

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE.

The “Brighton Difference” is a motto that is repeated often in the Brighton community. It represents a value system that our district possesses to go the extra mile to enrich the academic experience for our students. A core component of that motto is the deep respect that the Brighton Area Schools Board of Education holds for the work that all of the teachers, support staff, and administrators do on behalf of our children and the commitment to support all of our employees as best we can within the financial constraints imposed on the district as a public institution. Consistent with that value system, the Board of Education has traditionally honored and respected all employee union groups by never asking more from one than it does another.

Brighton Area Schools has not been immune from the economic havoc wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic. Approximately \$1.5 million was retroactively cut from the BAS 2019-2020 fiscal year budget and the state is projecting in excess of \$5 million in cuts in Brighton Area Schools’ budget for the 2020-2021 school year. Despite knowledge of the looming financial crisis, the Board proactively sought in the spring of 2020 to protect all of its employees from reductions to their current pay while asking them to suspend expectations for additional money in the 2020-2021 school year. In short, the Board wanted to bring financial stability during a time of great uncertainty. The Board successfully finalized contracts under those terms with two employee bargaining groups – the administrators and support staff. However, Brighton Education Association teachers’ union leadership declined to engage in negotiations.

As August approached, the district administration and Board were focused on the adoption and implementation of its Return to School Plan – a Herculean effort on many levels that interim Superintendent Dr. Laura Surrey was tasked with overseeing. The administration and BEA leaders met frequently during the summer to formulize details of the plan, which includes added teaching staff to reduce class sizes where possible, necessary personal protective equipment, and a new online curriculum to help make an online option for students easier for teachers to deliver. However, the BEA leadership did not engage in any financial negotiations until last week. This is a negotiation process that should have been done months ago, but is now just beginning – diverting the limited time and resources of our administration during this critical period that should be focused solely on preparing for the safe return to school.

To handle the complexity of a negotiation over finances, working conditions, and safety protocols with an in-person return to school, the BEA leadership insisted on a traditional negotiation process. The success of this traditional bargaining process relies heavily on the confidentiality of the ongoing negotiations, and the Board has at all times in the past fully respected the sanctity of such confidentiality.

The Board held a special meeting on August 31, 2020, for the sole purpose of interviewing the three finalists for the Superintendent position – one of the most important decisions a school district makes. The approval of a teachers’ contract was never an item on the meeting

agenda. However, during a lengthy call to the public at the conclusion of the interviews, many teachers and parents expressed outrage over what they believed to be the Board's positions on various issues being discussed in the ongoing "confidential" negotiations. Much to the dismay of the Board, not only was it highly inappropriate for the BEA leadership to selectively disclose information from the negotiation session out of context, many of the issues to which the teachers and parents objected were based on false information.

It is unfortunate that the BEA bargaining team waited until the eleventh hour to begin bargaining financial terms and chosen to manipulate the emotions of the teachers and community as means of trying to pressure the Board into capitulation. Although the Board would prefer to publicly disclose all facts and discussions that have occurred during the negotiations, the Board is legally prevented from doing so and such disclosure would be counter-productive to the negotiation process to which the Board remains committed. The Board will continue negotiating in hopes of a resolution that preserves current pay and considers the financial challenges presented at this time. We appreciate all of the support generated on behalf of our teachers and look forward to a strong start to the school year.

Brighton Area Schools Board of Education