume 4 Issue 5

Employee Federation of NHMCCD

March-April 2001

6% Salary Increase Needed for 2001-2002



As the college district develops the 2001-02 budget, we will be doing the usual—weighing competing needs and allocating accordingly. However, this round the administration and board must pay special attention to employee salaries. Since Dr. Pickelman's arrival, the district has embraced two important values. First, the chancellor wishes us to compare favorably with other community colleges. Secondly, he believes that employees should not lose buying power and should gain over the cost of living when possible. These two values, which the union also embraces, must be given careful consideration as salary increases are determined this year.

We often hear the administration expressing the goal of not just being the best community college in the state but one of the best in the country. However, according to the Texas Community College Teachers Association's latest comparison survey, our faculty salaries lag behind even the state goal. TCCTA'S "Survey of Faculty Salaries---Texas Public Community Colleges---1999-2000" shows that out of 49 community

colleges, NHMCCD has a state ranking of 8th for a master's degree and 9th for a doctorate (based on a nine month beginning salary, first year of service; NHMCCD'S faculty salary structure has steps for the first five years and ranges beyond that, making it impossible to compare us to other colleges beyond five years). Without a significant salary increase, we will likely fall out of the top ten colleges in Texas.

Other economic factors also come into play. The cost of living increase for 2000 reported for the Houston area is 3.9%, so a salary increase less than that would cause employees to lose buying power. However, we also face staggering increases in 2001-02 in two areas, fuel and health costs. The Houston Chronicle (March 15, 2001) reports that Reliant Energy is seeking its "third fuel rate hike in less than a year to pass on the increased costs of natural gas. The hike, if approved, will result in power bills being about 30% higher this summer than last summer [. . .]." The two previous increases, 11% each, should have been accounted for in the 3.9%

CPI for Houston, but the new hike, 6%, is not.

Health costs are also worrisome. Just before the beginning of this academic year, Employee Retirement System announced a last minute increase in premiums that employees must pay for dependent coverage. Attached (9) is a chart showing premium increases from 99/00 to this academic year. These increases ranged up to \$20 per month (employee plus children) to \$33 per month (employee plus family). Since salaries for this year had already been determined, NHMCCD generously absorbed those significant last minute increases, and employees were not burdened with finding the means to cover them. However, in spite of this increase in premiums, our prescription drug coverage went down, which did cost employees more money. According to Human Resources, the drug programs for all insurance plans were affected the same way. The cost for generic prescriptions remained the same, \$5 each. Brand name prescriptions went from a co-payment of \$15.00 each to a two-tiered structure.

"Preferred" name brands increased to a \$20 co-payment, while "non-preferred" name brands increased to a \$35 co-payment, more than a 100% increase. Mail order prescriptions increased from a single co-payment for a three months' supply to two co-payments. At the new co-payment rate, a name brand on the "non-preferred" list increased from \$15 to \$70, better than 300%. If you have been keeping up with the news lately, you are aware of discussions in Austin predicting higher health care costs and lower coverage for 2001-02. NHMCCD employees are likely to experience even greater costs for prescription drugs next year. Premiums are likely to increase beyond the cost that the college is already picking up. If the college does not continue to absorb this year's increase, then employees must shoulder that burden as well.

Looming increases in fuel and health care costs are a concern, and we do not know what other increased costs will erode our salaries. These costs threaten us all but especially the staff, so they must not be forgotten. Why should the salary increase for 2001-02 be 6%? Anything less than 4% would cause us to lose buying power and likely cause the college to fall out of the top ten community colleges in Texas. However, 4% only keeps us even if we don't look at enormous increases in utility, health care, and other unknown costs. It is impossible to predict what these costs will actually be. The AFT recommends a salary increase for next year no less than 6% for all employees. Anything less harms us significantly and will likely violate those two values laid out by the chancellor.

Alan Hall

STATE OF THE UNION 2001

In the last Advocate, we celebrated the union's 20th anniversary by publishing Kevin Bailey's article delineating the obstacles we encountered when we first organized. Our current position in the district is, indeed, a marvel considering what we were up against. We now represent a large number of faculty and staff and have a good working relationship with most administrators. Make no mistake, however. We are unafraid to challenge administrative positions or actions with which we disagree. Virtually any given issue of The Advocate supports this claim. We also get results. Many of the changes in the district have been the result of union advocacy. On occasion, I hear someone say, "I like what the union does, but I haven't joined because I don't think I'll get into trouble," a comment which reflects a narrow view of the union's role. We often do help folks with conflicts, but we do so much more. I think it is useful on occasion to remind faculty and staff of the wide range of activities in which the Federation is engaged.

