

A STATEMENT FROM THE SCHOOL BOARDS OF THE RUTLAND
SOUTHWEST SUPERVISORY UNION REGARDING THE STATUS OF
TEACHER NEGOTIATIONS

The Bargaining Committee for four School District Boards within the Rutland Southwest Supervisory Union (Middletown Springs, Poultney, Tinmouth & Wells) has been negotiating with the NEA Teacher's Union that represents the teachers in all four of these Districts for over a year. Since we did not reach a settlement in face-to-face negotiations, the Boards and the Union agreed to use a neutral mediator for assistance. When we did not reach a settlement in mediation, the Boards and the Union submitted their proposals to a neutral fact finder. The fact finder's non-binding recommendations were received on January 9, 2012 and the Boards' Committee met with the Union once again on January 18, 2012.

During that meeting, the Boards presented the Union with two proposal options – a proposal for a one-year settlement and a proposal for a three-year settlement. The Union rejected both of these offers.

Since negotiations remain at an impasse, the Boards want to explain their position to the community.

While there are still several unresolved issues concerning such things as the length of the workday and teacher duties, the Boards believe there are three significant issues over which the Boards and the Union disagree.

- SALARY – The Union is proposing a total salary increase that would average 3.5% among the four districts in each of three years. This would give teachers average increases of about \$1,700 each year.

The Boards recognize the effect the current economic conditions are having on the residents of our communities. In a three-year proposal, the Boards offered salary increases that **average about 2%** (roughly \$980) in each of three years. The actual range is 1.56% - 2.26% depending on the district and the year.

Teachers who receive “step increases” on the salary schedule (over 60% of the staff) would receive increases greater than this range because they are still moving up the salary schedule. Among the four districts, these step increases average \$1,114 per teacher per year (a 1.8% - 3.7% salary increase depending on the teacher’s experience and education level). Teachers at the top of the salary schedule do not receive step increases and would receive increases of **1.0% per year** under the Boards’ proposal.

- HEALTH INSURANCE – Depending on the district, teachers currently pay between 10% - 15% of the premium cost for their health insurance. The Boards three year proposal would have the teachers in Poultney, Tinmouth, Wells and the SU increase their contribution by just 1% in the last year of the contract (2012/2013). This would make the teacher contributions:
 - Poultney & Wells – 11%.
 - Tinmouth & Middletown – 15%.

The Union has offered to increase contributions by 1% for teachers in Poultney and Wells. However, the Union wants to **reduce** teacher contributions in the other two districts (in Tinmouth from 14% to 11% and in Middletown from 15% to 11%). Since most Vermonters pay at least 20% toward their insurance premiums, the Union’s proposal to reduce teacher contributions does not seem to make sense.

- AUTOMATIC SALARY INCREASES – As with virtually all school districts within the state, our teachers are paid based on a salary schedule that includes annual “step” increases for all teachers who have not yet reached the top step of the salary schedule. Over 60% of the current staff receive these increases, which average \$1,114 (1.8% - 3.7%, depending on the teacher’s experience and education level).

The Boards are currently required to pay these increases “**automatically,**” even **after** the Union contract has expired. In other words, if the Boards and the Union have not settled a new contract by the beginning of next school year, teachers will be paid these increases “automatically” even though the Boards did not agree to them. This is exactly what happened over the last two school years. The current contracts actually expired June 30, 2010 (except for Tinmouth) but the Boards have been obligated to pay these step increases for the last two years because the Union has refused to reach a settlement.

The Boards have proposed contract language that would make these step increases part of negotiations, rather than having them paid “automatically.” The Boards believe that it is unfair to require taxpayers to pay salary increases without giving the Boards the opportunity to negotiate over them. Quite simply, all salary increases should be negotiated. The Union wants teachers to continue receiving these automatic annual increases without having to negotiate over them.

Over 50 Vermont school districts have eliminated automatic step increases in their teacher contracts, including several in southern Vermont (Bennington, Mt. Anthony, Pownal, Shaftsbury, Mill River, Clarendon, Shrewsbury, Wallingford, Green Mtn UHS, Chester-Andover and Flood Brook).

The Boards believe that they have presented an offer to the Union that attempts to strike a balance between our concern over the current economic realities and our respect for the dedication of our teaching staffs. It is our sincere hope that the Union will reconsider its position so that we will be able to reach a settlement that is fair to the taxpayers as well as the teachers. Another bargaining session is scheduled for February 1, 2012. The Boards will post updates on the RSWSU website (www.rswsu.org) as bargaining progresses.