

CONTRACT NEGOTIATION UPDATE

Southwest Vermont Supervisory Union
and

Southwest Vermont Regional Technical School District

Board negotiators left a 16 hour negotiation session that began at noon on October 18th disheartened and frustrated that Association negotiators decided to terminate negotiations rather than discuss the Board team's last detailed offer for a one year contract for the current year. While expiration of the agreement between the Boards and the Association on June 30, 2010 has resulted in a protracted dispute, it is a dispute that is typical of prior negotiations in the Southwest Vermont Supervisory Union and most teacher negotiations throughout the state. The disagreement is centered on salary, health insurance and time teachers spend providing direct services to students.

Salary:

While there are numerous ways to discuss teacher salaries, what is consistently of greatest importance to teachers is the amount of an increase, if any, from the prior year. The Boards' final offer provides every teacher an increase over the salary they received in 2010-2011. This is certainly less than the annual increases of \$1800 and over that many teachers have come to expect. However, as all teachers in the Association know, many people in the communities where they work have seen no increase in income in several years, while others have seen reductions in their earnings or lost their jobs. Given the current economy and existing uncertainty about the costs which local communities may incur as a result of hurricane Irene, Board negotiators believe that the modest increase they have offered is reasonable. Indeed, some argue that it would be appropriate to offer no salary increase this year.

Health Insurance:

Teachers employed by SVSU, its member districts and the technical center are provided health insurance coverage that rivals any available in the state. Contract terms in effect for this year require teachers to pay an additional 5% of the premium cost for the insurance they select. This additional cost is \$337 for teachers who elect single person coverage, \$662 for two person coverage and \$887 for family coverage. Recognizing the modest amount of the salary increase offered this year, Board negotiators have agreed to reimburse all teachers the additional 5% premium cost they are required to pay. Consequently, teachers will pay 15% of the cost of their health insurance this year; the same amount they paid last year.

Working Conditions:

The changes in working conditions offered by Board negotiators apply to approximately half of the teachers in SVSU and the technical center. None of the changes apply to elementary schools.

Middle school contract terms for this year provide for teachers to provide, on average, 300 minutes during a 450 minute work day in direct contact with students providing instruction, advisories or tutorials. The contract terms also provide for teachers to be assigned up to 30 minutes of administrative duty time each day. The Association asks that middle school teachers provide up to 327 minutes per day for time in direct contact with students and administrative duties. Consequently, the only difference between what the Boards' are seeking is the addition of 3 minutes, with a clear allocation of time between direct student contact activities and administrative duties.

High school contract terms for this year provide for the same 300 minutes of direct student contact activities per day as are applicable to the middle school. The Association seeks to limit this to no more than 255 minutes of direct instruction time, with no specific recognition of time for student advisories or tutorials. The 45 minutes sought by the Boards does not lengthen teachers' 450 minute workday. It simply provides that during 5 hours of that work day, teachers could be working directly with students. Also, the actual schedule in place at the high school this year does not fully utilize the additional 45 minutes allowed by the contract since this year's schedule was substantially developed before the Boards' contract changes became effective at the end of June.

Technical center contract terms for this year provide for teachers to provide 300 minutes per day of direct instruction during the 7.5 hour work day, 45 minutes more than the 255 minutes proposed by the Association. The Association also proposes that technical center teachers who provide this additional instruction be paid additional compensation at the teacher's per diem rate, as has been done in the past. In prior years technical center teachers who have taught more than 240 minutes (now increased to 255 minutes based on the Association's latest proposal) have received thousands of dollars above their annual salary simply for teaching students during their regular 7.5 hour workday. The Boards' offer reflects its determination that it is both reasonable and appropriate to require teachers to spend at least 5 hours out of each 7.5 hour work day providing services directly to students without receiving compensation in addition to their annual salary.

Board negotiators were willing to continue negotiations beyond 2:15 AM this morning when Association representatives walked out. In an effort to continue negotiations, the Board team asked for the 2:00 PM negotiation session today. Board negotiators have not yet heard from the Association what amount of salary increase is needed to resolve the pending dispute. If \$200 is insufficient, the Board team asks whether \$300, \$500, \$1000 or \$2000 per teacher would be. On health insurance, the Boards' offer provides for no increase in teacher contribution this year. Apparently this is not enough. Board negotiators are left wondering whether the Association is actually seeking a reduction in the 15% teachers have paid for several years. Finally, while teachers have been making statements to the public about their dedication to students, they have been seeking at the bargaining table to limit the time they spend providing direct services to students. As discussed above, what the Board team seeks does not impact elementary teachers and involves virtually no change for middle school teachers. Also, the additional student contact time now available under the contract at the high school has not been included in this year's schedule. Consequently, the only real change this year relates solely to additional compensation paid teachers for hours worked during the 7.5 hour work day at technical center teachers.

To conclude, what the Boards have offered to the teachers for the current year, together with the manner in which new work hour provisions for the high school have been implemented this year, addresses each of the Association's identified areas of concern. Certainly, if the teachers want a greater salary increase this year, they need to inform the Board team of the amount of their request. To the extent that teachers are concerned about how contract provisions may be applied during the next school year, there is amply time to negotiate further changes before it starts without disrupting the current year. It is time for the Association to move on from the past 22 months and begin negotiations for a contract for a term commencing July 1, 2012.

Issued by the Negotiation team for the Southwest Vermont Supervisory Union school districts and the Southwest Vermont Regional Technical School District on October 19, 2011:

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