

**Collective Bargaining**

**April 5, 2022**

**4:00 PM**

**Bitterroot Valley Education Cooperative**

**And**

**The Cooperative Employees' Bargaining Unit 4403, MFPE, NEA, AFT, AFL-CIO**

**Attendance for Union:** Karen Gideon, Lindsay Davis, Erin Bauer, Rachella Moresi

**Attendance for Management:** Dr. DoBell, Diane Woodard, Jenny Rammell

**Other Attendees:** Jill Reynolds, Chris Hughes

**Start Time:** 4:05 PM

**Time Constraints:** Dr. DoBell and Rachella Moresi, 5 PM

**Minute Taker:** Jill Reynolds

**Public Comments:** No public comments have been received.

**Review/Approve prior meeting minutes:** Minutes approved, and we will attach Karen Gideon's email with edits to the final version of the minutes. There was discussion around the process of editing/changing minutes and how that should be done so all input is considered. The agreement was made again to attach Karen's email with edits to the final version of the minutes.

**Agenda Items for today:**

- A.** Management will present any other topics for bargaining – Ms. Rammell said there are no other topics for Management
- B.** Union will present any other topics for bargaining- Ms. Moresi said she is following up with Melanie at MFPE but would like to add language to the agreement that non-degreed behavior consultants can move over to the degreed behavior consultant salary matrix.
- C.** Salary Matrices – Ms. Rammell explained the management position on our current salary matrices.
  - Special Education federal and state funding is flat while expenses continue to grow which has led to deficit spending, weakening reserves and carry over dollars, impacting sustainability. We rely on districts to supplement special education funding.
  - CSCT funding is the revenue generated from their billing of services. We need to address current pressing needs as well as future needs. The salary base for both Therapists and Behavior Consultants need to be addressed to encourage recruitment and be competitive with other providers.

- Management is proposing adjustment in steps, both the number of steps and the dollar amount of steps, for both Special Education and CSCT positions.
- Management will address the stark difference in the Specialist and the Mental Health Therapist salary matrices.
- Management is looking at allowing income growth while providing cooperative sustainability.
- Management is addressing the alignment of current employees' salary to ensure that the matrix changes do not put a new hire at a higher level of pay than current employees with the same tenure/experience.
- Management is presenting the best option at this time to address these issues and remain fiscally responsible.
- Mr. Hughes said this is a delicate balance of fiscal responsibility and unknown future of funding. He also echoed the sincerity to do the absolute best we can.
- Dr. DoBell spoke to the fact that we are all facing a labor crisis in the Valley as well as the country, and historically high inflation rates of 8%. We are all trying to take care of our employees.
- Ms. Reynolds reviewed the management proposals for Specialist, Preschool Teacher, Mental Health Therapist, and Mental Health Degreed Behavior Consultants.
  - Specialist
    - Base salary will be increased 12.3% from \$42,726 to \$48,000 2022-2024.
    - There will be 25 steps versus current 35 steps.
    - Each step increment will be \$1,000.
    - Maximum salary will be \$73,000 2022-2024.
    - Employees are moved to new matrix step based on 2021-2022 salaries, ensuring similar dollar amount of increases and step placement so a new hire would not receive a higher salary if the maximum 7 years of experience is honored when hired.
    - Employees whose current salary exceeds the maximum salary will receive the \$1,000 step amount as a stipend 2022-2024, their salary will be frozen until such time the matrix changes and the new maximum would exceed their frozen salary amount.
    - These changes bring us more in line with other employers in the area who hire these positions in schools, while maintaining a higher base pay than most, similar or more steps, and higher step dollar increases, and similar or higher maximum salaries.
    - These changes also reduce the dollar amount of future growth as compared to the current matrix which would continue to grow while funding is flat, while providing salary growth for the majority of the staff.
    - Erin asked for explanation on how staff were moved over to the new matrix. Jill reviewed this again.

- Rachella asked to confirm the stipend for employees over the maximum salary would be each year and not just a one-time stipend in 2022-23. Jill confirmed it would be each year until such time the maximum salary changes to exceed the frozen salary.
  - Preschool Teacher
    - Base salary will increase 8.1%, from \$34,226 to \$37,000 2022-2024 based on comparisons to other member districts starting teacher pay.
    - Lane increases will stay at 3% as they are in line with other member districts.
    - Step increments will be \$1000 per step 2022-2024, same as Specialist matrix.
    - No change in the number of steps.
  - Mental Health Therapist
    - Base salary for Prelicensed Mental Health Therapist will increase 11.9% from \$40,352 to \$45,139 2022-2024. This will result in a base increase for Licensed Mental Health Therapists of 13.8% from \$42,163 to \$48,000 2022-2024.
    - There will be 20 steps versus 15 steps in current matrix.
    - Each step increment will be \$1,000 2022-2024.
    - Maximum salary will be \$68,000 2022-2024.
    - Employees are moved to new matrix step based on 2021-2022 salaries, ensuring similar dollar amount of increases and step placement so a new hire would not receive a higher salary if the maximum 3 years of experience is honored when hired.
    - Employees whose current salary exceeds the maximum salary will receive the \$1,000 step amount as a stipend 2022-2024, their salary will be frozen until such time the matrix changes and the new maximum would exceed their frozen salary amount.
    - These changes address the discrepancies in the Special Education and Mental Health Therapist schedules which is important as they both require the same education (Master's Degree).
    - These changes address the discrepancies in the cooperative starting pay versus other mental health providers that have recently become an issue and resulted in losing employees to other providers.
  - Degreed Behavior Consultant
    - Base salary will increase 11.5% from \$27,121 to \$30,250 2022-2024.
    - There will be 20 steps versus 15 steps in current matrix.

- Each step increment will be \$630 2022-2024.
- Maximum salary will be \$42,850 2022-2024.
- Employees are moved to new matrix step based on 2021-2022 salaries, ensuring similar dollar amount of increases and step placement so a new hire would not receive a higher salary if the maximum 3 years of experience is honored when hired.
- Employees whose current salary exceeds the maximum salary will receive the \$630 step amount as a stipend 2022-2024, their salary will be frozen until such time the matrix changes and the new maximum would exceed their frozen salary amount.
- These changes keep the current percentage relationship of Behavior Consultant to Therapist salary matrices.
- Karen asked about funding these changes. Mr. Hughes explained that we had received grants and supplemental Medicaid payments that would be used to fund these changes.
  - Mr. Hughes explained these changes are necessary to enable to us to hire and retain quality employees, while be fiscally responsible for the next two years. It is unknown at this time if there will changes to CSCT regulations, increases in the Medicaid reimbursement rate, etc. In two years, we will know more and will have to address those changes then.
  - Dr. DoBell explained this is the situation for many of the districts using incremental funding to raise salaries now. In the future when the incremental funding is gone, if funding doesn't provide the dollars to cover expenses it may require staff reductions (RIF). Dr. DoBell also explained that this is a possibility for cooperative staff as well, but the Board understands the value of the services provided by the cooperative staff and he would have no issue asking other Board members to support the programs with incremental District funding if needed.
- Erin thanked management for the work done and thought put into the matrices proposals.
- The summary file of matrices changes will be distributed to the bargaining team members along with the notes.

**Next meeting** is scheduled for Wednesday, April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022, at 4PM in the BVEC Conference Room. Dr. DoBell asked if the Union would be presenting their salary matrices recommendations at the next meeting. Karen replied they would be responding to what management presented today. The union will also present their high priority topics at this meeting.

**Meeting adjourned: 5:00 PM**