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Vergennes, VT – Addison Northwest School District Board Issues the Following Statement:

After eleven meetings over seven months and without significant progress toward an agreement, the Addison Northwest School District Board declared impasse in its negotiations with the Addison Northwest Teachers' Association (ANTA) on April 10. Impasse is a tool intended to improve the progress of negotiations by utilizing a neutral, third party mediator to help the parties reach an agreement. The Board remains hopeful that the parties can agree to a fiscally responsible contract before the current agreement expires on June 30 and before the teachers need to begin enrolling in one of the four new healthcare plans by November 1. Major issues stalling the talks have been health insurance benefit coverage and salary.

Health Insurance

Last month, the Board increased its original proposal and offered up to \$13,044 toward a teacher's premiums for family coverage and added a Health Reimbursement Account depending on which plan a teacher chooses. Beginning in January 2018, the Vermont Education Health Initiative (VEHI), a statewide plan that covers Vermont public schools, will replace its current healthcare insurance offerings with four new plans that provide the same benefits using the same Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Vermont network. The Board estimates that its proposal will provide an opportunity for savings without impacting the quality of healthcare coverage available to its teachers.

The ANTA health insurance proposal -- unchanged from its original offer -- requires the District to pay 95% of any insurance premiums and cover 100% of all out-of-pocket expenses including deductibles. Teachers would pay, at maximum, 5% of their premiums -- although it was unclear whether such a cost was being considered as an out-of-pocket expense. The Board estimates that financial exposure of the ANTA proposal is an additional \$700,000 annually in healthcare expenses.

Salary

The Board's proposal increases the lowest end of the salary scale by 10.95% to assure that the District remains competitive within Addison county, and provides an average one-year raise of \$750. In contrast, ANTA's last position is a 9.75% increase plus a seniority increase of 4.5% for all employees covered by the contract, resulting in one-year raises of up to \$9,000.

Next Steps

The Board has agreed that further discussions between the parties without the assistance of a neutral third party will not result in a new contract within a reasonable time frame. The Board's declaration of impasse permits the parties to engage a mediator to help reach an agreement. Board representatives plan to work with a mediator and ANTA representatives, and remain hopeful that the parties can agree to a fiscally responsible contract before the end of the school year. The Board believes this process will help all concerned to reach common ground for the benefit of our students, teachers, and community.

On March 1, 2016 voters from the towns of Addison, Ferrisburgh, Panton, and Waltham, and the City of Vergennes approved unification of the Addison Northwest School District, consolidating the five districts that had formed the Addison Northwest Supervisory Union. The 2017-2018 contract will be the first agreement between ANWSD and ANTA.

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