Educational Issues

The union routinely engages in educational issues and advocates educational positions. We meet with the administration regularly on educational issues and take positions on these subjects in The Advocate. We also reprint articles from publications from our state affiliate, the Texas Federation of Teachers, and our national affiliate, the American Federation of Teachers. Topics have included distance learning, academic freedom, censorship, budget, and embedded dual credit. The union has affected college policy and procedure on educational issues.

Employee Advocacy

Through the venues mentioned previously, we advocate for all employees on salaries, benefits, and working conditions. Through the newsletter and seminars, we regularly educate employees about policies and procedures and issues like sexual harassment, retirement, rights and responsibilities, due process, educational law, the colleague system, medical privacy, and ethics in the work place. We have also fought hiring inconsistencies and advocated posting and advertising of job openings in the district. We believe that processes should be supported by policies and will continue to support efforts that ensure implementation of fair policies at NHMCCD.

Political Activity

Our union's local political activity has been non-partisan. Many people associate unions with the Democratic Party. Here at NHMCCD, we have a political rainbow of members, a blend of Democrats, Republicans, and Independents. For that reason, we typically have not endorsed candidates for national office in The Advocate. On the local level, we have endorsed and worked for candidates for the college's Board of Trustees. On the state level, we have lobbied the legislature on a number of educational issues, and I have testified before the Higher Education Committee of both the House and Senate. This legislative session, one of the more interesting topics on which we have worked is providing input on a bill to eliminate TASP. We also assisted the TFT in developing a higher education agenda including increases in salaries, in state funding of community colleges, in retirement benefits, and in adjunct faculty salaries, as well as health insurance for adjuncts and a guarantee of due process for all college employees in the state.

Professional/Personal**Development**

The union believes in supporting our membership on all levels. As part of that support, this semester we have begun to offer professional and personal development sessions geared to improving employees' lives at work and home.

Social Events

The union sponsors at least two social gatherings annually. We believe it is important for employees to have an opportunity to socialize in a congenial atmosphere away from work.

Member Assistance

We often help our members in all kinds of situations, including those not necessarily work related, through our Member Assistance Program. If a member comes to us with a personal problem, anything from financial issues to personal conflicts to emotional problems, we provide assistance by putting that person in touch with appropriate individuals or organizations that can help.

Member Advocacy and Representation

Curiously, the one thing for which many people recognize the union is only a part of what we do. Providing representation to members involved in conflicts is an important activity of ours, but only one of our activities. Union members with legitimate complaints or concerns find us at their side advising, representing, and advocating on their behalf. If necessary, we use our legal defense fund to secure an attorney. Everyone should know that the union does not condone or protect poor performance. If we have a member with a weakness

or performance problem, our role is to guarantee due process while we mentor the member. We will assign another union member to

provide guidance and support to correct the problem. The union makes sure no one is too trigger happy regarding termination.

Representation is available only to members and does not cover events that pre-date membership. In the past year and a half, I have been contacted by a number of employees who found themselves in some conflict, including some facing the threat of termination, who developed a sudden interest in the union. It doesn't work that way. Sadly, I have had to explain that they were on their own. From what I know of the termination cases, at least two of them could have benefited had the employees been union members.

Professionalism

In summary, the union is a professional organization actively engaged in all of these activities. Membership should not be thought of as only for "protection". Membership dues support a host of activities and events, and membership is a bargain. If you believe faculty should have a voice in educational issues, you should join. If you believe employees should have a voice in the political process, you should join. If you believe in the value of employees helping out each other, you should join. If you believe employees should be treated with dignity, fairness, and respect, you should join. Your dues help support these values. As an added advantage, if you need help in a conflict, we will be there for you. Don't join because you think you might get into trouble. Join because you embrace the values we embrace.

