

I am writing on behalf of the RSU 22 Board of Directors in response to many inquiries regarding the Board's ongoing negotiations with our teachers. Over the past several months, community members have expressed their concern about the progress of negotiations and questioned the Board's bargaining objectives. We also understand some community members have grown frustrated with the Board's lack of public response to community questions which, in turn, may have led to a perception we are not listening to community members or our teachers. This is not true. Please understand labor negotiations are conducted in private. The Board has always respected its obligation to keep negotiations confidential. However, negotiation discussions have now become public through the use of social media, and as a result, the Board feels compelled to explain its position to ensure all are fully informed.

From the outset, it has been the Board's intention to increase pay for our teachers. Like many of the people who have spoken at Board Meetings, we understand and appreciate the desire to advocate for our teachers. We, too, are friends and neighbors with teachers. We, too, have children who benefit from the commitment and dedication evident in so many of our teachers. However, the realities of economics and state funding formulas play a limiting role. The collective bargaining process is seldom straightforward. As many of you are aware through social media, the issues remaining in dispute between the parties are salaries, health insurance, and the merit-pay system. The following is a summary of the Board's last proposal with respect to each of these issues:

- The Board has proposed a salary increase over teachers' 2015 pay of close to 9.3% over the three year term of the proposed collective bargaining agreement, or 9.7% if compounded. The result is teachers would receive an average increase of approximately 2.7%, 3.1%, and 3.5% each respective year. Over these three years, teachers would receive an average of slightly over \$4,700 in increased salary. This amount would vary for each individual teacher depending upon where they are on the salary scale. As an important part of its salary proposal, the Board has listened to the Association regarding the structure of the salary scale. The Association concerns include the fact it takes 25 years to get to the top of the scale. Additionally, they expressed concern the existing structure results in years teachers do not receive a salary adjustment as they progress through the scale. In response, we have proposed to reduce the number of steps on the salary scale, resulting in increased life-time earnings. The Board has also proposed to make adjustments within the scale to ensure most teachers will receive a step increase each year of the contract.
- The Board has proposed to keep its current health insurance contribution rates unchanged over the course of the contract, up to a maximum increase of 5% in annual premiums each year. This means the Board would continue to pay 100% of the teachers' coverage and 70% of the additional cost of dependent coverage, so long as annual premiums do not go up more than 5% each year. If the increase in premiums is higher, teachers would be responsible for the additional cost.
- Finally, in response to the Association's concerns, the Board has agreed to remove the merit-pay system whereby teachers can earn up to an additional \$1,000 each year for receiving an outstanding evaluation. The Association has stated the merit pay system is demeaning and divisive. While there are sound arguments to be made on both sides of this issue, we have

listened to the Association and have agreed to eliminate the merit-pay program. However, the Board is not willing to accept the notion teachers should receive an automatic salary step increase merely because they have worked an additional year. The Board proposed that teachers maintain a basic standard of performance in order to advance a step on the salary scale. This standard includes achieving a rating of “proficient” in classroom management from the District’s evaluation tool, a tool implemented in part with input from teachers themselves.

The Board’s financial proposals are not made in a vacuum. We recognize we must support our teachers and remain competitive with neighboring school districts. However, the community cannot afford to completely revamp the salary scale in one contract. RSU 22 does not have the same tax base and financial resources as the cities of Bangor or Brewer. Furthermore, as a rural district comprised of four towns, two counties, and six separate school buildings, RSU 22 is one of the highest state-subsidy receivers in our area – over 68% of our budget is subsidized from the state. When our Legislature does not fully fund General Purpose Aid for education, which they have never done (despite being mandated to do so in 2004), the negative impact hits our District especially hard. Unfortunately, for 2016-2017, we anticipate losing approximately \$325,300 in General Purpose Aid from the state. Despite this recent news, we remain committed to the proposal we have made to our teachers.

On behalf of the School Board, I wish to assure the community the Board is working diligently towards a negotiated agreement that is fair to the teachers, the tax payers, the community, and our children. The Board also wishes to extend its appreciation to all its teachers and staff who work so hard to make education in RSU 22 a success.