

CONTRACT NEGOTIATION UPDATE

October 28, 2011

Southwest Vermont Supervisory Union
and

Southwest Vermont Regional Technical School District

The Truth About Negotiations on Thursday, October 27th

At the facilitator's request, Board and Association negotiators met face-to-face at 11:00 AM yesterday morning. In a final effort to reach agreement, he asked that the parties give consideration to a specific proposal with the understanding that the negotiating teams would not disclose to anyone else that a proposal was under consideration or the terms of the proposal. If the parties did not agree to submit the proposal, in its entirety, to their respective constituents for ratification, neither party would mention that a proposal had been considered or the terms of the proposal.

At approximately 2:00 PM, Board negotiators informed the facilitator that they would submit the proposal to their boards. At 2:30, the Association responded that it would only submit the proposal to its membership if the health insurance and working conditions were substantially modified. Under the agreed-upon rules, this constituted a rejection of the only proposal under consideration. The parties were not authorized to make different proposals and were only required to respond to the specific proposal under consideration. The facilitator communicated the Association's response to the Board team. The Board team, in accordance with the rules, asked the facilitator to inform Association negotiators that based on the Association's rejection of the proposal, negotiations were concluded.

Upon receiving the Board team's communication from the facilitator, the Association asked that it be granted additional time for consideration. Board negotiators agreed that the Association could have an additional hour, until 3:30. At 3:40 the Association again rejected the proposal by again requiring revision of the health insurance and working condition provisions. Again Board negotiators acknowledged the Association's rejection of the proposal. Based on this, the facilitator informed the media that negotiations were suspended with no further sessions scheduled. Consistent with the rules in effect for the day, the facilitator made no mention of a specific proposal and stated that the parties had simply run out of things to say. Board negotiators issued a similar statement at approximately 5:00 PM.

At 5:47 PM, the VTNEA issued a release to its statewide membership and the media stating that negotiations broke down because Board negotiators refused the teachers' last offer that contained "significant concessions". Stephanie Peters is quoted in the release stating, "[i]t appears that anything short of pure capitulation to their demands will not satisfy the boards."

VTNEA's issuance of this release clearly violated the conditions established by the facilitator. More importantly, however, the content of the release is simply untrue. The proposal under consideration required both parties to make significant concessions. For the Boards' part, the concessions involved providing a substantial salary increase and allowing teachers to receive "step" increases during negotiation of a new agreement. Association concessions included accepting changes in working conditions and health insurance contributions. The Association twice rejected the proposal, refusing to accept the changes in working conditions and health insurance.

Board negotiators had serious doubts about the likelihood of obtaining board approval for the proposal but were willing to take it to their boards in an effort to end the strike. Accordingly, Board negotiators accepted the proposal. They did not reject any offers made by the Association since, as explained above, the Association was not authorized to make any offers. As of 3:40 PM yesterday afternoon, the Board team abandoned further consideration of the rejected proposal.

It is apparent to Board negotiators, that the strike is continuing at this time in large part because of the Association's unwillingness to provide its membership and the public truthful information. Issuance of grossly inaccurate information only brings unnecessary confusion to a situation that requires greater clarity. Also, characterizing Board negotiators as being uncompromising when such is clearly not the case, adversely impacts the ability of the parties to work together cooperatively as they must.

It is truly unfortunate that the VTNEA and its local Association believe they must be dishonest with their membership and the community to obtain what they consider a "fair" contract. It seems far more likely that the strike will come to a prompt end if the Association provides its membership objective and accurate information. The Board team has attempted to do just that with the statements it has been issuing. It will continue to do so.

As of issuance of this statement, the positions of the parties continue unchanged from those summarized in the Board

team's October 26th, 5:45 PM statement. The Association's representative informed the facilitator at 2:30 PM today that the Association has a "new" proposal to present to the Board team. Given the facilitator's unavailability over the weekend, the parties will meet on Monday morning. Board negotiators ask that the Association provide its proposal in writing over the weekend to the Boards' representative. This will allow Board negotiators to develop information needed to evaluate the proposal over the weekend and expedite discussions on Monday.

Issued by the Negotiation team for the Southwest Vermont Supervisory Union school districts and the Southwest Vermont Regional Technical School District on October 28, 2011:

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