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## SCHOOL BOARD REACTS TO FACT FINDING REPORT

On July 17, Michael Ryan, the fact finder on teacher contract negotiations sent the Burlington School Board and teachers' union (BEA) his advisory report, assessing each side's proposals for settlement.

"The fact finder offered helpful analysis in some areas, which we will use as a basis for finding common ground," said Stephanie Seguino, negotiations chair for the Board. "Mr. Ryan's analysis departed, however, from key economic realities at both the local and state level. His final recommendations were based primarily on a small number of teacher contract settlements scattered across the state where economic circumstances differ substantially, and included districts benefiting from extra Act 46 revenue."

The report also contains important factual errors. For example, the fact finder based his salary recommendation on an erroneous assumption that the District increased the FY18 budget by 5.8 percent over the FY17 budget. The actual increase was 4.3 percent. As a result, the fact finder appeared to assume the District has \$1.28 million more in revenue than is actually available.

Mr. Ryan used the erroneous revenue calculations as the baseline to recommend a 2.75 percent salary increase in the first year, and 3.5 percent in the second.

"We just don't have the kind of money the fact finder suggested is available—at least not without cutting programs and reducing staff," said Mark Porter, School Board Chairperson. "The Board is loathe to consider either of these alternatives after several years of budget cuts that led to loss of programs and staff."

The Board has offered the teachers' union 1.75 percent in new salary money in a first year of the contract and 2 percent in the second year, which would give every teacher an average annual raise of \$1,241 in the first year and \$1,419 in the second year of a contract.

Fact finder Ryan did not factor the legislative policy direction of Act 85, the recently passed teacher health care compromise, into his recommendations.

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"In his analysis, Mr. Ryan's report also ignored the potential negative financial impact of that law on the District, which may make reaching a settlement more difficult," said Commissioner Mark Barlow, a member of the Board negotiating team.

The Board met with the teachers' union on July 25 to negotiate operational issues, and believes modest progress was made toward agreement on some items. Time did not permit a discussion of salary and health care, and the Board will continue to make itself available to meet so as to ensure the contract issues are resolved before the start of the school year.

While the Board is unable to fully accept the fact finder's recommendations on salary and health care, negotiation team members said the Board will work with some of the fact finder's more balanced recommendations in hopes that they will set the stage for needed compromise in other areas.

The complete fact finding report [is available to view here](#).

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