

Bolinas-Stinson Union School District and Bolinas-Stinson Teachers Association Negotiations Reach Impasse

October 6, 2025

Dear Bolinas-Stinson Union School District Community,

I'm writing to share an update on the District's contract negotiations with the Bolinas-Stinson Teachers Association (BSTA), which represents our teachers. (Our classified staff—including most non-teaching employees—are represented by a separate union, the Classified School Employees Association (CSEA), and those negotiations are handled separately.)

Review of Negotiation Facts

The District and BSTA have been negotiating a new three-year contract (2025-2028). Bargaining teams met five times between March 26 and August 8, 2025. Due to substantial differences on key articles, especially salary, we jointly declared an impasse. We are now working with a state-appointed mediator from the Public Employment Relations Board ("PERB"), with our next mediated meeting scheduled for October 28.

We all agree on the goals for our contract negotiations:

- We will continue to ensure excellent learning for our students.
- We will maximize pay for our dedicated staff.
- We will do these things in a way that is fiscally responsible and sustainable for the long term.

The salary figures below include both the new raises now being negotiated and the automatic yearly "step increases" previously negotiated and already in place. These automatic step increases average 2.6% per year, adding up to about an 8% raise—over \$7,500 per teacher—over the next three years, even if no additional raises are agreed to in current negotiations.

The Financial Reality: Why the BSTA Proposal Is Too Costly

The BSTA proposal plus the automatic step increases described above would cost the school district \$547,000 over three years and give each teacher an over \$40,000 raise in total (\$15,000 in year 1 + \$18,000 in year 2 + \$7,000 in year 3). The District highly values and loves our teachers, but accepting their proposal would immediately put the District at risk of severe financial distress.

1. Deficit Spending and Risk of Insolvency

The latest BSTA proposal would increase deficit spending and is projected to render the district fiscally insolvent in year 3. Our budget reports reflect that the District is currently facing annual operating deficits, before negotiating any further salary increases. The Marin County Office of Education, which supervises our budget, recently wrote to our school: *"Absent offsetting cost reductions, salary increases will increase the district's deficit spending."*

2. Paying for Salary Increases from Reserves

The state and our School Board require the District to keep a strategic reserve of at least 10% of total expenditures. The Marin County Office of Education advises the District to "maintain reserves at far higher levels than the state required minimums to ensure sufficient cash for operating purposes." Using reserves to fund ongoing or permanent salary increases goes against guidance from the State Department of Education's Fiscal Crisis and Management Assistance Team (FCMAT). Rapidly spending down reserves is not sound financial management and could trigger county or state intervention under AB 1200.

BSTA’s proposal: With BSTA’s proposal and the automatic step increases, teacher salaries would rise by over \$40,000 per teacher over three years. This would cause severe deficit spending, funded by our strategic reserve. By year two, the reserve would drop to about the 10% minimum required, and by year three, the district would not be able to meet its financial obligations.

The District’s proposal: With the district’s offer and the built-in step increases, teacher salaries would rise by over \$12,000 per teacher over three years. This plan requires using our strategic reserve, creating significant deficit spending. It’s financially risky but manageable if we can cut costs, increase revenues, or both. Working with our bargaining units, we’d have three years to end the deficit while aiming for higher revenues.

3. Uncertainty About Federal Funding

About 7% of the District’s annual revenue comes from the federal government. Though we have not seen reductions in the current year due to successful legal action which prohibited the Administration from “freezing” these funds, the District’s federal funding allocations are under threat by the current Presidential Administration.

Competitive Compensation:

BSUSD teacher salary and benefits are among the highest in Marin County, **ranking #4 of 18 districts** in total compensation as of June 2025. (Total compensation is the value of salary + health benefits.) For health and welfare benefits alone, the district ranks #2, providing about \$30,770 per employee for coverage of self and one dependent.

The District is offering a 4% salary increase this year over the automatic step increases, which is the maximum affordable over three years without risking financial stability. Additional raises may be possible if we can lower expenses or increase revenues. For that reason, the District proposes to revisit salary negotiations each of the next two years rather than close off the possibility of further raises now.

Parity for All Staff:

While BSTA only negotiates for its own members, the District must consider the entire budget and all staff. The District’s offer of a 4% raise in Year 1 applies to all employees—teachers and non-teachers. We must ensure there are enough funds to provide fair increases for every employee group, including those represented by CSEA, with whom negotiations are ongoing.

