



**Message to the Burlington Community**  
**From The Burlington School Board**  
**September 15, 2016**

The Board made its final offer to the Burlington Education Association (BEA) on Wednesday, September 14, based upon a realistic appraisal of available financial resources, and a belief that it is not in the best interests of Burlington students or the community to extend FY17 contract negotiations further into the school year. Because this is a one-year employment policy, to be enacted immediately, that will expire on August 31, 2017, the Board will approach the union with a request to immediately commence bargaining the next master Agreement when all employment related matters will be subject to negotiation.

Having reached the end point in negotiations with the union, it is important that the community know the details of the Board's final offer to the teachers. You will see that the Board has made significant concessions, while at the same time addressing a number of issues essential to the District's financial and operational effectiveness. These, in turn, will allow the District to better serve our school children.

In general terms, the Board's final offer 1) provides a fair and reasonable raise to teachers that also reflects current economic conditions and respects the capacity of Burlington taxpayers, 2) continues to offer salaries that are regionally competitive, 3) improves salary competitiveness for new teachers, 4) provides management with greater operational flexibility to meet student needs, and 5) does not require further cuts to the current budget, or deficit spending.

Below you will find a detailed summary of the Board's final offer to the teachers union, which will also serve as the basis of the one-year employment policy that the Board has reluctantly implemented. (See Finality Resolution on the District website). *V.S.A. Title 16, Chapter 57, Section 2008, Finality of Decisions*, states that once the school board has fully complied with statutory provisions pertaining to the collective bargaining process, it may unilaterally declare an end to negotiations for the year in question if the Board is unable to arrive at a mutually acceptable contract settlement with the union.

1. **Salaries:** The Board increased its previous **new salary dollar offer to 2.75%**, which represents an average dollar increase of **over \$1,900 per full-time equivalent teacher (FTE)**. The rate of increase is more than **three times the current cost of living rate** of 0.8%, based upon data from the Vermont Department of Labor and Bureau of Labor Statistics, and more than typical salary increases most Burlington residents have seen .
2. **Salary Grid:** The Board will implement a salary grid this year that continues to pay for experience and graduate credits, and that achieves the shared goal of the union and District to create a pay scale that is regionally competitive within the county. **Salaries on the new salary grid average 3.2% higher than salaries on the FY16 salary grid**. New salaries will equal or exceed competitiveness benchmarks previously agreed upon by the parties. **Burlington teachers will now rank 3<sup>rd</sup> of 9 at the Base (BA) salary, 4<sup>th</sup> of 9 at the Masters step 10, and 5<sup>th</sup> of 9 at the Masters+30 step 15 salary**, compared with other districts in the county. There will, of necessity, be a **one-year suspension of step advancement** on the salary grid during the 2016-17 school year. The Board has also recommended creating a joint study committee to explore alternative compensation models.
3. **Health Insurance:** The Board withdrew its September 12 proposal that teachers pay 17% of the cost of their health insurance premiums, and accepted the union's earlier offer that **teachers pay 16% of the cost of premiums starting January 1, 2017**.

(cont.)

4. **Placement of new teachers on salary grid:** The Board agrees to maintain the historic step and column salary grid concept, but will require that teacher applicants fully disclose all academic credentials at the time of application in order for the Superintendent to place the teacher on the appropriate column on the salary grid. **The Superintendent will have discretionary authority to determine initial step placement based upon district need and applicant credentials.**
5. **Living Contract/Middle of the Middle Language, Article 18.2-c:** The Board **will delete the experimental language** first negotiated into the contract during the last bargaining cycle. As this final offer indicates, the Board remains committed to keeping the total compensation package for teachers regionally competitive, but will not accept language in the contract that **automatically ties** the salaries of Burlington teachers to salaries negotiated in surrounding towns.
6. **Graduate course tuition reimbursement:** The Board will establish **an \$80,000 pool of money to reimburse teachers for pre-approved coursework during the 2016-17 school year.** Approval will be linked to the relevance of the course to the teacher's instructional area, as well as District needs. In order to insure the District benefits from its expenditures in this area, the Board will require that teachers who receive reimbursement for graduate coursework repay the district if they leave the District within three years of receiving this tuition benefit, at a rate of 100% if they leave within one year, 75% within 2 years, and 50% within 3 years. The Superintendent will have the discretion to waive this requirement in special cases.
7. **Payments for unused sick leave upon separation:** The Board has withdrawn its proposal to eliminate this language from the contract. However, new language will be added specifying that **the benefit will no longer be available for teachers hired after September 16, 2016.**
8. **Paid sick leave:** The Board has withdrawn its proposal to reduce the number of paid sick leave days and will **maintain the current language providing teachers with 20 paid sick days per year,** cumulative to 190 days.
9. **Personal leave days:** The Board has withdrawn its proposal to reduce the number of personal leave days from 4 days to 3 days. In order to resolve an existing problem, however, the Board will require that **teachers secure permission from the Superintendent to use personal leave days** between Memorial Day and the close of the school and on any pre-scheduled District-wide in-service days.
10. **Teacher Work Day:** The work produced by the study committee charged with addressing this matter during the 2015-16 school year is in need of further review by District administrators. The Board acknowledges the concerns raised by teachers and remains open to working collaboratively to address the stated concerns.
11. **403(b) study committee:** The Board agrees to the formation of a committee to explore creation of a voluntary 403(b) benefit option for interested teachers.
12. **Volleyball Category adjustment:** The Board agrees with the union's proposal to move Volleyball to the Category II pay scale.

In summary, this employment policy puts the teachers at a **salary that is higher than the mid-point for the county in several key categories, including starting salaries.** It also ensures a **salary increase on average of \$1900 per full-time equivalent teacher,** and aligns spending on graduate tuition with District needs. We are able to offer these contract terms, while only **modestly increasing the health care contribution of teachers.**

The District's final offer and employment policy reflects present-day economic realities, which **must** be a factor in contract negotiations with all District bargaining units. It also reflects the Board's firm commitment to no longer run deficits and to resist further cuts that will harm the quality of education we can offer our children. The Board is unanimous in its belief that this is a fair contract that reflects our high regard for teachers, while at the same time the economic constraints that the District faces.