



**BURLINGTON SCHOOL BOARD  
TEACHER CONTRACT NEGOTIATIONS IMPASSE POSITION STATEMENT – 4/13/16**

The Burlington School District Negotiating Team entered into the negotiations process with the goal of achieving a more sustainable contract that meets our students’ complex needs. The basis for the School Board’s negotiating positions is summarized below:

1. We began the bargaining process with a 1.8% average salary increase offer. During the mediation session, the Board Negotiating Team indicated that we were willing to move higher than 1.8%, contingent upon the union’s willingness to redirect some of the dollars required to fund other costly contract provisions.
2. We are prepared to offer a regionally competitive salary. We believe the current contract language--first negotiated three years ago--requiring automatic salary adjustments to maintain a “middle of the middle” salary ranking in the county is well intentioned but does not belong in a contract. It has the effect of “pre-negotiating” salaries for the next contract without regard for other cost increases, such as health insurance. It also effectively delegates the responsibility to negotiate Burlington teacher salaries to neighboring towns without consideration for the impact on Burlington taxpayers.
3. We believe that teachers should help cover the 7.9% increase in health insurance costs that the District will face in FY17. The premium charge for family coverage in 2016-17 will be \$23,792, but teachers will only pay 15% of that cost. The Board has proposed that they increase their share to 19%, which is less than the 20% paid by state employees, and would result in an increase to the District’s teacher health insurance budget of 2.8%.
4. We have proposed to work collaboratively with the union in developing a new, more sustainable compensation model that better serves all teachers and is less insulated from current economic realities. The reasons for moving away from the current salary grid include:
  - a. It is inequitable.
    - i. The current salary grid produced salary increases for teachers this year ranging from less than 1% to more than 8%, based solely upon individual variations in years of service and graduate credits.
    - ii. The grid also produced an average increase over last year’s salaries of 6.6% for teachers below the top step. This increase only benefitted approximately 40% of the teachers. The Board believes that the rate of growth in step increases needs to be moderated in order to free up funds to help support salary increases for all teachers, including those who no longer benefit from step movement on the current grid.
  - b. It is not responsive to external economic conditions.
    - i. The current salary grid, even without a negotiated increase, will automatically advance salaries for teachers placed below the top step by an average of 3.2% next year, based solely on completion of another year of service. This will cost the District about \$325,000.

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- ii. Salary increases generated using the existing grid are significantly higher than recent inflation rates, which according to the VT Dept. of Labor have averaged 1% during the 3-year period covered by the current teachers' contract and just 0.1% during 2015.
    - c. It automatically advances teacher salaries based on accumulated graduate credits without regard for the impact of the course work on teacher effectiveness.
  5. Funding to support continuation of current trends in the District's graduate course tuition reimbursement expenses will require a budgetary commitment of about \$325,000 in FY17. This expense only benefits a portion of the teaching staff and the District has no control over the quality or relevance of the courses. The Board's proposal would promote the use of professional development funds for providing all teachers with meaningful training relevant to the needs of Burlington students.
  6. Several of the current contract provisions restrict the ability of school administrators to make forward-looking student-centered decisions based upon an evaluation of student needs and District resources.
    - a. Burlington students would be best served if the Superintendent were allowed to determine starting teacher salaries in accordance with the qualifications of the teacher and needs of the District. We are proposing to eliminate the current contract language that restricts the Superintendent's ability to make such determinations.
    - b. The contract also unduly restricts the authority of principals to assign teacher responsibilities during the school day. The work of a teacher-administrator study committee is being reviewed to determine if it will allow for greater flexibility in accordance with student needs.
  7. Current personal and sick leave benefits are not sustainable. The District budgets approximately \$436,000 annually to cover the cost of teacher substitutes and approximately \$300,000 to pay departing teachers for unused sick days. We propose to reduce the number of paid leave days and eliminate unused sick day compensation for departing teachers.

Moving forward, we continue to believe that a successful agreement must advance the following objectives:

1. Broaden the learning experience to prepare students for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,
2. Secure a contract consistent with Burlington taxpayers' ability to pay, and
3. Provide compensation and a workplace environment for teachers that allow the District to be an employer of choice.

Board focus will now turn to making a compelling case for its positions via the factfinding phase of the negotiations process.