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City, teachers far apart on pay-raise issue

Union is seeking additional \$83.5m

By [James Vaznis](#) | GLOBE STAFF JANUARY 03, 2012

The Boston Teachers Union is requesting \$83.5 million more than the city is offering for salaries, a hefty financial divide that is slowing contract negotiations, according to a report released today.

The salary proposal pitched by the teachers union would cost the city \$116.1 million over four years, while the city's offer would cost just \$32.6 million over the same period, according to the report prepared by the Boston Municipal Research Bureau, a fiscal watchdog funded by businesses and nonprofit institutions.

"It's unrealistic," Samuel Tyler, president of the research bureau, said of the union's proposal. "The city has limited revenues; it's not like they have an open checkbook."

The salary gap is one of several key issues that will be the subject of at least two more negotiating sessions this month, as both sides aim to hammer out an agreement and end a process that has dragged on for 20 months.

An agreement would replace a teachers' contract that expired in August 2010, and covers roughly 5,000 teachers, nurses, guidance counselors, librarians, and other educators.

Richard Stutman, president of the teachers union, said his organization is willing to negotiate down its salary request, but that the city has refused to budge from its position. Of particular concern, Stutman said, is that the city is offering no pay increase for the second year of the contract.

"A zero percent increase is not realistic," Stutman said. "When the city gets more realistic, [the contract] will be resolved."

The city's offer is consistent with what it is offering its other unions for pay increases, according to the municipal research bureau. Like the teachers union, most other city unions have been working under expired contracts for more than a year. Any new agreement would be retroactive to the expiration of

the previous contract.

The city's proposal offers four-year contracts that would provide a 1 percent increase for the first year, no increase for the second year, a 2 percent increase for the third year, and another 2 percent increase for the final year of the contract.

By contrast, the teachers union has been pushing for a three-year contract that calls for a 2 percent increase in the first year, a 4 percent increase in the second year, and another 4 percent increase in the final year.

Superintendent Carol R. Johnson said the city's salary offer is a reflection of limited revenue. Offering a higher pay rate to teachers, she said, could come with a drawback.

"The consequence is we could lay off valuable employees who are contributing to the improvements we are working towards," said Johnson, noting that the School Department once again "will be struggling to balance our budget."

Tyler said that if the city increases its offer to the teachers union it would probably confront pressure from the city's other unions to do the same, a potentially pricey proposition.

He also noted that the annual salary increases are just one piece of the pay raises that many teachers would be entitled to. Under both proposals, many teachers would also qualify for additional raises, earned for working a specified number of years or gaining an academic degree.

For instance, under the union proposal, a teacher with three years of experience who holds a master's degree would make \$59,458 in the first year of the contract and could eventually make \$84,209 in the fourth year of the contract by earning an additional 15 graduate credits. That is a 41.6 percent raise over four years, according to the research bureau.

By contrast, that same teacher would receive a 33.8 percent increase under the city's proposal, bumping pay from \$59,458 to \$79,578.

The research bureau prefers to base teachers' raises on merit rather than on contract language that automatically ties such compensation to experience and academic credentials.

Stutman defended the salary request as affordable.

"The city has to do a better job of raising revenue," said Stutman, as he urged the city to step up efforts to seek payments in lieu of taxes from colleges, museums, and other nonprofits.

The research bureau has been pushing for wide-ranging changes in the teachers contract as a member of Boston United for Students, a coalition of mostly advocacy organizations. The coalition has been lobbying for extended school days, greater flexibility for administrators in hiring teachers, a robust teacher evaluation system, and larger roles for parents and students in making decisions at their schools and in hiring staff.

Many of those topics have been the subject of the teacher contract negotiations.

“There is urgency for this contract to bring about fundamental reform that will result in greater student achievement,” Tyler said.

Otherwise, parents may opt to send their children to independently-run charter schools, which are expanding in the city to serve an additional 2,000 students, he said.

“This contract,” Tyler said, “is extremely important to enable the Boston public schools to be competitive with charter schools.”

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