

# Contract talks will make school year busy for four Lower Bucks County districts

By ANTHONY DIMATTIA Staff writer | Posted: Monday, August 18, 2014 12:00 am

A lot of time will be spent at the bargaining table for a number of school districts during the coming school year.

Four of the eight Lower Bucks County districts — Council Rock, Morrisville, Neshaminy and Pennsbury — along with the Bucks County Technical High School, have union contracts that expire in 2015.

Bristol Township is already busy negotiating with six of its unions whose contracts end this summer.

Here's a look at how each district and the tech school stand with contracts going into the new school year:

## **BENSALEM**

A six-year deal was approved with the 474-member Bensalem Township Education Association in May 2012. It provides a 7.2 percent salary increase over the term of the contract, which will expire in June 2017. The average teacher salary last year was \$79,828.

In July, Bensalem moved nearly 900 employees to the Bucks and Montgomery County Schools Health Care Consortium to save the district an estimated \$1.4 million. Teachers will be able to keep their Personal Choice 20/30/70 plans with the move. Health insurance premium contributions will increase 16 percent this school year and in 2015-16, and 17 percent for 2016-17.

## **BRISTOL**

Bristol teachers have another three years before their five-year contract runs out.



The Pennsbury school board heard public comment on Thursday night about the proposal to close Village Park ES to save about \$1 million per year, redistricting about 650 elementary students to even out population in the 10 remaining elementary schools, approve a proposed budget for 2013-2014 that could call for a property tax increase and decide whether to accept the recommendations in a fact-finders report issued regarding the near three-year old contract stalemate between the district and the teachers union. School board member Dan Rodgers gave a presentation about the proposed budget at the beginning of the meeting.

Under the pact, which expires Aug. 31, 2017, Bristol Borough Education Association members will get a 1 percent raise this year and 2 percent pay hikes in the last two years of the pact.

Starting this school year, teachers will receive full step increases, which is an incremental pay raise based on experience. That will remain for the rest of the deal.

The Bristol Borough Educational Support Professional Association contract expired June 30, 2013 and ongoing negotiations are taking place for a new contract.

Also up is the custodial and maintenance contract that expired June 30 and negotiations for a new bargaining agreement is also ongoing.

The Bristol Borough Educational Administrators Association contract expires June 30, 2017.

### **BRISTOL TOWNSHIP**

Six unions representing 660 Bristol Township employees could be working without contracts by the end of August. Three already are doing so.

The agreement with the Bristol Township Educational Association — 448 teachers and other district professionals — expires Aug. 31. The BTEA is one of four unions in the district that accepted pay freezes beginning with the 2011-12 school year.

The original deal, signed in 2009, called for a four-year contract with annual salary increases ranging from 2 percent to 3 percent. A fifth year was added later.

The starting salary for an employee with a bachelor's degree is \$45,927. The highest BTEA salary is \$102,378.

Under the current deal, BTEA members pay \$80 a month for Personal Choice single coverage and \$110 for families. Under the Keystone HMO, they pay \$55 for single coverage and \$90 for families.

The Act 93 Union, which represents the district's administrators and supervisors, is one of the three unions whose members are working without a contract after their deals expired June 30.

The other two are the Office and Professional Employees International Union, which covers 41 secretaries and 45 cafeteria employees, and the Transportation Workers Union, which covers 73 full- and part-time custodians and 22 maintenance employees.

Bristol Township is also in negotiations for the first time with Teamsters Union Local 115, which represents 25 bus drivers; and with the six-member security/school police union. Both groups joined the union earlier this year.

“The district is currently actively negotiating with each group,” said Alison Buchan, the district’s personnel coordinator and open records officer, adding that a mediator is involved in talks with the BTEA and the Teamsters.

## **BUCKS COUNTY TECHNICAL**

### **HIGH SCHOOL**

The two-year deal inked July 2013 between the high school board and the union representing about 120 staffers will expire at the end of the 2014-2015 school year.

Teacher salaries are determined by the average salaries of the tech school’s six sending districts — Bensalem, Bristol, Bristol Township, Morrisville, Neshaminy and Pennsbury — and calculated based on a two-year time lag. The average teacher salary for the upcoming school year is \$79,956, school officials said.

The teachers’ base plan for medical insurance is Personal Choice 20/30/70, a Preferred Plans option offered through a health care consortium of school districts in Bucks and Montgomery counties. The teachers will pay 17 percent of their health care premiums in 2014-15.

### **CENTENNIAL**

Labor peace will reign in the district since the Centennial Education Association contract doesn’t expire until 2016.

The current deal was approved in 2011, retroactive to 2010, and would have expired in 2014 if not for a 2012 mutual agreement to extend the contract to 2016. Under the terms of the extended deal, the union’s 396 members will get a 0.75 percent pay raise in 2014-15 and a 1 percent pay increase in 2015-16.

The average salary in Centennial this school year is \$90,000. Also, employee monthly contributions to base health plan premiums will increase by \$5 a month in the 2014-15 and 2015-16 school years. Teachers currently contribute \$51 a month to the base plan.

### **COUNCIL ROCK**

The 926-member Council Rock Education Association, which includes teachers, guidance counselors, librarians and several other positions, is in the last year of a three-year contract.

