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BURLINGTON SCHOOL BOARD SETS TEACHER CONTRACT TERMS

Early this morning the Burlington School Board, in a 9 to 1 vote, passed a finality resolution to establish employment terms for the teachers’ union with a one-year contract period beginning on September 1. This action was taken with regret that 10 months of negotiations between the Board and Burlington Education Association (BEA) had not produced an agreement. A final bargaining session held yesterday lasted over seven hours but did not put the parties within reach of a negotiated settlement.

The guiding principle for the board in contract negotiations was advancing the quality of student education and, in particular, addressing the persistent lack of significant progress in closing the achievement gap and reducing the high school dropout rate. In addition, the Board was committed to a contract that promoted financial sustainability, maintained competitive salaries, and continued to offer high-quality affordable health care for teachers and their families.

The employment terms established by the Board provide, on average, a \$1,702 raise for teachers (this represents an increase of 2.4%, which is significantly above the cost of living factor, 1.3%). In addition, the terms offer teachers access to virtually the same health insurance as in the past, but with lower costs (teachers will benefit from a substantial reduction in health care premiums, while maintaining access to the same providers and services as last year). The table below compares current premium and out-of-pocket (OOP) costs with those under the new plan, adopted in the Board’s employment policy.

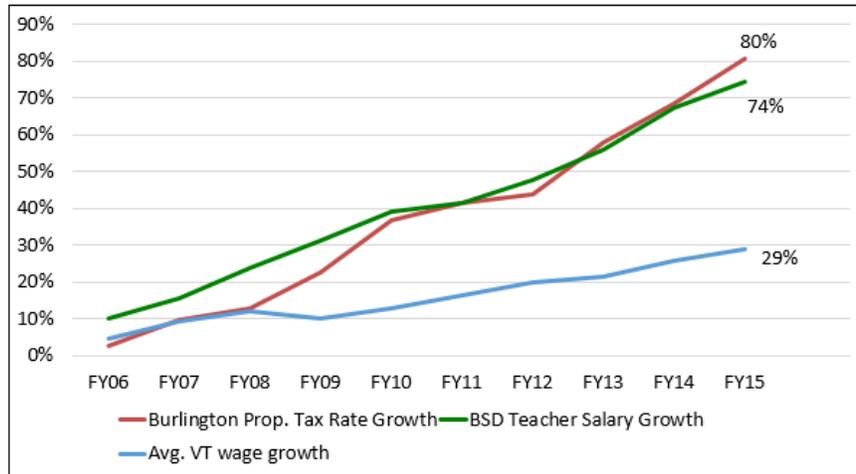
Board Proposal – Health Care

	Current Premium	New Premium	Current Avg. OOP	New Max OOP	Teacher Savings
Single	\$1,535	\$1,256	\$400	\$400	\$279
Parent +1 Child	\$3,017	\$1,942	\$800	\$800	\$1,075
Parent + Children	\$4,045	\$1,942	\$1,200+	\$800	\$2,503+
2 Adult	\$3,017	\$2,359	\$800	\$800	\$659
Family	\$4,045	\$3,479	\$1,600	\$1,200	\$966

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Regarding financial sustainability, as the graph below indicates, both Burlington teacher salaries and Burlington property tax rates have risen at a pace that far outstrips average Vermont wages. While the Board is committed to keeping Burlington teacher salaries competitive, it is creatively working within community financial constraints.

Cumulative Growth of Property Taxes, BSD Salary, and Avg. VT Wages



The salary and benefits provisions of the employment policy adopted by the Board represent a sincere effort to balance respect for the economic circumstances of both teachers and taxpayers. Contrary to the contention of the BEA, the FY18 budget does not contain funds sufficient to meet their demands unless they are diverted from budget lines that support programs and services for students.

“In the context of student needs and the ability of the community to fund public education, the contract terms set by the Board are fair and reasonable,” said Commissioner Mark Porter.

The operational issues under negotiation stem from the Board’s instruction to the Superintendent regarding closing the achievement gap in student performance. The employment terms provide administrators greater flexibility in directing and coordinating the talented teachers in our district in order to create common approaches to address a long-standing problem. As an example of the depth of the challenge, only 25% of low-income students who qualify for Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) scored as proficient on the District’s reading assessment in 2016/17, compared to 69% of non-FRL students. Those students on IEPs or 504 plans saw an even wider gap, with only 12% rating proficient, compared to 58% of those not on IEPs/504 plans. Math score disparities were even wider. Similar gaps in high school completion rates exist. Of all FRL students who start 9th grade, 15% fail to graduate within 5 years compared to 3% of non-FRL students. That percentage among students on IEPs/504 plans is even higher at 21%. Many of these students have dropped out of high school. Failure to address achievement gaps has

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a negative impact on the lives of children and our entire community, not only now, but well into their future.

The employment terms create more flexibility for Burlington High School to offer additional support for students, though a modest increase in teacher assigned time, starting in January 2018 (a typical BHS teacher would have 54% of their day in teaching assignments, rather than 47%). The terms still guarantee teachers two planning blocks in the combined Blue/White day schedules, but will allow BHS to offer additional support such independent studies, smaller supervised study halls, or even, with teacher agreement, additional classes. The terms create an advisory Academic Achievement Gap Committee, which will create a collaborative teacher/administrative approach to effectively using this additional teacher time. In addition, the Board responded to BEA concerns about elementary school prep time needs, and the employment terms offer elementary teachers relief from arrival and dismissal duty, (beginning January 30, 2018) and offers an increase in duty free lunch time.

While the Board was reluctant to adopt this employment policy, since late October 2016, a total of 17 meetings were held with the BEA in an effort to settle this contract and avoid the disruption that takes place if a settlement has not been reached prior to the start of school. Continuing negotiations that should have been completed in the prior year diverts Board and administrative attention away from the budget preparation process and addressing other important educational policy matters. It also diverts attention from the need to begin negotiations for *next year's* teacher contract (which, if settled in a timely manner, could be clearly reflected in the new budget). It needlessly increases the District's legal expenses for negotiations and other potential litigation. Moreover, other District unions are waiting for the teacher contract settlement before engaging in more meaningful talks.

“When negotiations stall, it can be tempting to simply to continue meet and talk. But if there is no sign that negotiations are really moving toward a mutually acceptable compromise on the issues, continued negotiations have very real costs for the community,” said Commissioner Mark Barlow, a member of the Negotiations Committee.

The employment terms established by the finality resolution replace the previous contract that expired on August 31.

“It is time to move on in pursuit of our common interests in keeping our schools vibrant centers of learning where all are welcome and all receive an education that will help them succeed,” said Commissioner Anne Judson, a member of the Board's Negotiations Committee.

One positive outcome of the negotiations process was that both parties agreed that they share the common goal of making changes to the contract that may be necessary to experience greater success in closing the achievement gap in a manner that leads to improved outcomes for all students. The Board stands ready to engage in thoughtful discussions regarding how best to accomplish this as we prepare to commence the next round of contract negotiations.

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The Finality Resolution passed last night is posted on the District website, <http://www.bsdt.org/school-board/negotiations/>, along with a negotiations update presentation.

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