



## **The Link between Negotiations and Educating Children**

Burlington School Board

April 4, 2017

In approaching contract negotiations with employee unions, the School Board is informed by its **Mission Statement**: “The mission of the Burlington School District is to graduate students who: value different cultures; engage with the community; communicate effectively; think creatively; skillfully solve problems; and achieve at their highest academic, intellectual and personal potential.”

Our goal is to align staff contracts with that mission. The challenge is to find ways to fulfill our mission to close the achievement gap among our student population, and to ensure a high quality education for all, given real world limitations on resources. We have a student body that brings very diverse needs to school each day—instructional, physical, language, social, cultural, emotional, and more. Burlington taxpayers have generously supported the District’s efforts to meet these needs, and it is important for us to respect the circumstances that limit their capacity to fund ongoing spending increases.

It should come as no surprise that good stewardship of taxpayer dollars is paramount as we balance program needs with establishing staffing and negotiated compensation levels. All of these are tightly interrelated. Due to budget restrictions, every dollar spent in one area is a dollar unavailable for another.

This explains why the Board seeks to make a number of important operational changes to the teacher contract that will modify out-of-date and confusing contract language that interferes with the most efficient use of staff resources. We seek contract language that will increase flexibility to meet the needs of students today and comply with the many requirements placed upon the District. We believe these changes will help to improve services to children and promote increased professional collaboration with existing resources.

Working within these challenging constraints, the Board’s overarching goal in negotiations is to provide a sustainable contract that advances the District’s mission and contributes positively to our students’ ever-changing needs, while reducing the risk of program losses. Our specific objectives are:

- Improved operational effectiveness to better meet student needs
- Fiscal sustainability
- Increased transparency for the public, and
- Expediency so that contract talks are concluded by summer; resources and time are limited.

The Burlington School District's teachers are highly valued partners in educating the city's children and the Board is committed to fair compensation within the limits of the community's ability to pay. We are pleased that with last year's contract, we were able to raise starting teacher pay to a level that is now among the highest in the county.

In this round of contract negotiations, the Board remains committed to securing a contract settlement that operationally and fiscally enables the District to best serve *all* of Burlington's school children, and that is sustainable, fair to teachers, and affordable to taxpayers.