

From: Merklein, Trip [CO]
Sent: Monday, May 07, 2012 2:17 PM
Cc: Burkett, Kay [CO]; Docherty, Fran [CO]
Subject: Member/Negotiations Update 5/7
Importance: High

Teacher Appreciation Week This week is National Teacher Appreciation Week. Our Board of Education unanimously passed a resolution on April 18th proclaiming last Friday as Tribute to Teachers Day. I hope you enjoyed the moment. So far, the BOE seems hesitant to move much beyond this small gesture and truly recognize the extraordinary work *all* teachers do to meet the unrealistic expectations placed upon us. After a Two Year Step Freeze, a far more meaningful show of appreciation for what we do for our students and community would be a sensible budget that reflects a step increase, balanced with a base increase, and a realistic workload.

On numerous occasions, we've heard our Superintendent and Board of Education say glowing things about St. Vrain teachers' efforts and commitment to our students. While I believe they are sincere, we are at a point where we must have more than complimentary remarks. Don and the Board make it clear that St. Vrain is an exceptional district that other districts look to with envy. However, they seem unwilling to make the genuine demonstration of appreciation: moving beyond a step freeze.

After a decade of experience with financial crisis, budget meltdowns, and a faltering economy, the SVVSD BOE has developed a perspective that has made them exceptionally skittish and pulls them together around excessively conservative budgeting. It's not as if they don't have the means; they just haven't prioritized educators.

Negotiations Update Through negotiations, the BOE has made it clear that they want meaningful compensation for employees that at least keeps up with the rising cost of living. Unfortunately, at this point they are unwilling to get us there, much less honor the practice of granting experience steps. Today, there are a variety of creative ways to achieve step advancement as well as a percentage increase to base pay. Other districts have managed to do so, and if in fact we are exceptional, SVVSD can do the same.

As a result of mediation in the fall of 2010, we entered into the two year agreement with Two Year Step Freeze, an additional Work Day, a 1.3% increase on base pay, and the District paying the .5% increase for PERA employee's contribution for each year. At that time the economy was in a freefall and the budget outlook was dire; it was a practical settlement. Now we have an improving economy and a stabilized budget. It's time to compensate teachers proportional to an expanded workload. Implementation of new programs has continued uninterrupted in the past two years, dramatically

increasing workload, and though there is an undefined policy of “no new initiatives” there is still plenty in the pipeline to keep teachers busy for a long time to come.

Your Negotiations Team returns to the table tomorrow with a proposal we believe to be fair and affordable. The BOE has fixated on the wrong number: an abundant general fund balance that earns virtually no interest. It is overlooking other critical numbers: the future financial liability of continued step freezes and the ultimate exodus of our best teachers to districts that do honor years of experience and step increases.

Step 1 has grown rapidly by 123 teachers over the 2010-12 Two Year Step Freeze (54 to 177), while at the same time over 70 teachers maxed out at the most expensive part of the schedule (end of the columns) have dropped off the schedule. The General Fund gains (while teachers lose) as expensive veterans are replaced with far less expensive novice teachers. At the same time, recruiting both novice and experienced teachers becomes increasingly difficult.

The step freeze is creating a “bubble effect” most easily observed in BA Step 1 (in 2009-10, 28 teachers, now up to 83 teachers in 2011-12) and MA Step 1 (in 2009-10, 15 teachers, now up to 62.5 teachers in 2010-11, 62.5 teachers). Extrapolating frozen steps for next year, as the District proposes, the bubble of Step 1 teachers will worsen considerably. It is irresponsible to continue this fiscal liability. This BOE is passing the problem for a future board to deal with: as the bubble moves through the salary schedule, it will ultimately reach the expensive sections of the salary schedule at once, rather than being spread across several steps as is intended.

A percentage on base pay is only part of a solution; a step increase should also be part of any prudent settlement.

Sincerely,

SVVEA Negotiations Team

Faythe Hanna, Negotiations Chair, Columbine El.

Cyrus Collier, Mead H.S.

Sarah Hightower, Burlington El.

Fran Docherty, UniServ Director

Trip Merklein, Pres. SVVEA