

Roxbury Township Public Schools

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Dear Parents and other Community Members:

We are writing to you in order to explain and clarify some of the factual information regarding our recently settled contract with the Roxbury Education Association (REA).

In Roxbury, we negotiate with the New Jersey Education Association (NJEA) through its local affiliate, the Roxbury Education Association. Our goal was to reach a settlement with terms that were good for our students by maintaining quality instructional services. We also sought to minimize the tax impact of a settlement.

If the parties involved in the process are unable to reach a settlement through negotiations and mediation, the next phase involves fact-finding and then super conciliation. Both phases are expensive. Our past experience has shown that pursuing fact finding has done little to change the settlement rates and has proven to be costly. Mediators and fact-finders are required by law to take into account various factors in making their decisions. Historically, the most important of these factors has been “comparability”, that is, how one school district compares to others in its County in starting salary, average salary and average percentage increase. Roxbury began negotiations with an average teacher’s salary close to the County average, and one of the lowest starting salaries. Given these numbers, the Board was forced to recognize that it could not make a persuasive “comparability” argument for a below average salary percentage increase. During these negotiations, the average percentage increase in Morris County exceeded 4.4% per year.

The Board and the Association were involved in negotiations for a period of more than two years, from December, 2006 to January, 2009. Ultimately, we were able to reach mutual agreement as a result of several key factors that formed the settlement. These factors were connected to the goals that the Board established at the start of the process.

- One of the Board’s goals was to make in-roads toward salary guide reconstruction such that we increased our ability to attract and retain high quality teachers and personnel that work with your children. By improving the salary guide of our teachers, we have become more competitive with other schools in Morris County. We feel that we are in a much better position to hire and retain quality instructors.
- A second goal was to distribute money on the guide more evenly. We were able to make changes to the salary guide so the total amount of money agreed upon is distributed more consistently. The prior guide had in it what is currently referred to as “bubbles”. A bubble is a disproportionate amount of money when moving from one step to another along the guide. We addressed this problem by adding an additional step to the guide which resulted in reducing the disproportionate amount on that step.

- Changes to the paraprofessional guide resulted in a savings of \$450,000 over the life of the contract.
- Another goal was to attain long-term health care savings. As the result of a successful arbitration, costly traditional insurance is no longer available. We estimate the savings to be about \$300,000 the first year.
- Lastly, we felt that it was important to also look at improvement in the areas of teacher training, staff and professional development. These areas are very important to the education that we provide to our students. Within our current practices and school calendar, there are no days devoted during the school year for district-wide teacher training and professional development. We have been spending thousands of dollars to send teachers out of district to workshops, or to bring presenters in while requiring substitutes to cover classes. Starting with the 2009-2010 school year, we will be adding two full day in-service days for staff and changing the number of student days from 182 to 180. As a result, we will have the unique opportunity to provide professional development and training on a district-wide basis without the need for additional travel expenses, registrations, substitutes. We estimate that this change will ultimately save the school district between \$50,000 and \$75,000 annually.

The length of time it has taken to reach this settlement has led to discontent with our staff, students, and parents. This has had a negative impact on our community. In addition, the longer the process continues the less likely the district would see the savings from concessions given by the association. It was the opinion of our legal counsel and the majority of the Board members permitted to be involved in the decision making that to move forward to fact finding would have been lost savings. The cost of fact finding, the remote chance of a state fact-finder reducing the settlement rate, and the loss of savings due to extending the negotiation process were considered and determining factors in deciding to settle.

The resulting settlements were 4.3, 4.7, 4.7, and 4.7. These percentages, however, do not truly reflect the cost of the settlement. When you subtract the amount of savings we achieved from the concessions agreed to by the REA; i.e. the \$300,000 deducted from the cost of health insurance as well as the additional \$450,000 it would have cost to cover the movement on the guide for the paraprofessionals, the estimated cost of the settlement would be approximately 4% for each year.

The Board would have preferred a less costly settlement. The REA, understandably, fought hard to make sure that its members did not lose ground to teachers in other school districts. Given the constraints of the State-mandated negotiations process, the Board believes that the recently ratified settlement was the best available to it this year. To have continued the negotiations, we believe, would have significantly increased the expense of the process without producing a significant reduction in the cost of settlement.

We hope the information above provides you with a clearer understanding of the recently settled REA contract. Throughout the negotiation process, the Board's primary goal was to ensure that our students receive the best possible education with the resources that are available. Thank you for your interest and continued support in helping us achieve our educational goals.

Sincerely,

Michael A. Rossi, Jr., Ph.D.

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Theresa D'Agostino

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