

Structural Change Impact Group
Working Group: Personnel, Compensation, Benefits, Retirement
MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, October 7, 2021 at 8:00 AM

Location – Remote Meeting on Zoom

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TOWN CLERK
BELMONT, MA

Members Present: Travis Franck, Anne Helgen, Norma Massarotti, and Meg Moriarty.

Guests Present: Michael McAllister

Notetaker: Travis Franck

DATE: November 12, 2021
TIME: 9:14 AM

[Meeting called to order at 8:05 am by Travis Franck]

Discussion of School District Questions from the Working Group

The committee members asked Mr. McAllister questions in the following topic areas. In the text below, “Town” refers to the Town of Belmont and “District” refers to Belmont’s school district.

1. Incentive programs

David Blazon, as Director of Facilities, likely has the most influence on the Town’s ability to generate revenue and control costs of District facilities. Some of the possible revenue streams include: room rental fees, ticket sales, meal fees.

Any incentive programs to find cost savings or other opportunities to better manage District facilities would have to be open to every employee. Currently there are no incentive programs in place.

2. Merit Pay Systems

Merit-based pay structure would require collective bargaining. The District doesn’t have a large number of non-union employees.

Steps and Lanes removal means that teachers could reach the higher pay tier faster. Currently it takes 14 years to reach the highest level of teacher pay. McAllister commented that he didn’t know of any district that has removed Steps and Lanes.

Administrators (Unit B) have a merit pay pool, but only Unit B and not Unit A (teachers, nurses, etc.).

All principals are, by law, not in the union, but Assistant Principals are part of the educators union in Belmont.

Stipends (i.e., for being a coach or club advisor) are negotiated in the union contract.

There are evaluations of teachers and administrators throughout the year, several times a year. These evaluations don’t influence or factor into raises for union members but do for the school principals.

3. Shift Premiums/Over-time Compensation

Article 11 in the union contract discusses overtime. The article mainly applies to building custodians working additional hours to cover space rentals. This overtime is paid for by the renters of the space – no net cost to District.

Overall, the overtime pay that is covered by the District is minimal (e.g., burst pipe); most overtime is paid for by outside groups.

4. Early Retirement

The union contract has early retirement language for Unit B employees (i.e., Administrators). These employees could retire two years early with payouts for those two years detailed in the contract (fixed amounts by experience).

Unit A employees (teach, nurses, etc.) tend to retire after reaching their maximum retirement benefit, which is 80% of their salary. The pandemic has increased the number of employees retiring before they have reached the 80% benefit. Normally the District averages six retirements per year, but last year (2020-21) there were approximately ~16 and this year ~12 retirements.

Teachers are not part of the Belmont retirement system. Non-teaching positions are part of the Belmont retirement system.

The health care system is managed by the Town for the District employees. The school department health care costs are carried in the District's budget.

5. Vacation, sick, time and personal leave accumulation and rollover policies

There are no sick-day payouts for the school district employees. This means sick days on the books are not a liability that for the District. Employees can accrue unlimited sick days with Unit A employees accruing at 15 sick days per year.

There are limited payouts of vacation days for administrative assistants. The maximum payout is five days regardless of the number of bank vacation days. Unit B employees do not have a payout for unused vacation.

Employees don't have short-term disability insurance and use their vacation days, or potentially the "sick bank" pool of days, which is a district level pool available to employees to cover extended illnesses.

6. Life Insurance Policies

The Town negotiates the life insurance rate for the school district. The District does not cover the premium costs for the employees, so there is no budgetary impact.

7. Health Insurance

Cost sharing of health care premiums differ among employees by their hire date. All non-union employees hired after 2019 are now 75/25. Union employees share premiums costs in a 80/20 split today. The cost sharing split is often part of union contract negotiations.

Opt-out incentive programs for health insurance are a collective bargaining issue.

The discussion did not provide clarity about how opting out of Town-provided health insurance today would change the Town's long-term obligations. Need to clarify.

8. Other Topics

McAllister mentioned that there are cross-district forums in which best practices for cost reductions and revenue opportunities are discussed with peers from other school districts.

The District has a different time tracking system than the Town because it is specialized to finding substitutes for teachers.

The District would be interested in moving to electronic paystubs because it would improve day-to-day efficiencies, along with any cost savings from reducing printing/mailing.

Franck and Moriarty discussed how there could be efficiencies in the online parent portal system(s), with a goal of having a system that is easier for parents to use for parent-teacher conferences, entering absences, and other important communications.

Public Comments:

- No members of the public were in attendance.

[Anne Helgen offered motion to adjourn; unanimous approval (4-0); the meeting adjourned at 9:32 am].