Alan Hall

**Posting**

In the last Advocate, I wrote an article titled "By Anointment, Appointment, or Application", in which I took exception to the

chancellor's failing to post and advertise job openings but instead appointing individuals to high level positions. His actions fell on the heels of other lower positions on campuses being filled the same way. I believe that these lower level appointments, in part, grew out of a climate created by upper administration's failure to lead by example. Since the article was published, two more instances have occurred. A job opening at one of the campuses appears to have been inadequately posted. Apparently an announcement appeared on a few bulletin boards. It was not posted on the web, nor was it in the campus Job Placement Binder. The person who got the position is a fine person, but many people discovered that a job was open when they read in email that it had been filled, a too frequent occurrence in our district. In a second instance, another position, Associate Vice Chancellor for Curriculum and Instruction, was announced to the campuses via email on February 15, 2001 with a February 16th closing. I discussed both instances with Dr. Pickelman. In the first instance, he promised an investigation and changes if they were appropriate. In the second, he responded by extending the date and continuing to accept applications, and Dr. Steve Head announced this extension via an email to associate deans and vice presidents dated March 19.

The chancellor continues to maintain his right to make appointments when it is in "the best interest of the college," a position with which the union fundamentally disagrees. Curiously, campuses will have some faculty positions open for the fall, and in some instances, departments have someone they would like to hire, but associate deans report, "We've been told that we must post, advertise, and interview," pointing out an irony, I believe. Dr. Pickelman insists that he believes that most positions should be posted, advertised, and

interviewed. In our discussion on the topic, I pointed out that relying on antiquated bulletin boards and binder notices seems ironic with our electronic capabilities. Moreover, such a system also requires that employees actively search for elusive postings, which is neither efficient nor effective. I requested that the chancellor instruct Human Resources to announce all job openings via email in a timely fashion and to make sure that the information gets to individuals without email access. He agreed to the request, and on February 21, Sue Tinder sent an email announcing that in the future HR will send "out an email each week listing current, full-time job vacancies" and encouraged employees to "visit our web site for detailed information <http://job.nhmccd.edu>." On February 27, Karen Gaede, HR at NHC, sent an email to NHC employees outlining five ways they may "access information about vacancies within the North Harris Montgomery Community College District" which includes the email method mentioned in Tinder's email but also includes methods of access that those who do not have email may use. I hope copies of these emails made it to folks without email access. The chancellor deserves credit for his efforts to make information about job openings more accessible so that our hiring processes are open and above reproach. We remain at odds on how open and appropriate his recent appointments were, but his more recent actions are a step in the right direction.

Alan Hall

Who is the AFT?



Last month, we began a new series of articles in which we present short bios of the executive staff of your AFT in an effort to introduce you to those who serve the AFT at NHMCCD. This month's bio introduces you to executive committee member Martha Newsome, Biology Professor at Tomball College.

Martha Newsome graduated from the University of St. Thomas with a Bachelor's Degree in Biology and then received her DDS from UT Dental School in the UT Houston Health Science Center in 1986. She practiced dentistry for five years, but unfortunately she never liked to inflict pain on patients, although she found that communicating with patients in a teaching mode was very rewarding. She continued practicing dentistry but also began teaching biology part-time at Kingwood and North Harris College in the spring of 1990. Her first semester was one of the most exciting times in her life as she realized her gift for teaching. Martha joined the district as a full-time biology instructor in the fall of 1990 at Tomball College and later retired her dental license.

Celebrating her tenth year with the district, Martha has worn many hats, including Biology Program Coordinator and Faculty Senate President. She has received the Faculty Teaching Excellence Award, in addition to the Writing Award, and she is excited to be chosen as this year's commencement speaker.

Martha has also pursued graduate work at the UT School of Public Health in Epidemiology (the study of disease in human populations), with a focus on genetics and bioethics. Her major goal in graduate school was to spend time as a student to gain new insights and to remember the view from the student's perspective.

In the last two years, Martha began seeking new avenues for teaching biology and became interested in distance learning because so many of her students were nontraditional students needing a course that fit into their busy schedules. She now teaches several courses online and enjoys creating online communities (but please don't ask about the number of email messages in her Inbox!). In her spare time, Martha is writing an instruction supplement for an online anatomy program with Benjamin-Cummings.

Martha is also looking forward to her new responsibility with the AFT and working with the infamous Alan Hall. She has agreed to assist Mary Ella Phelps, an AFT faculty vice-president, in representing members, providing mediation and conflict resolution, and other union activities at Tomball. Martha will also serve on the union's executive committee.