To prevent a fiscal cliff from ongoing deficit spending, the District must manage its finances responsibly. We remain committed to mediation with BSTA to reach a fair and sustainable agreement.

What is Fund 40?

The term “Fund 40” has been circulating recently in the context of this contract negotiation, and I’ve been asked what it is. Fund 40 is a restricted account school districts use for facilities repairs and maintenance. Four years ago, the District used nearly all of its \$375,000 Fund 40 balance to replace our failed septic system after sewage flooded our playing field and office. Maintaining safe, dry, and functional facilities is not optional.

Last year, the District replenished Fund 40 with \$400,000 in restricted funds because we face over \$2 million in deferred maintenance on our beautiful but aging campuses. Current high-priority projects include:

- Replacing several roofs near failure
- Fixing leaky windows in the main office
- Infrared testing of old electrical panels
- Resurfacing hardcourts on the Bolinas campus before the asphalt fails
- Repairing or replacing exterior siding where it is damaged or delaminating

These projects will cost about \$350,000 this year, leaving roughly \$50,000 in Fund 40 for emergencies. To keep our facilities safe and functional, the District will need to set aside some revenue each year to rebuild Fund 40 and continue addressing deferred maintenance needs.

Sincerely,

Leo Kostelnik, Superintendent
Bolin-Stinson Union School District

Bolinas-Stinson Union School District

BSUSD and Bolinas-Stinson Teachers Association/California Teachers Association (BSTA/CTA) Negotiations are currently at impasse.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (answers below)

- How Do Bolinas-Stinson Teachers Rank in Pay Compared to Other Marin County Districts?
- BSTA writes that they are ranked #13 of 17 in salary compared to other Marin County school districts. The District writes they are ranked #4. Why the difference?
- BSTA writes that many districts in the last few years negotiated much larger raises than the 9% BSTA and the District negotiated over the last 3-year contract. Are District teachers falling behind their peers in compensation?
- Does Bolinas-Stinson have difficulty attracting and retaining teachers?
- What is a “teacher salary schedule?”
- What raise is the teacher’s union proposing?
- What raise is the District proposing?
- Why take this risk?
- What about other District employees?
- Why doesn’t the District offer larger raises in this round of negotiations?
- What is “Fund 40?”
- What does it mean when negotiations are “at impasse”?
- What happens after impasse is declared?
- What issues can lead to impasse?
- What issues were settled between BSTA/CTA and BSUSD before heading into impasse?
- What issues were still unsettled between BSTA/CTA and BSUSD heading into impasse?
- What is fact-finding?
- Are fact-finding recommendations binding?
- What happens after fact-finding?
- Is mediation confidential?
- What factors are considered in fact-finding?
- Can the District implement salary or benefit changes unilaterally?
- Can teachers strike during impasse?
- What is the District’s goal during impasse?
- How long does the impasse process take?
- Where can I learn more?

How Do Bolinas-Stinson Teachers Rank in Pay Compared to Other Marin County Districts?

Teacher pay can be compared in two ways: salary only or salary plus health benefits. Most districts use “total compensation” (salary + benefits) because it reflects the real value of a teacher’s contract.

As of June 2025, Bolinas-Stinson teachers rank #2 in Marin County for health benefits, with the District contributing \$30,077 per year for coverage of the employee and one dependent. (The graph shows last year’s health benefit level: \$26,759.)

As of June 2025, when salary and benefits are combined, Bolinas-Stinson teachers rank #4 in total compensation among all Marin County school districts.

