



❖ FAQ 1

Q: What was the issue with the 2015-2017 negotiated contract regarding teachers' salaries and who was responsible for the signing of that contract?

A: The short answer: The Board of Education (BOE) and the Bethel Education Association (BEA) both signed the contract; therefore, the BEA and the BOE are **both** responsible for the contract language.

The long answer: The BOE read with interest the latest "bulletin" from the Bethel teachers' union. The BEA omitted some key points in their community flyer regarding teachers' salaries as it relates to negotiations.

At the beginning of the 2015-2017 negotiations, both the BOE and the BEA agreed to use integrative bargaining in which both parties collaborate to find solutions. In this contract, the BEA did **agree** to step freezes, receiving no longevity salary increase based upon years of teaching experience. The teachers' union did receive a **9.3% increase** in base salary over the three-year contract period.

Shortly after negotiations were completed, the Board hired a new superintendent. While reviewing the negotiated agreement, the Superintendent asked for legal clarification to ensure the wording in the agreement was correct. The contract stated that teachers "*will receive up to a maximum of ten years credit for teaching service outside of the district*" as well as a contradictory statement that both parties added, explaining that "*newly hired employees will be hired in at similar step levels as existing employees – effectively a hold harmless clause to maintain equality with existing employees.*" This wording added by the BEA and the BOE was not enforceable under Ohio law (ORC 3317.14). The BEA filed a grievance against the Board. A third party arbitrator determined the BOE's position to "credit years outside of the district" was correct.

The BEA flyer states that the teachers would like all step freezes from the past two contracts returned to them, by using the term "equality". The equality that the BEA is requesting is to undo prior negotiated agreements to which both the BEA and BOE agreed.

Due to some of the information presented to the Bethel community in the BEA flyer, the BOE felt it was necessary to provide some facts regarding the prior negotiated agreements. The issues regarding this situation are complex, but both the BOE and BEA are committed to finding a sensible solution. The BOE recognizes their responsibility to provide a contract that addresses the Union's concerns and would like to resolve the financial issues of the contract as soon as possible. However, one of the BOE's driving guidelines is the fiscal obligation to the voters of Bethel's District; they will not ratify a contract that puts the district's financial obligations at risk now and over the next three years.

In conclusion, the BOE regrets that the community members of Bethel Local Schools were presented with one-sided information and used as leverage in the negotiation process by the BEA. Looking to the future, the BOE is hopeful that the negotiation process will be conducted in a more professional manner.