

RNESU teacher contract resolved

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JEANNÉ COLLINS

BRANDON — After several months of negotiations, Jeanné Collins, superintendent of the Rutland Northeast Supervisory Union (RNESU), announced last week that RNESU, Otter Valley Unified Union and Barstow Unified Union school boards and the Teachers Association had ratified a new three-year teacher contract for 2022-2025.

“The goal of the school board during this round of negotiations was to bring our teachers’ salaries back in line with their regional colleagues,” Collins wrote in a statement after the meeting. “Often in recent years, our schools have lost candidates to higher-paying districts around us and we have had to start school years without a teacher in the classroom, as seen recently in Otter Valley math and Leicester classroom vacancies.”

In an interview, Collins said that the district had hired teachers this past summer only to have them quit and join another higher-paying district nearby even before the school year started. She explained that the district’s lower pay scale was the result of several years of single-year negotiations “without the ability to execute a long-term retention plan.”

RNESU currently ranks eighth out of nine surrounding supervisory unions in its pay scale, Collins said.

The 40-plus-page contract ratified by the teachers and the school district provides a 7% boost in the salary matrix (a pay scale based on a grid that leverages educational levels with years of experience) for teachers in the first year of the contract, followed by 3% increases in the second and third years. The matrix has six columns of educational levels, starting with a bachelor’s degree in education to a master’s degree plus 30 hours of specialized instruction. The experience level goes from year one and maxes out at 20 years.

The new pay range in the first year of the contract goes from a first-year teacher with a bachelor’s degree starting at \$44,352 to a high of \$88,703 for a teacher with 20 years experience with the highest education level.

“We expect that the new contract will move our teachers more toward the middle of regional compensation packages,” Collins said. “The following years will see more moderate cost of living adjustment increases. This investment in the retention of quality teachers and the ability to attract new teachers to vacant positions meets the primary purpose of the school system — to offer a rigorous and quality education.”

Other cost savings provisions were added to the contract to help fund the increase, Collins said, “particularly in the area of limiting professional development options beyond advance coursework and a step limitation when moving on the salary matrix (starting in year three).”

Throughout the negotiating process, Collins said, both sides approached the negotiations in good faith and came out with a mutually beneficial package.

“The boards appreciated the mutual respect of the negotiations and the work of our teachers through COVID and beyond,” she said. “It is mutually felt that this contract leaves the district in a good place to attract and retain quality teachers.”

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