



BEDFORD CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT
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**Bedford Central School District
Board of Education Meeting
September 30, 2009**

**STATEMENT OF THE BEDFORD CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT BOARD OF
EDUCATION REGARDING THE NEGOTIATING IMPASSE WITH THE
BEDFORD TEACHERS ASSOCIATION**

On September 23, 2009, the negotiating teams of the Board of Education and the Bedford Teachers Association (“BTA”) concluded that they have reached an impasse in their negotiations for a new contract. This statement is intended to explain why there is an impasse, and what the Board’s goals are in the negotiations.

Background

The current contract between the District and BTA expired June 30, 2009. By New York State law, the terms of this contract remain in effect after its expiration, until a new contract is agreed to by both sides. Like all the District’s union contracts, the BTA contract is available online at www.bcsdny.org.

The negotiating teams for each side have been bargaining for a successor contract since February of 2009. Thirteen formal negotiating sessions have been held, not counting additional informal meetings and conversations. The District’s negotiating team is comprised of the Board’s lead negotiator, Richard Kass of the law firm of Bond, Schoeneck, & King, Superintendent Jere Hochman, Assistant Superintendent for Business and Administrative Services Mark Betz, and Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources Robert Cooper.

Overview

The Board of Education values the work and worth of the professionals who teach our students every day. Although we may disagree over the rate at which their salaries can reasonably be increased over the next several years, there is no doubt that our teachers are a superb group of professionals.

In an effort to enhance student learning and professionalism and to prepare for significant revenue shortfalls, the District’s proposal addresses:

- Salary Increases
- Professional Development
- Health Insurance Contributions
- Differentiated Teaching Assignments

The District has proposed the following:

1. • **A single salary increase for every teacher** commensurate with current economic conditions and anticipated revenues trends. The Board's salary proposal 1) offers a salary increase to every teacher; 2) eliminates the approach of an across-the-board salary increase in addition to an increase for teachers on salary steps (years 1-15); and 3) slows the trajectory of salary increases to align with anticipated constraints on future budgets.
2. • **Compensation for Professional Development** that provides options for a teacher to increase his or her compensation based on professional growth and performance. Current contract language of "Career differential" increases that are not connected to additional work or performance would be phased out.
3. • **An increase in health insurance contribution** in line with increases that other employees have been asked to contribute.
4. • **Differentiate teaching assignments** such as number of periods taught per day based on the differing workloads in different subject areas, while increasing opportunities for collaborative planning where necessary.

Throughout this process, the Board's goal has been to achieve a contract that:

- promotes the highest levels of student achievement and professional development,
- is fair to our hardworking and highly-valued teaching staff, and
- is consistent with the District's short-term and long term budget constraints.

Our aim is to maintain programs, keep class sizes low, and enhance innovation and continuous professional development knowing we must anticipate projected budget constraints including known expenditure increases, anticipated reduced state and federal revenue, and keeping taxes in line with community expectations. To do this, we must match our projected expenditures with projected revenue.

When considering budget constraints, we took into account that the state budget crisis may threaten state aid, that state-mandated pension costs will be increasing, and that our taxpayers are suffering through the deepest recession in generations. In May, the citizens of our District voted in favor of a budget that reflected a budget-to-budget decrease of -0.67% and an overall decrease in the tax levy of -1.44%.

For the past decade, budget-to-budget and tax levy increases have been in the range of 5% to 9%. We do not anticipate revenues growing at those rates anytime in the foreseeable future.

77% of the district's annual budget consists of expenditures for salary and benefits for district administrators, teachers, and staff members. If we are to retain the quality and integrity of our instructional program, we must slow the trajectory of expenditure growth in salary and benefits, increase efficiency wherever possible, and tie any extra compensation to professional growth and performance.

In developing our proposal, we took into account trends in the cost of living. Over the 20 years before the current contract expired, the Consumer Price Index for metropolitan New York increased by 81.8%. Over that same time period, the salary schedule in the teachers' contract increased by 125%. Over the 2008-09 school year, the CPI *decreased* by 1.3%. During that same year, the salary schedule in the teachers' contract increased by

3.5%, and almost 70% of teachers received total increases of more than 6.5%. Over the long term as well as the short term, salaries based on the contract have outstripped the rate of inflation by a substantial margin.

The District's Proposal

With these goals in mind, the District's last proposal contains the following primary elements:

First, with regard to salary increases, it is important to note that when reporting the salary increases in school district contracts, the usual practice in Westchester is to disregard the cost of moving employees up on multistep salary schedules. We believe this practice obscures the true cost to the school district. The multistep salary schedule establishes salary "steps" for each year of teaching. Per contract, an increase in compensation is given for moving up a step.

Each step in the contract schedule indicates a salary increase that ranges from 3% to 7% of salary.

Approximately 75% of our teachers have not yet reached the top step of our 15-step salary schedule. For those "on steps," the contract essentially allocates two increases each year instead of one—the general increase applied to the entire salary schedule, plus the increase for moving up a step on the salary schedule.

Our proposal represents a change from the usual way of doing business by giving teachers only one automatic increase per year.

The District's proposal includes salary increases totaling 3.2% in 2009-2010, 2.2% in 2010-11, and 2.2% in 2011-12, *inclusive of step increases*, not in addition to step increases.

Moving teachers up one step on the current salary schedule costs about 2.2% of payroll.

