

The Virgin Islands Consortium

No Substantial Discussions as Yet on Increased Teacher Base Pay, Says Government's Chief Negotiator

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A cost analysis has to be carried out to calculate the financial impact of increasing the starting salary for new teachers to \$50,000, before the government's financial team can begin negotiations.

That is according to Joss Springette, chief negotiator at the Office of Collective Bargaining, who told legislators on Tuesday that there has not yet been any substantial conversation about how much increasing the pay scale would cost.

“That’s a process that we have to work on before having a discussion further with the governor and OMB [Office of Management and Budget] because that’s a large group, the largest bargaining unit, so the process of calculating that will take some time,” she said.

“Once we have a costing we’ll have a better sense of what that would look like and the financial impact,” she added.

In a bid to attract people to the teaching profession, Governor Albert Bryan Jr. announced in his State of the Territory address in January that the starting salary would be increased beginning in September 2023. Currently, introductory teachers make between \$46, 000 to \$48,000 a year.

Following his address, Mr. Bryan [told the Consortium](#) that the new starting pay would take effect in the new school year because the current contract had expired and a new agreement has to be reached by then.

However, according to the chief negotiator, the current contracts for teachers do not expire until the end of August 2023, and so negotiations with their unions have not yet started to include discussions on the proposed increase in base pay among other things.

Sen. Donna Frett-Gregory, chair of the Committee on Budget, Appropriations & Finance questioned whether this implementation would really happen in September. She also noted that an increase in base pay would imply an increase for teachers further up the pay scale.

“Naturally, organically, if you have teachers coming in at \$50k, new teachers, then those that are there you have to move the bar,” she said.

According to Ms. Springette, there are 13 active negotiations for this fiscal year, all of which require her attention.

"There are 17 that are expired and I'm working on four right now. So there's 13 beyond that and each year contracts expire," she said.

She said the Office of Collective Bargaining has been looking at ways to move the process along more quickly, with some unions indicating their willingness to negotiate to some extent through email.