Staff

Adjuncts and the Political Front

Our local union has worked closely with our State affiliate, the Texas Federation of Teachers, in developing a higher education agenda (see "Political Activity" in

Alan Hall's "State of the Union" above). We are happy to report progress on each of the items but want to highlight two bills in particular because they deal with adjuncts, a group often ignored in the political process. First, the union has supported HB2397 by Chavez which requires that the Coordinating Board conduct a faculty compensation disparity study and prepare a report, including any appropriate recommendations, regarding any disparity between the salary and benefits for part-time faculty members and full-time faculty members. Testimony in support of the bill was offered by the TFT. Another bill filed with TFT support, HB3510 by Guterrez, would give adjunct faculty at community colleges ERS health insurance coverage if they have five years experience with their employer and teach a six-hour load or more. The fact that a bill has been filed or passed out of committee does not mean that it will become law. It does mean that serious attention is being paid to the issue. The union is hopeful on these two bills. These two should become law.

Staff

Letter to the Editor

The following letter was written in response to Alan Hall's article "Follow the Money," which was published in the issue of The Advocate.

Alan, you've done some great investigative reporting in the article, "Follow the Money." I am shocked to find that we have had a surplus! Here at NHC there have been so many areas of need, and you have mentioned some: a need to hire new full time faculty to

replace the ever diminishing one; a need to buy equipment and software to serve our students better; and a need to repair our deteriorating buildings. It is not as if these needs have not been voiced repeatedly over the last few years. So, it is very difficult to accept Dr. Williams' responses to your inquiries, namely that administration has never received any major complaints, that they have never harmed any programs, and anyway they didn't know that they had the money until it was too late to spend it. I especially find the mantra "We have had an increasingly well funded budget" to be insulting. As Hamlet says, are we pipes to be played on? Are we that easy? It is incredible to me that an operation so well greased as to build empires of new campuses and a new university center can be run so poorly as to not know that they have money to correct some of the inequities here at NHC. Maybe I'm missing something. Is someone dropping the ball here? Does faculty and staff have access to administration? Does someone say, "We need this or that to serve our students better," and does administration respond, "Sorry, we don't have the money"? Does someone say, "Please, we need to repair the elevator for our handicapped students," and does administration respond, "Sorry, not enough money"?

It seems to me just on the surface of things that the administration is more involved and interested in creating new tax bases than in serving the students that we now have. A letter of explanation, apology, and promise of change should come from whoever is responsible, and YES, Alan you should keep following the money!

Neil Newsom
NHC

AFT Part-timer bears witness at AFL-CIO Event

Many American workers today are exploited, but the image that strikes a surefire chord with the public these days is that of the part-time faculty member who cobbles together a living by teaching at multiple campuses. AFT member Linda Cushing represented her beleaguered colleagues at a Feb. 13 press conference opening the AFL-CIO's executive council meeting in Los Angeles. An art instructor at North Orange County community College, she is also president of Adjunct Faculty United/AFT, which represents 1,400 part-time faculty at three local colleges in the California county. Since organizing her own campus last year, Cushing has helped lead a widening organizing crusade at other California community colleges, where the inadequate pay and lack of benefits, she said, "is shameful." she is the face of a more varied labor movement, said AFL-CIO president John Sweeney in introducing her. She and her fellow organizers won a landslide victory using e-mail and personal approaches to reach faculty "who are treated by their schools as nameless, faceless, interchangeable people," she said. Cushing's position today is somewhat surprising, she added, even to herself, because before she began teaching, she worked in the private sector and fought the unions. "I stand before you now as a Republican who has seen the light," she proclaimed, "because I learned firsthand what happens to professionals when there is no representation and no hope."

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Keep the reins of technology in faculty hands

When United University Professions/AFT (UUP) asked its

members about the issue of distance learning within the State University of New York (SUNY), we weren't sure what we would find. Our union comprises 24,000 diverse academic and professional faculty from Buffalo to Manhattan who have a broad array of technical skills and interests. Technology on our 29 campuses ranges from the up-to-date to the out-of-order.

Yet the results of our commissioned survey found a certain commonality. Although our members have long been open to the academic opportunities of technology, they're not bashful when voicing their concerns over how it is used and to what ends.

