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Fact Finding Session

Burlington, Vermont — Representatives of the Burlington School Board and the Burlington Education Association (BEA) participated in a fact finding session today in accordance with state law, following an unsuccessful mediation session on March 23. The teachers’ contract expires on August 31, 2016 and the parties have been working to negotiate a successor agreement for the past year. The fact finding process provides both parties with an opportunity to present arguments in support of their positions before a neutral hearing officer selected by the parties: Attorney John Cochran.

The Board’s goal was to present data in support of their position that the traditional teacher compensation model is not economically justifiable or sustainable and therefore needs to be changed in order to be more responsive to current economic realities. The data showed that Burlington teacher salaries have achieved parity with salaries for other Vermont professionals. Burlington teacher salary increases in the recent past have exceeded inflation and have been outpacing increases for the average working Vermonter. The data also showed that Burlington teacher health insurance premium costs are higher than average, while teacher contributions towards the cost of their premiums are lower than average for the general workforce, both nationally and in Vermont.

Board Vice Chair Stephanie Seguino commented that, “Students would be harmed by the additional FY17 budget reductions of more than \$1 million that would be required to fund the union’s 5.7% compensation increase proposal.”

The District presented a hypothetical salary grid that would fall within the middle of the salary ranges for teachers in the other Chittenden County school districts, and would distribute increases in a more equitable manner than the existing salary grid model. Board Chair Mark Porter stated that, “The Board remains committed to providing regionally competitive compensation but the associated salary increases will only be affordable if some of the dollars used to fund other generous benefits are reallocated to help pay for them.”

The fact finder is required to issue his report within the next 30 days. The findings in the report are not binding, but will serve as a frame of reference when contract negotiations resume.

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