

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: March 17, 2017

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Teacher Contract Talks Reach Impasse

The Burlington School District notified the Burlington Education Association (BEA) today, March 17, 2017, that a state of impasse exists in contract talks for the 2017-2018 school year. That said, the Board has notified the union that it is willing to continue meeting in the weeks leading up to mediation and factfinding.

Since the BEA brought its substantive proposals to the table on January 31, the parties have met approximately ten times in an unsuccessful effort to reach a settlement. The union proposed a total increase in new salary-related dollars of 7.74% (5.74% in direct salary plus an additional 2% salary contribution to a new retirement benefit). The District's opening salary offer would increase salaries by 0.5%.

According to Board Chairperson Mark Porter, "The Board's opening salary is a starting point that is much closer to the recent 4-year inflation annual trend of 1.1% than the union's proposal. We're willing to compromise, but given the gap between the two salary proposals, it's clear that mediation will be needed to help the parties reach agreement."

In addition to wages, both parties proposed numerous operational changes. The Board's operational proposals are intended to improve the District's ability to meet student needs by simplifying outdated and confusing contract language—often decades old—that governs the workday, teaching assignments, and similar areas, without reducing teacher compensation.

The union also brought proposals in similar operational areas that include reducing teacher-student instructional time, which the Board does not believe is in the best interest of students.

The BEA's proposals are estimated to increase total costs by \$5.3 million dollars. Funding such a proposal would require cuts to student programs, or an additional tax increase of over 9%.

To ensure a timely settlement and save money for both parties, the Board has asked the BEA to combine the mediation and fact finding processes, and has requested that this process take place before the end of April.

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Vice-Chairperson Stephanie Seguino added, “The Board is very sensitive to the community’s desire that we complete negotiations before school starts in late August. To do this, we need mediation to begin as soon as possible in order to reach a quality agreement.”

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