And that's exactly what our random sample of nearly 500 UUPers found: They are overwhelmingly receptive to the uses of distance learning but share a healthy skepticism about its quality effectiveness and impact on their profession:

- 90% of the respondents report that they have not yet taught a distance learning course, but 60.5% say they would be willing to do so.
- 76% who teach a distance learning course say they did not get professional assistance in developing their course. Only 37% say that available technical support was good.
- 73% believe it is likely that their intellectual property rights are at risk with distance learning courses.
- 75% of respondents say the possibility of student cheating is a likely disadvantage of distance learning.
- Nearly 69% find it likely that distance learning could lead to a greater workload; 72% say it will mean more work for the same pay.

Our members' major concern is the quality of distance learning courses, with 68% saying they do not believe distance learning courses offer the same quality as traditional courses. And 83% say that electronic courses should only supplement—not replace—traditional courses.

High noon for higher ed?

To address these issues, UUP asked David Noble, a leading critic of distance learning, to speak at its Delegate Assembly in Buffalo, N.Y., this fall. Noble's extensive writings on the subject of technology include "Digital Diploma Mills," a four-part critique of distance learning.

"It's the degradation of the quality of education in pursuit of the dollar," Noble said of many distance learning programs. Faculty produce content, and employers market it, he said, adding that online delivery also opens up courses to monitoring and censorship.

Using the term "high noon for higher education," Noble sees distance learning as "the biggest threat ever" to institutions and faculty.

"Once the faculty converts its courses to courseware, their services are in the long run no longer required," he wrote in "Digital Diploma Mills." They "become redundant, and when they leave, their work remains behind."

Online courses, he said, "are a potential means of generating revenue for universities while cutting labor costs to the core."

Why does this "virtual university's potential to revolutionize education make Noble and others among us uneasy? Because under the guise of carrying the democratization of education—that great Jeffersonian revolution—even further, the virtual university could become the very occasion for its destruction. More

than jobs are at stake; the quality of American higher education could be at risk.

Whatever new technology is introduced, it should not degrade either professorate, by recreating the assembly-line approach to education, or students, by delivering more data and less knowledge. Nor should it destroy the traditional brick-and-mortar experience that make American higher education the best in the world. A recent study by the Institute for Higher Education Policy, "Quality on the Line," enumerates 24 benchmarks for determining quality in distance learning. Many of these echo the AFT's own policy statement, "Standards of Good Practice in Distance Education" (see "Going the distance," AFT On Campus, October 2000).

Essential points of both documents:

- Faculty must have control of the curriculum;
- Faculty appointed and evaluated through a traditional consultative process who volunteer to use distance and online learning should teach the courses; and
- Faculty must play a proactive role in teaching and mentoring students, including discussion, dialogue and other aspects of the social process of education.

These standards aim at ensuring quality. The problem is their cost. The simple fact: You can't use the new technology as an end to save a buck. Once education is driven by savings, savings become the goal and education slips to a subordinate position.

In today's political environment, where far-right ideologues attack higher education as an oversized, ossified institution in search of students—virtual universities and distance learning courses may begin to look like inexpensive and democratic alternatives, a way to have their cake and eat it too. But, for students, this cake will be a cheap and tasteless alternative to real education. It's our job to make sure that technology is used to enhance the educational experience.

William E. Scheuerman

William E. Scheuerman (wscheu@uupmail.org) is president of United University Professions and an AFT vice president.

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Raising the Issues

A column where we address topics that concern you. We appreciate your input; contact us with your ideas for future columns.

Recently, faculty or staff have approached several officers in the union in regard to issues surrounding salary. This article is an attempt to air their issues. While your issue might not be addressed here, you might like to hear of your colleagues' recent concerns in this area.

Case #1: A professional employee was hired in 1996 and told that salaries were not negotiable; two years later a co-worker was hired in the same area with the same

classification, and the same degree but was allowed to negotiate his salary. The result is that the newer employee was hired making \$2000 more than the person with two years experience in the same position. Interested? Read on.

Case #2: A recent job posting for a Division Coordinator listed a starting salary range that is only \$545 less per year than a current Division Coordinator makes with 11 years worth of service to this institution. If the new hire negotiates, will she be making more than the loyal, steadfast employee with 11 years of service?

