

September 19, 2016

Dear Burlington Teachers,

Board Members spoke from the heart on Thursday night in expressing our deep personal regret that we could not approve the BEA's final offer to accept the fact finder's recommendation for a 3.25% salary increase with no other changes in contract parameters, while also meeting our responsibility to maintain a balanced budget. Out of necessity driven by local economic conditions, reductions in Federal funds available to schools, and legislated spending growth restrictions, this year's budget did not permit a business-as-usual approach to spending. Balancing the current budget required use of one-time surplus funds along with painful cuts that affected all aspects of school district operations, of which more than a third came from Central Administration. Funding the BEA proposal would have required more than \$400,000 in additional budget cuts or deliberately committing to deficit spending, neither of which would be a responsible thing to do.

In the face of these budgetary constraints, we and the BEA demonstrated a desire to achieve a negotiated agreement by engaging in the bargaining process for more than a year. Another desire shared by both parties has been to ensure that salaries for Burlington teachers are comparable to those of neighboring districts. However, due to the financial constraints described above, the Board recognized that simply increasing salaries, without making any other changes in the contract, would require us to spend more money on total compensation than we had in the budget that was approved by voters in March.

About 25% of the cost of funding the teachers' contract is driven by provisions other than the teacher salary schedule, including tuition reimbursement, payments of accumulated sick leave at retirement, health insurance, and substitute costs resulting from personal and sick day allotments. The cost to the District of some of these, such as health insurance premiums which will increase 7.9% this year, are increasing at a rate well beyond salary costs.

The one-year employment policy that we reluctantly adopted last Thursday on a 10 yes, 1 no, 1 abstention vote meets our shared goal in that it actually improves the regional competitiveness of Burlington teacher salaries. To be able to afford this, some non-salary provisions of the contract were adjusted but none were eliminated for current teachers. The full resolution is available on the District website, but here are some key points:

- Salaries on the new salary schedule average 3.19% higher than salaries on the schedule it replaces, representing an average increase per teacher of over \$1,900. This translates to a salary budget increase of 2.75%.
 - The ranking of benchmark salaries designated by the BEA will be as follows:
3rd at the BA, Step 1 level, 4th at the MA, Step 10 level, and 5th at the MA+30, Step 15 level
 - The "middle of the middle" contract provision will no longer be in effect
- We accepted an earlier BEA proposal that sets teacher contributions to health insurance at 16% of the premium effective January 1, 2017, compared to the current 15% contribution rate

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- Reimbursement of 100% of graduate course tuition will continue to be available up to a cumulative cost to the District of \$80,000. Some payback requirements will apply to teachers leaving District employment within three years of the year in which they received a tuition reimbursement. (The budget also contains \$1.2M in professional development funds to support District-sponsored training designed to improve teacher effectiveness in addressing the complex needs of our students.)
- No change in the number of allowable personal days. However, personal leave requests after Memorial Day, or on a District-wide Inservice Day, will be subject to advance approval by the Superintendent.
- For new teachers going forward, initial salary step placement when they are hired will be determined by the Superintendent and payment for unused sick days when they leave District employment will not be available.

We acknowledge that adopting an employment policy was not the preferred outcome following a year in which both the BEA and the District worked hard to collaborate. What we also feel, however, is that the terms of this policy are reasonable and that the employment action at this time is in the best interest of our students. Each of us volunteered for service on the School Board with the goal of doing our best to balance the needs of students, staff, and the Burlington community. Over the course of this year, each of us has learned that accomplishing this in the context of current economic realities is extremely difficult. Yet, this is a way forward that provides a stable base from which we can move on to an era in which we can expand and grow rather than contract and cut. With that in mind, we hope that you will join us as we put forth a renewed effort at collaboration and working together in the best interests of Burlington's students and move on to the important task of negotiating a contract that will take effect on September 1, 2017.

With great respect and sincere gratitude for your dedicated service to the children of our community,

Mark Porter, Chair
On behalf of the Burlington School Board