



April 17, 2017

Update on Teacher Contract Negotiations

From the Colchester School Board Negotiating Team

The contract between the Colchester School Board (CSB) and the Colchester Education Association (CEA), the Colchester teachers' union, will expire on June 30, 2017. The negotiating teams for both sides have been meeting since December 2016 working on a new contract. On April 12th, the board declared an impasse and requested mediation.

This is an update from the CSB negotiating team on the progress of negotiations and next steps in the process.

The board conducted months of research and planning before negotiations. The questions we explored included the following: Is Colchester attracting and retaining great teachers? Are we rewarding outstanding teachers? Are we getting good candidates for openings? We want to recruit and keep outstanding faculty.

Colchester teachers are doing a great job. They deserve competitive compensation. Our challenge is that many Colchester taxpayers are struggling with taxes increasing at a higher rate than household incomes. We have to balance affordable tax increases with the compensation increases necessary to recruit and keep great teachers.

Another negotiating goal is to increase community goodwill and trust. For this reason, the CSB and CEA have held negotiating sessions open to public comment and observation. We have been posting updates, negotiation meeting schedules, and other relevant information to our negotiations website at <http://www.csdvt.org>.

The board's goal is a contract that attracts and retains high-quality teachers and is supported by the community through its affordability. We balanced these competing goals by offering a salary proposal based on inflation, increases seen by members of the community, and comparison to other Vermont school districts.

Both sides share the same goals of exceptional student learning and operating the district efficiently. We've made progress in negotiations, but after four months we are still apart on the key issue of compensation and believe we haven't gotten significantly closer to an agreement in recent meetings.

On April 12th, the board declared an impasse and requested mediation to help move negotiations forward. The next steps in the negotiating process is to hire a neutral mediator to help iron out issues and reach an agreement. The mediator does not take sides or recommend an outcome. We see mediation a step forward to accelerate the negotiating process.

The board is hopeful that the two sides will reach an agreement during mediation. Some taxpayers have asked why there has to be an agreement. There must be eventual contract resolution between the CSB and the CEA. An agreement will be reached. The challenge is trying to achieve a contract acceptable to teachers and a budget acceptable to taxpayers without making cuts to school programs.

Colchester schools are exceptional. Our schools deliver learning outcomes consistently above the state average at a cost below the state average per student. This accomplishment is possible thanks to the hard work and diligence of everyone in our community—taxpayers, families, teachers, administrators, staff, and students.

The board is committed to working with the CEA to reach an agreement that continues Colchester's tradition of providing exceptional educational opportunities at an affordable cost.

Sincerely,

The Colchester School Board Negotiating Team

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