Case #3: This is the story of NHC computer technicians and how they are the lowest paid technicians in our district. Some salaries at the DO and other campuses can exceed NHC's technicians' pay by as much as \$7000. That's right, NHC techies, working on the largest campus, with the greatest number of computers to keep running and updated with new editions of software, and with duties more numerous than their counterparts on the other campuses, receive much less in pay than other technicians on the various campuses. Should they be forced to explore opportunities at other campuses? Can NHC afford to lose them if they decide to pursue those opportunities?

While some faculty contacted union representatives about similar incidents, they declined to have their stories publicly aired. We respect their wishes.

In an attempt to clarify the district's stance on some of the issues mentioned above, I contacted Karen Gaede, the Human Resources Coordinator at NHC, and she responded with the following:

Does the District compensate for years of service? Yes and no.

There is no "adjustment" made to the classification system for years of service to the District. However, the compensation practices here do reward employee years of service in several important ways. Employees who have been with the district for years "accumulate" across-the-board increases even when such increases take them above the established pay level for their position. When across-the-board adjustments are made, there is no "cap" on compensation for any employees. Second, when employees are promoted to a new position, they can carry with them these accumulated salary adjustments. (A promotional increase is calculated as the greater of the new entry level salary plus 2% OR 8% above their current salary.)

Why does the District not compensate based on years of service? Compensation is set for each employee in accordance with the classification established for the position into which they will be hired or promoted. Last year, the classification of the Division Coordinator was changed after a review identified the growth in the responsibilities assigned to that position. Division Coordinators were moved to the B10 classification; persons whose compensation was already above that level did not receive pay adjustments and those whose salary was below that level did receive an adjustment.

The District Web Page, under the Mission/Value Statement section, states the following:

We believe that the most important resources of the North Harris Montgomery Community College District are the individual faculty and staff members, who are entitled to a supportive collegial work environment which rewards excellence, provides opportunities for professional development, encourages meaningful involvement in the decision-making

process, and provides excellent
In light of the previous examples, are the employees of our district really viewed as one of the most valuable resources in our district? Do we, as a District, truly offer a supportive environment and reward excellence in our employees? Do we value years of service with merely adequate compensation, or will we pay

compensation.

people what the marketplace will offer them? Will we sit and watch our more ambitious, creative employees leave our colleges for better pay elsewhere, while then turning around and paying top dollar for the newly hired who are lacking the institutional knowledge and background of our seasoned employees? If you are interested in

more information, facts and figures on salaries may be obtained through any campus library, through the District's Human Resources Web Page, or through your campus Human Resources Coordinator.

Cris Neuman

CALL FOR ARTICLES

We invite you to send us your opinions, your news, your questions and so forth. The Advocate is a forum for information and free interchange of ideas. Send your articles to Dawn Baxley, Editor, NHC, or e-mail: dawnb@nhmccd.edu, or submit to any of the following officers: Alan Hall, President, ACAD 217, NHC; Velma Trammell, WNSP 174, NHC; Rich Almstedt, KC; Tim Howard, NHC; Julie Alber, MC; Cris Neuman, NHC; Mary Ella Phelps, TC; Bob Locander, NHC; or Allen Vogt, NHC.

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Join the AFT - Call Alan Hall

The Advocate is a publication of the Employee Federation of North Harris Montgomery Community College District.
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HEALTH BENEFIT COST COMPARISON

COST PER MONTH TO EMPLOYEES

Plan Name	Employee Only	Emp & Spouse	Emp & Children	Emp & Family
	99/00 00/01	99/00 00/01	99/00 00/01	99/00 00/01
1. HealthSelect	\$0.00	\$122.65	\$82.12	\$204.77
2. HealthSelect Plus	\$0.00	\$107.51	\$71.98	\$179.49
3. Aetna/PacifiCare*	\$0.00	\$97.58	\$74.12	\$162.92
4. Humana/UTMB*	\$0.00	\$96.62	\$64.69	\$161.32
5. NYLCare = HMO* Blue	\$0.00	\$102.62	\$79.65	\$171.33
				\$198.62

Notes:

Aetna and Humana are being eliminated. PacifiCare and UTMB will replace them. NYLCare has changed names to HMO Blue