Under the pact, CREA members had a complete pay freeze for 2012-13, a slight step increase in the second half of 2013-14 for members not at the top of the scale, and a 0.5 percent pay increase for all members this school year.

The starting CREA salary for the upcoming school year is \$44,469; the maximum is \$107,469. In addition, CREA members at the normal maximum who also have doctorate degrees earn an

additional 3 percent, for \$110,693 a year. The average CREA member will make \$95,558 this year.

This school year, CREA members will contribute 16 percent toward their health insurance premiums. The insurance has co-pays of \$10 to \$20 for in-network doctor visits. Co-pays are \$10 for generic prescriptions and \$20 for name brand drugs.

When the contract was signed, Council Rock school board members lauded CREA for accepting minimal raises and increasing their health insurance premium contributions at a time when the district was dealing with steeply rising expenses in other areas, especially pensions.

The 515-member Council Rock Educational Support Professionals Association, which includes positions like bus monitors, maintenance personnel, teacher assistants, cafeteria aides, recess aides, clerical personnel, technology specialists and others, will also have its contract expire in 2015.

The three-year CRESPA contract had pay raises of 0.5 percent in 2012-13, then 1 percent in 2013-14 and finally 1.5 percent this school year. CRESPA members earning more than \$32,000 a year contribute 9 percent to their health insurance premiums this school year; those earning less than \$32,000 contribute 6 percent. The doctor visit and prescription co-pays are the same as in the CREA contract.

Council Rock Superintendent Mark Klein had little to say about talks toward new contracts for both unions, except that he expects to begin discussions with both associations no later than January.

## **MORRISVILLE**

The contract with the 69-member Morrisville Education Association — including a psychologist, two guidance counselors and a school nurse — will expire at the end of the 2014-15 school year.

The three-year deal, signed September 2012, included no salary increase the first year and had union members paying more toward health care premiums. Union members received pay raises ranging from 2 percent and 8 percent of their salaries last year. In addition, union members at the top of the district's educational attainment ladder get 0.5 percent salary increases.

Teachers will pay 16 percent of their health care premiums this year.

The Morrisville Education Support Personnel Association Custodial/Maintenance and Secretarial/Clerical and Morrisville Education Association teacher contracts expire June 30, 2015.

## **NESHAMINY**

The district is set to reopen talks in January with the Neshaminy Federation of Teachers. The current two-year pact ends in June. Neshaminy hopes to avoid another contract impasse, after it took five years to reach the current agreement.

This deal, which runs retroactively from 2008 through June 30, 2015, featured a salary schedule that allowed a teacher with the highest levels of experience and education credits to make upward of \$107,000. However, the deal didn't require Neshaminy to raise taxes, with officials estimating it would save the district \$2.5 million to \$4 million throughout the contract.

The savings came from removing a number of perks and benefits that were included in a previous contract. They included a \$27,500 retirement incentive and free health care for any retired teacher with more than 10 years of service until age 65. Teachers also went from paying nothing for health insurance to paying 11 percent to 16 percent of their premiums during the 2014-15 school year.

Before the contract was signed, teachers hadn't received a pay raise since the previous deal expired in 2008.

With NFT talks yet to start, the school board has focused its attention on striking a new deal with the union for the district's support staff after its most recent contract expired June 30.

Both sides remain worlds apart on a host of issues, and both recently tossed out a state appointed fact-finder report. They've been negotiating since January.

The district also wants to outsource some union jobs, which the union opposes. The fact-finder, a lawyer appointed by the Pennsylvania Labor Relations Board, suggested the district outsource dining room and playground aide jobs and cleaning positions, but hold off on contracting out food services jobs until July 1, 2016.

The union wants a five-year deal. The district wants a three-year pact. The fact-finder recommended four years. The district asked to move more than 50 full-time instructional and non-instructional aides to part time and make them ineligible for benefits. That would save the district \$600,000. Union members oppose that. The fact-finder recommended a lower pay scale for all new support staff hires.

"We hope with this report as a starting point, we can return to the bargaining table and quickly come to a resolution," school board President Scott Congdon said at a recent meeting.

Union President Mindy Andersen said her members "overwhelmingly rejected" the fact-finder report. The union represents 500 bus drivers, clerical staff, aides and technology and food service employees.

## **PENNSBURY**

Pennsbury's five-year, retroactive contract with its teachers will expire at the end of June.

The current deal with the Pennsbury Education Association was approved June 2013. It came nearly three years after the union's last contract expired, making it retroactive to 2010-11.

The basis of the deal was a recommendation by state-appointed fact-finder Lawrence Coburn. The union, which represents about 800 teachers, psychologists, guidance counselors, social workers, librarians and school nurses, asked for the fact-finder after contract talks stalled.

The five-year deal included no pay raises for the first three years. Pay raises of less than 1 percent kicked in during 2013-14, and will continue in 2014-15 for about half of the union members.

The PEA members who received additional compensation were not at the top of the district's pay scale, which is slightly more than \$98,000 a year for the average member. Also, no increases for educational attainment were included in the deal. The teachers' options for medical insurance plans are Personal Choice 20/30/70 and Personal Choice 10/20/70.