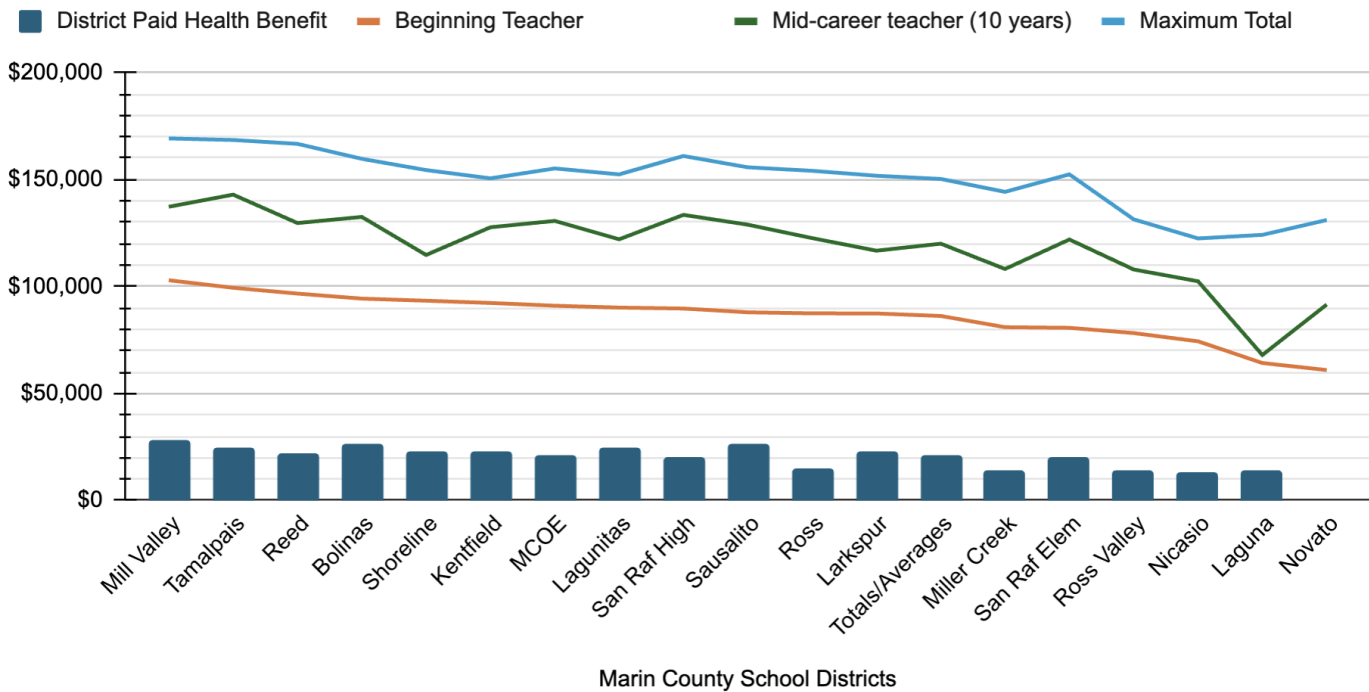
The lines on the chart below show countywide “total compensation” comparisons for three levels of experience:

- Maximum Pay (20–25 years)

- Mid-Career Teacher (10 years)
- Beginning Teacher

The bar graph at the bottom of the chart compares the dollar value of Health Benefits.

Marin County School District Comparison: District Paid Health Benefit & Total Compensation (Salary + Benefit) for Year 1, Year 10, and Senior Teachers



BSTA writes that they are ranked #13 of 17 in salary compared to other Marin County school districts. The District writes they are ranked #4. Why the difference?

BSTA is comparing salary only, while the District is comparing the total value of compensation — which includes salary plus District-paid health benefits worth \$30,077 in 2025–26. When benefits are included, a first-year BSUSD teacher ranks #4 out of 19 Marin County districts in total compensation.

BSTA also based its comparison on the lowest pay level on the salary schedule — a first-year teacher with minimal post-graduate coursework. This is not characteristic of the rest of the salary schedule. That same teacher would receive a raise of more than \$8,500 in year two, and \$2,000–\$3,000 per year after that. Across the salary schedule, the year-two raise is more than double the size of a typical annual increase.

BSTA writes that many districts in the last few years negotiated much larger raises than the 9% BSTA and the District negotiated over the last 3-year contract. Are District teachers falling behind their peers in compensation?

Several other districts have raised pay and are narrowing the compensation gap, but BSUSD still ranks #4 out of 19 Marin County districts.

The District did not raise base pay in 2023–24, but each teacher received a payment of \$8,226 on top of their regular salary in lieu of raising base pay on the salary schedule. The contract also includes negotiations for a 2024–25 salary increase, so this year the District and BSTA are negotiating both the final year of the previous contract and a new three-year agreement.

It's also important to note that a smaller percentage increase on a higher salary can equal or exceed a larger percentage increase on a lower salary.

