

## Information on Teacher Contract Negotiations August 18, 2017

Teacher contract negotiations require meaningful concessions on the part of both parties in order to reach a settlement. The outstanding issues themselves are not easy, having to do with salary, healthcare, and operational matters. Therefore the focus of negotiations and public debate must focus accurate characterization of the positions of the parties. The Board is committed to avoiding distractions that too often can arise from misinformation.

To that end, in response to a second leaflet recently circulated by the BEA in Burlington, which contains numerous misstatements, we would like to correct the record as follows.

- **Misinformation:** Teacher retention is a problem due to low pay.
- **Fact:** Burlington School District has an annual turnover rate of approximately 3% of all teachers. This percentage is very low, and in fact, is lower than the national average for teachers. There has been no statistically noteworthy change in that trend in recent years. Burlington School District continues to attract large numbers of highly qualified applicants for job openings each year.
- **Misinformation:** Board policies limit the amount of time the teachers have to plan and collaborate.
- **Fact:** Since the factfinding report was issued, the Board has made two proposals to the BEA that would improve the amount of time the teachers have to plan and collaborate. One plan addresses challenges at the elementary school level and the second at the high school level. The BEA failed to accept the Board's proposals or make a counter proposal.
- **Misinformation:** Resources allocated to teacher compensation have declined.
- **Fact:** Teacher salaries have increased every year at a pace that greatly exceeds the rate of inflation. The BEA has claimed that teacher salaries as a percentage of the total budget have declined. This approach is flawed because it uses the overall budget rather than the general fund to make this calculation. More importantly, not every dollar increase in resources coming into the district should lead to an increase in teacher salaries. Some of the funds coming into the district are restricted, such as funding for capital projects, multilingual liaisons, new playgrounds, and so forth. The most important metric in terms of assessing salary growth is the percentage increase in teacher salaries in comparison average wage growth. The rate of growth of teacher salaries has exceeded wage growth of the average Vermonter over at least the last five years.
- **Misinformation:** The Board's proposal weakens teacher health insurance benefits.
- **Fact:** The Board's proposal continues to offer teachers high quality health insurance benefits that are comparable with the present plans, but have premium levels significantly lower than the current plans. To see greater details about the Board's proposal, see an op-ed by Commissioner Anne Judson in the Burlington Free Press on August 4, 2017 and on the BSD website.

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- **Misinformation:** The Board is dragging on its feet in negotiating after the release of the factfinder’s report on July 17.
- **Fact:** The Board has repeatedly reached out to the BEA to negotiate since October, 2016. The BEA declined to bring its contract proposal to the table until the end of January, 2017. The Board has initiated the scheduling of all bargaining sessions thus far, but has had a difficult time securing dates from the BEA. We have offered to meet anytime, anywhere, including on Saturdays, and over the summer. Our goal has been and continues to be to complete negotiations before school starts to avoid disruptions to families and children. Most recently, on August 8, the BEA’s negotiations team failed to attend a scheduled bargaining session, informing the Board it would not be willing to meet again until August 24. And although hard to estimate precisely, the collective investment of Board members’ time has been upwards of at least 300 hours thus far.

The Board cannot say enough how committed we are to reaching a settlement with teachers that offers fair compensation in the context of our goal of prioritizing the needs of children in the school district and taking into account economic conditions, and the ability of the community to pay. We are committed to achieving this goal by the start of the school year.

While negotiations can be tough, we urge all parties to engage in respectful, honest public comments about this process, each party’s position, and outcomes. And we hope the community will demand a respectful process.

Let’s all of us in our community take the high road. We may differ on the positions of the BEA and the Board and those issues are legitimate to debate and disagree on. But to undermine, misrepresent, and attack the “other side” — too prevalent a tactic in national politics—does not need to be the road we take here in Burlington.

More detailed information on the Board’s and BEA’s positions as well as supporting documents can be found on the district’s webpage at [www.bsdtv.org](http://www.bsdtv.org).

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