

## Contract

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of the state Labor Relations Board. The School District demands that employees change to managed-care plans — forsaking the traditional Blue Cross/Blue Shield indemnity plan — or pay the difference in premiums.

"The district saying they are in dispute over the health care is a red herring," said Holland. "Because what the district is trying to do is to get the association to accept two tenths of a percent less pay than the fact finder recommended."

Holland said he was approached by Charles Boytin, president of the school board, and offered a deal to settle the contract, including the health care issue, if the teachers would come down 0.2 percent from the salary recommended by the fact-finder. "What is wrong with this picture?" asked Holland. "The law doesn't allow you to change the fact-finder report. You either have to accept it completely or reject it completely."

The state board released the report because — by law — it became public when one side accepted it and the other didn't.

The Lake-Lehman School District rejected the fact finder's report although it is unclear if board members actually voted to reject it or rejected by default. In a letter to the Pennsylvania Labor Relations Board, Attorney Bruce Campbell, chief negotiator for the school district, said, "important information from an in-

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Atty. John Holland  
Representing the teachers

dependent, source on health care" had not been provided to the district along with other unspecified information important to consideration of the fact-finder's recommendations, resulting in the district's inability to accept the recommendations. Attempts to speak with Campbell or members of the school board were unsuccessful.

"That is their weasel words to explain why they didn't vote," said Holland. "The laws of this state require them to vote on a fact-finding report and they neglected those duties."

A fact-finder was called in when further advancement in contract negotiations could not be made. Lake-Lehman teachers have been working without a contract since August 2001, although contract negotiations have been going on much longer.

In the report, given to the two sides on May 28, Mulligan wrote "many school districts are now demanding that their employees co-pay the premium, no matter what plan they choose. I cannot fault anyone for thinking that accepting a 'lesser' plan, paying some of the premiums, etc., is 'giving back' something that was

freely given in the past.

"... I would prefer to think of medical insurance and the payment, therefore, as a joint effort between management and the employee to provide the best benefit at the optimal cost."

Mulligan's recommendation on health care is to form a joint committee to address the problem, an idea that has been discussed with both sides. The committee would have three teachers, one School Board member and two district administrators.

"But keep in mind, the teachers have done everything they can to save the district money on health care costs," said Holland. "From agreeing to lesser health care for new employees to joining the health care consortium to making changes in the prescription plan, the teachers have bent over backwards to help contain health care costs."

In addition to formation of the committee, the fact-finder suggested the district provide teachers with more than three years of service their choice of the Blue Cross plan or a less expensive managed care program.

Besides health care, the report addressed eight other sticking

points.

Mulligan gave little consideration to the initial salary demands of both sides — the union sought a 5 percent-per-year increase, the district countered with 2 percent. During a May 16 negotiation hearing, the district increased its offer to 2.5 percent and the union decreased its demand by a quarter percent.

Mulligan suggested a 3.36 percent average increase for the 2001-02 salaries, equating to about a \$1,672 average. The 2002-03 salary increase would remain the same, equalling about \$1,730, with the increases in following years set at 3.41 percent, 3.68 percent and 3.19 percent.

Also discussed in the report:

- No changes should be made to the collective bargaining agreement regarding the professional development and educational improvement of teachers.

The district wants to tighten the rules on which credits merit reimbursement and which apply toward salary increases. The union is seeking an increase in tuition reimbursement and in the number of credits that can be reimbursed.

- The fact-finder also recommends not changing contractual language detailing early-retirement incentives.

Members of the education association want employees with 10 or more years of service to

receive 80 percent of their final average salary upon retirement. The district wants to pay no additional benefits because retirees will receive an enhanced pension benefit and payment of their insurance premiums.

- In their list of demands, teachers also asked for a limit on workloads and class size and that "past practices and maintenance of standards" be formal-

ized as part of the contract. Mulligan, in her report, favored the district, which wanted no changes to be made.

- The report leans toward the teachers regarding the retroactivity of teachers' salaries. The union demands pay retroactivity to August 2001 — what should have been the start date of the new contract.

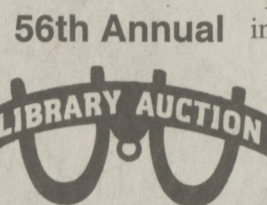
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Volunteers are hard at work collecting items for the 56th annual The Back Mountain Memorial Library Auction.

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## Cafeteria

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increase in a la carte items at the high school.

The increases come after the school district overspent its 2001-02 budget by more than \$7,000. Nutrition Inc. Spokeswoman Mary Philler said the deficit was a result of increased participation of approximately 30 meals above the budget in the elementary schools.

The new contract will have the school district breaking even, she said.

Paul Degillo, of Foreman Burkavage, reported that the

middle school renovation and addition project is approximately 57 percent complete, with Phase I of the project totally finished.

Degillo said renovations to the library, auditorium, kitchen and second floor classrooms are underway, and the shell has been poured for the pool.

In other business:

- The school board and Shawn Murphy, representative from State Senator Charles Lemmond's office, recognized eight retiring teachers in the school district with plaques and gifts.

- The board voted unanimously to approve the submission of applications for Federal Funds under the No Child Left Behind Authorization Act of 2002, and further approve the school district to serve as the sponsoring agency to operate these programs according to the guidelines of the act, including a program offering supplemental reading instruction in elementary and secondary schools; professional development, staffing and technology and education improvement and support ser-

vices.

- The board voted to appoint Berkheimer Associates as the earned income tax and delinquent tax collector the municipalities in the school district, and entered into an agreement with Kingston Township for the collection of school taxes for the 2002-03 school year.

- The board honored the high school indoor color guard team, under the direction of Cassie Palfey, for winning the novice division of the Atlantic Coast Championships.

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