Does Bolinas-Stinson have difficulty attracting and retaining teachers?

While middle school teachers with single-subject credentials in areas like math, science, history, and English are often harder to find, BSUSD has not had trouble attracting or keeping teachers.

Our strong compensation, supportive working conditions, and excellent educational programs make the District a desirable place to work. We also benefit from our beautiful campuses and close-knit school community. Among our 12 teachers, the average tenure is 8 years, and 4 teachers have been with BSUSD for more than 10 years.

What is a “teacher salary schedule?”

The teacher salary schedule is part of the negotiated contract between BSUSD and BSTA. It sets each teacher's pay based on years of experience (“steps”) and education level (“columns”).

Teachers automatically move up one step each year, earning a raise for additional experience. They can also earn more by completing enough graduate-level coursework to move to the next column.

Below is the current BSTA salary schedule from the most recently negotiated contract. Currently contracted teacher salaries are highlighted in yellow.

To calculate “total compensation” (Salary + Health Benefits) prior to negotiated salary increases, add \$30,000 to the salaries shown below.

2024-2025 certificated salary schedule					
STEP	BA + 30 units	BA + 45 units or Masters	BA +60 units or Master's +15 units	BA+75 units or Masters +30 units	BA +90 units or Masters +90 units
1	\$67,586	\$70,688	\$73,702	\$77,395	\$79,331
2	\$76,154	\$78,610	\$81,067	\$84,339	\$85,986
3	\$78,611	\$81,067	\$84,155	\$87,428	\$89,074
4	\$81,072	\$84,155	\$87,242	\$90,516	\$92,162
5	\$84,155	\$87,242	\$90,330	\$93,603	\$95,250
6	\$87,243	\$90,330	\$93,418	\$96,692	\$98,337
7	\$90,330	\$93,418	\$96,507	\$99,778	\$101,425
8	\$93,418	\$96,507	\$99,594	\$102,867	\$104,514
9	\$96,506	\$99,594	\$102,682	\$105,956	\$107,601
10	\$99,594	\$102,682	\$105,769	\$109,044	\$110,689
11		\$105,769	\$107,252	\$110,526	\$112,170
12		\$107,252	\$108,735	\$112,007	\$113,653
13		\$108,735	\$110,216	\$113,491	\$115,134
14		\$110,216	\$111,699	\$114,972	\$116,618
15		\$111,699	\$113,182	\$116,456	\$118,099
16			\$114,662	\$117,936	\$119,583
17			\$116,145	\$119,420	\$121,064
18			\$117,626	\$120,901	\$122,546
19			\$119,110	\$122,386	\$124,028
20			\$120,590	\$123,865	\$125,510 (2 teachers)
21				\$125,348	\$126,993 (2 teachers)
22				\$126,830	\$128,474
23				\$128,312	\$129,957
24				\$129,794	\$131,439
25				\$131,277	\$132,922
Salary schedule is based on 186 days of service					

What raise is the teacher's union proposing?

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What raise is the District proposing?

With the District's offer and the automatic step increases, teacher salaries would rise by more than \$12,000 per teacher over three years.

This plan would use funds from the strategic reserve and create significant deficit spending. It is financially risky but manageable if the District can reduce costs, increase revenues, or both.

Working with our bargaining units, we would have three years to eliminate the deficit while seeking higher revenues. If that effort is not successful, the District would be forced to cut programs or lay off employees.

Why take this risk?

The District recognizes that the Bay Area's high cost of living makes it hard for many employees to get by on school district salaries. That's why the District and both bargaining units share a commitment to maximizing employee compensation, while also ensuring high-quality learning for students and long-term financial stability.

The District's current proposal is financially risky but manageable if we can reduce costs, increase revenues, or both.

What about other District employees?

While BSTA only negotiates for its own members, the District must consider the entire budget and all staff. The District's offer of a 4% raise in Year 1 applies to all employees—teachers and non-teachers. We must ensure there are enough funds to provide fair increases for every employee group, including those represented by CSEA, with whom negotiations are ongoing.

Why doesn't the District offer larger raises in this round of negotiations?