IF we were to describe our salary proposal the way Westchester school districts usually do, ignoring the cost of step increases, our proposal would describe increases of 1% in 2009-10 and 0% in 2010-11 and 2011-12.

When the automatic step increases are taken into account, (and teachers receive only one increase) as they should, the District's proposal is for total average salary increases of 3.2%, 2.2%, and 2.2%.

Second, the district has proposed a new program that offers professional development stipends to be given on the basis of each teacher's professional growth. Only those teachers who demonstrate continued professional growth would receive such a stipend. Stipends would vary according to teachers' individual circumstances and choices for professional growth. We have proposed that the District spend the equivalent of 1% of payroll on these stipends in 2010-11 and an additional 1% of payroll in 2011-12.

Thus, our *total* compensation proposal, including step increases and including professional development stipends, is for 3.2% average increases each year of a three-year contract.

In light of the professional development program, we have proposed the *phase-out* of so-called “career differentials” and other payments that all teachers with 18 or more years in the profession currently receive without regard to individual accomplishment. These “career differentials” give senior teachers salary increases of approximately 3% without any connection to professional growth, learning, or demonstration of performance. (Note: Teachers who already acquire or are approaching the “career differential” in this contract period would be “grandfathered”).

On first glance, it may appear that our compensation proposal is overly generous in light of the current state of the economy and the low rate of inflation. However, our hands are tied by New York State law. The current collective bargaining agreement contains a salary schedule containing 15 steps. Teachers move up one step per year until they reach the top step. New York law provides that teachers are entitled to move up a step even after the contract expires.

As stated above, the cost of moving teachers up on the step schedule in this way is approximately 2.2% of their payroll each year. Thus, New York law guarantees that BTA’s members will receive an average increase of 2.2% per year *even in the absence of a new contract*. We have offered to increase average compensation by 1% each year above this 2.2% floor, and in the second and third years of the contract we have tied this additional 1% to professional development.

Third, we have proposed that the teachers’ share of their health insurance premiums be increased to 20%. In the spirit of moving toward an agreement, the district later proposed increasing the contribution gradually over five years from 10% to 15%. In the private sector, it is common for employees to pay 50% of the premiums or more and the U.S. government employee contribution is 25%. The District’s central administrators now pay 20% of their premiums. We believe it is fair for our teachers to pay a contribution rate commensurate with their relative income.

Fourth, regarding differentiated teacher assignments, we have proposed that the District have the right to assign teachers to teaching schedules commensurate with the demands of their teaching load. Currently, all secondary teachers teach five periods out of a nine-period day.

The Board believes that the demands of preparation, teaching, and student assessment vary in different subject areas. Furthermore, a contract that permits some teachers to teach more classes allows the district to offer more sections of some subjects rather than being pressed to cut courses or increase class sizes. Therefore, the District should have the management right to assign secondary school teachers with differing workloads to a sixth period of teaching. At the same time, the Board has stated a willingness to discuss ways by which elementary school teachers can gain more time for planning without reducing student contact time.

BTA’s Position

BTA has rejected our proposal. They insist on a contract that would be radically different. Specifically, their response to the primary elements of our proposal is as follows:

- BTA insists that the overall compensation package should be increased by 4.7% in 2009-10, 5.4% in 2010-11, and 5.6% in 2011-12. BTA does not phrase their proposal this way, because they do not include the 2.2% cost of step increases when they talk about compensation.

They therefore characterize their proposal as 2.5%, 3.2%, and 3.4%. No matter how BTA's compensation proposal is characterized, we believe it is much too high in light of the troubled state of the economy, the low rate of inflation, and the District's short-term and long-term budget constraints.

- BTA has not foreclosed the idea of diverting some part of the compensation package to professional development stipends. We welcome BTA's openness to this idea, and hope they will continue to participate in the committee that is working on developing the details of this new program.

- BTA has refused to agree to increase their health insurance contributions except in the context of its compensation proposal described above. Even then, they refuse to agree to any increase beyond 13%, phased in over three years.

- BTA refuses to permit any teachers to teach more than five periods without extra pay.

The Road From Here

The Board of Education has the highest of expectations for Bedford students and is keenly aware that the continued growth and skills of district employees are the means to achieving those ends. However, the district can no longer operate "business as usual" in light of economic trends for the foreseeable future. Therefore, the district's major proposals include:

1. A single salary increase for every teacher commensurate with current economic conditions and anticipated revenues trends;
2. Compensation for teachers based upon professional growth and performance and phasing out "Career differential" increases that are not connected to additional work or performance;
3. An increase in health insurance contribution in line with increases that other employees have been asked to contribute.
4. Differentiated teaching assignments based on the differing workloads in different subject areas while increasing opportunities for collaborative planning.

As this summary makes apparent, the District and BTA are far apart in their positions. It is for this reason that both sides have agreed that they have reached an impasse. This means that PERB, the Public Employment Relations Board, will assign a mediator to try to facilitate an agreement. Mediation will probably take place later this fall.

The Board greatly respects the work of the teachers of our District, but respectfully disagrees with the teachers' union's position on its contract. We hope that as the negotiating process continues in mediation, we will continue to communicate with each other in a respectful and collegial manner. We appreciate the hard work that their members do every day for our students, and we promise to continue to work with them to provide the highest quality education for our children.