

Chariho School Committee Meeting
Executive Session Minutes – December 13, 2022
NEA ESP Negotiation Update/Ratification of Contract
Minutes to remain sealed until an agreement is reached.
Minutes unsealed December 13, 2022

Committee Members Attendance: Chair Linda Lyall, Vice Chair Catherine Giusti, Donna Chambers, Tyler Champlin, Kathryn Colasante, Polly Hopkins, Gary Liguori, Craig Louzon, Andrew McQuaide, Larry Phelps, Patricia Pouliot and Karen Reynolds.

Administrators and Others Attendance: Superintendent Gina Picard, Assistant Superintendent Michael Comella, Director of Administration and Finance Ned Draper, Attorney Jon Anderson, Attorney Sean Clough and School Committee Clerk Donna Sieczkiewicz.

II-6. NEA ESP Negotiation Update/Ratification of Contract

Superintendent Picard noted that Sean Clough has supported the District in these negotiations and has provided a nice review of the changes to the contract. There was one sentence that was holding this up. We will save \$6600 in not having to supply every employee with a voice mail. She will let Gary provide an overview. Gary stated that the ESP contract was a learning lesson for him. Some years ago the District went to two different schedules for these employees; Schedule I and Schedule II (those hired after a certain date). Schedule I employees are paid more money for the same job which is worrisome as there is inequity in the pay scales. Gary noted that he took over in the middle of negotiations. ESP had originally asked for an 11% increase and after some contentious discussions, they walked away from the bargaining table. There was a long pause and a shift in their leadership so they then asked to get back together. What we brought forward was an effort to close the gap between the two schedules. They did say there was interest in this so that is the approach we took. They gave us a proposal to close the gap but it was a little more than we could afford. The difference in the two pays varies a lot. With Ned's help, we reworked the numbers. They wanted to close the gap in three years but we feel it will be more like eight or nine years or three contracts. We have around \$150,000 budgeted for this year. They wanted this contract to be retroactive to last year but Article 28 states that they have to, in writing send a letter by registered mail, notifying us to open negotiations and they didn't do that so we were clear that we were not going back. They did ask for a bonus and we said that we would give a one-time bonus for this year but did not want to go retroactive as that would set a precedent when they didn't follow the contract. We did scale the bonus back from what they proposed. Gina added that we have a lot of vacancies so the money saved could be used for the bonuses. Ned noted that senior employees (Schedule I top step) would see a 2% increase. We are way behind the State in some salaries. Gina commented that the morale in this Union is becoming contentious because of the difference in the pay between the two Schedules. ESP did have one concern regarding our proposal and that was about secretaries; there are only four in this group. Almost every person in support staff is a member of the community. Karen stated that she was part of the negotiations and we are losing a lot of valued employees who are going for higher paid jobs. Gary added that those who were in the room for negotiations were pleased with the proposal. Ned commented that it is difficult to make steps line up as in the teachers' contract so kudos to their group and ours for making this happen. Tyler noted a concern he had about Teacher Assistants to which Ned explained that those who are lower paid come up faster and catch up at the end so they are at a lower percent. Sean stated that he provided an Executive Summary with language and salary changes. He cannot say it better. The meat and potatoes were salaries and narrowing the gap. He reviewed the language changes. Jon explained the process. This Agreement is ready for a vote which will take place on the public agenda. He was just informed that the NEA ESP Union approved the Agreement. He would not ask the Committee to approve it if they did not. Gina added that minimum wage goes up in January so some of them would be getting an increase just to keep up with minimum wage. We do not compare to surrounding salaries to which Ned noted that the probationary rate was lower than minimum wage. Gary stated that they had to get rid of the probationary pay but the probationary period will

remain the same. Pat questioned if an employee is rated on performance but we are having a hard time getting jobs filled, we can't really afford to terminate them. Gina replied that we have terminated employees as we expect them to live up to our expectations. We do not allow them to lower the standard. Jon added that if they can't do the job, they are let go. Kathryn commented that they are proud of their environment so they want everyone to perform well. Pat stated that in the private sector, they keep mediocre people to which both Gina and Jon responded "not here, we let people go." Gina noted that this will not be an overnight fix but we want them to know that we value them. Kathryn stated that overall a lot of these salaries are just being brought up to what others get. She asked if they looked at the percentage between the two schedules or the market to which Gary replied that they looked at the market. There are a handful of schools that do not pay into Social Security so while some places like Westerly pay more in salary, they do not pay into Social Security. In terms of retirement, not having Social Security makes you more vulnerable.

As there were no more comments or questions, the Committee moved to approval of Home Instruction Requests.

Donna J. Sieczkiewicz, Clerk