



BENSALEM TOWNSHIP SCHOOL DISTRICT

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STATEMENT FROM SCHOOL BOARD ON REJECTION OF FACT-FINDER'S REPORT

Tonight, the Bensalem School Board cast a vote in favor of solvency and sustainability of educational programs by voting *against* the Fact-Finder's Report prepared by a designee of the Pennsylvania Labor Relations Board.

While our School Board was concerned with a variety of recommendations in the report, it was most troubled by an aspect of the salary proposal which totaled \$5.3 million dollars in recurring costs.

Allow me to explain: While the School Board's proposal provides all eligible teachers with annual bonuses in years 2, 3, 4 and 5 of \$3,000, \$2,000, \$2,000 and \$2,000 respectively, the Fact-finder's plan creates recurring salary increases based on years teaching and education. The terms for these are "step" and "column movement." The problem with "step" and "column movement" for a financially challenged District such as ours is that unlike annual bonuses, they create repeating and increasing costs, with no ability in place to pay for them.

Do not misunderstand our action: We know that our teachers play a vital role every day in the advancement of our educational mission. We value the inspiration, guidance and insight they bring to their classrooms. We voted "no" because we want to make certain we are solvent enough to sustain those classrooms in which they teach.

The ability to fund \$5.3 million in recurring costs – without closing schools or downsizing staff - simply does not exist.

As the community is aware, Bensalem School District has struggled with an increasingly structurally unbalanced budget. This deficit **has everything** to do with rising costs of unfunded government mandates, pension obligations which have skyrocketed over 500% in nine years, and revenues lost to charter schools. Without these factors and through sound fiscal management, District spending would have been limited to increases of under 1% each year for the last nine years. **But these factors are, unfortunately, our reality.**

Bensalem Township School District also has **another unfortunate reality**: we are already eliminating our savings to maintain quality educational programs. This can adversely affect this quality, a standard that our community expects and our children deserve. The continuation of this trend has also negatively impacted our credit rating.

Agreeing to the Fact-Finder's proposal that the District spend \$5.3 million dollars in recurring costs would be fiscally-irresponsible to everyone:

- Our taxpayers who would have to pay it.
- Our students whose educational programs would be rendered unsustainable
- Our educators whose passion for teaching would be immobilized by our lack of solvency.

For all of these groups that make up our Bensalem family, we voted against the Fact-Finder's report this evening.

So, where do we go from here? For many school districts, a fact-finder's report at least provides a starting point to reopen negotiations with a new perspective.

It is our sincere hope that our teachers encourage members of the Bensalem Township Education Association do just that.