The latest BSTA proposal would increase deficit spending and is projected to render the district fiscally insolvent in year 3. Our budget reports reflect that the District is currently facing annual operating deficits, before negotiating any further salary increases. The Marin County Office of Education, which supervises our budget, recently wrote to our school: "Absent offsetting cost reductions, salary increases will increase the district's deficit spending."

The District is offering a 4% salary increase this year over the automatic step increases, which is the maximum affordable over three years without risking financial stability. Additional raises may be possible if we can lower expenses or increase revenues. For that reason, the District proposes to revisit salary negotiations each of the next two years rather than close off the possibility of further raises in those years.

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Last year, the District replenished Fund 40 with \$400,000 transferred from the unrestricted reserve funds because we face over \$2 million in deferred maintenance on our beautiful but aging campuses. Current high-priority projects include:

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These projects will cost about \$350,000 this year, leaving roughly \$50,000 in Fund 40 for emergencies. To keep our facilities safe and functional, the District will need to set aside some revenue each year to rebuild Fund 40 and continue addressing deferred maintenance needs.

What does it mean when negotiations are “at impasse”?

An impasse occurs when the District and the teachers’ association have met and negotiated in good faith but cannot reach agreement on one or more issues. When both sides determine that further discussions are unlikely to lead to agreement, either party may declare impasse under Government Code Section 3548.

What happens after impasse is declared?

Once impasse is declared, the process moves to mediation under the supervision of the Public Employment Relations Board (PERB). PERB assigns a neutral state-appointed mediator to meet with both parties. The mediator works privately and confidentially to help the parties reach an agreement.

If mediation does not resolve all issues, the process may move to fact-finding.

What issues can lead to impasse?

Impasse can occur when the parties cannot agree on one or more issues, such as:

- Salaries
 - Class size or workload
 - Health and welfare benefits
 - Leave policies
 - Working conditions
-

What issues were settled between BSTA/CTA and BSUSD before heading into impasse?

- Class sizes
 - Retirement benefits
 - Evaluation
-

What issues were still unsettled between BSTA/CTA and BSUSD heading into impasse?

- Salaries
 - Health and welfare benefits
 - Leave policies
 - Grievances
-

What is fact-finding?

Fact-finding is a formal process that occurs if mediation does not result in an agreement. A three-person fact-finding panel is established:

- One member is selected by the District.
- One member is selected by the teachers’ association.
- One neutral chairperson is appointed by PERB.

The panel reviews each side’s positions, supporting data, and financial information. The panel then issues a written report with non-binding recommendations to help the parties reach agreement.

Are fact-finding recommendations binding?

No. The fact-finding panel’s recommendations are advisory only. Both parties review the report and may continue negotiations based on its findings.

What happens after fact-finding?

After the fact-finding report is issued and made public, the parties may continue to negotiate. If no agreement is reached after all legal steps are completed, the District may choose to implement its last, best, and final offer. The association may then consider taking job action, such as a strike.

Is mediation confidential?

Yes. Mediation is confidential under California law. Information shared during mediation cannot be disclosed publicly or used later in any hearing or legal proceeding.

What factors are considered in fact-finding?

Fact-finders typically consider:

- The public interest and the District's financial ability to pay.
 - Comparisons with similar school districts.
 - The cost of living.
 - Existing contract terms.
 - Overall conditions of employment.
-

Can the District implement salary or benefit changes unilaterally?

Not until the statutory impasse process has been completed. Only after mediation and fact-finding are completed, and all legal requirements are met, may the District implement its last, best, and final offer.

Can teachers strike during impasse?

A strike is only lawful after all required impasse procedures have been completed, including mediation and fact-finding. Strikes that occur before those steps are finished may constitute an unfair labor practice under state law.

What is the District's goal during impasse?

The District's goal is to reach a fair, sustainable, and lawful agreement that recognizes employee contributions, ensures excellent learning for our students, and maximizes pay for our dedicated staff, in a way that is fiscally responsible and sustainable for the long term.

How long does the impasse process take?

The length of the impasse process varies. Mediation may take several meetings over days or weeks. Fact-finding typically takes 30 to 60 days once the panel is established.

Where can I learn more?

California Government Code Sections 3548–3548.8 (Impasse procedures):

https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?sectionNum=3548.&lawCode=GOV

Public Employment Relations Board (PERB):

<https://perb.ca.gov>

California School Boards Association (CSBA):

<https://www.csba.org>

