

Wednesday, Jan. 17, 2024

Mayor's Newton Update

We Newtonians are passionate about education and believe deeply in supporting our students. All of us are committed to a sustainable contract that offers competitive pay and benefits and recognizes the dedication of our amazing teachers.



I'm hearing from a lot of families – and a lot of disappointment, frustration, anger, and dismay.

I know that a strike by the Newton Teachers Association would harm our children and disrupt the lives of our parents/caregivers.

I urge the Newton Teachers Association to keep these negotiations at the bargaining table among the adults and with the mediator ... and to keep our students in the classroom.

As our Superintendent, Dr. Anna Nolin, has said, “Our students are counting on us all.”

Newton's School Committee offered to meet any day this week and are committed to continuing good faith negotiations, engaging in a meaningful and collaborative way at the negotiating table.

What's Happening Right Now?

Since strikes by teachers' unions are illegal in Massachusetts and NPS has evidence that a strike is about to occur, the Newton School Committee filed yesterday a “strike petition” with the Massachusetts Department of Labor Relations (DLR) to request that the Commonwealth Employment Relations Board (CERB) conduct an investigation into the union's unlawful strike activity.

Late last night, the DLR responded by issuing a Notice of Strike Investigation. A pre-investigation conference was held today at 2:00 pm. A formal evidentiary hearing is scheduled for tomorrow, Thursday, Jan. 18 at 9:00 am.

We expect that at the end of the day on Thursday or perhaps early Friday, the CERB will close its investigation and render a decision.

If the CERB determines that the NTA is engaged in a strike or a strike is about to occur, the CERB will order the union, including its employees and officers, to cease any strike activity.

We understand that the NTA still continues to move forward with a strike vote tomorrow, Thursday, Jan. 18 and that a strike would begin on Friday, Jan. 19.

If there is a vote to strike, we will have to see what actions the CERB takes to address the union's decision to strike.

If the NTA strike occurs, school will be canceled, all buildings will be closed, and all school-related events and activities will be postponed. The Newton Public Schools will provide meals for students that can be picked up at Newton North or Newton South High Schools. Click [here](#) for more information on NPS Update on Strike Operations 1.16.24.

A negotiation session had been previously scheduled for Friday, Jan. 19. The Newton School Committee Negotiations Team continues to offer to meet with the NTA tomorrow, Thursday, but the NTA has declined to meet.

A Competitive Offer from the Newton School Committee

Great schools are a direct result of great teachers. We want to continue to attract and retain excellent teachers. A competitive and sustainable contract is essential for our teachers.

The School Committee is committed to settling the contract (which expired at the end of August) in a manner that honors our educators and staff, allows the Superintendent to continue to provide program improvements, and does not result in layoffs and budget reductions to pay for the contract.

To support this effort, I have continuously prioritized increases in the operating budget for the Newton Public Schools and the use of new one-time funds.

NPS has communicated that the use of the incremental, new one-time funding I recently allocated will be to (i) address large class sizes in the high schools, (ii) add additional supports in the elementary schools, and (iii) provide a competitive contract offer to our educators.

Last night in a Q&A session with parent organization leaders, Chair Brezski provided information detailing compensation and benefits packages for Newton's teachers that are at competitive levels relative to peers. Superintendent Nolin noted that the Newton Public Schools is an attractive place to work with only 12 unfilled positions (out of approximately 2,000), according to the most recent staffing update.

What is the Newton School Committee's Current Offer?

The School Committee offer includes pay increases of at least 6% every year for the next three years for about half of all Newton teachers (those earlier in their careers with lower pay who are in the "step" portion of the salary scale; they will have increases of approximately 4% in their pay each year for all three years plus another 2.25% COLA increase in the first and second years of the new contract and a 2.75% increase in the third year).

The School Committee offer for the other half of the teachers who are higher paid (and are on the “top” step of the salary scale) provides pay increases of 2.75% in both the first and second year of the contract and then a 3.25% increase in the third year. In addition, these teachers also receive longevity payments annually (ranging from \$875 to \$3300) and additional payments averaging 5.5% when they complete higher levels of education or coursework.

I thought it might be helpful to have a couple of examples of what teachers in Newton currently make.

- A newer teacher in their third year at NPS who has earned a Master’s degree earns \$67,559 under the existing contract. (If that teacher has earned a Bachelor’s degree, \$62,116.) [With the School Committee’s last proposal, next school year that teacher would make \$73,198 with a Master’s and \$67,268 with a Bachelor’s.]
- A teacher who has been here longer, let’s say twelve years, who has earned a Master’s degree and completed 45 educational credits, earns \$115,473 under the existing contract. [This teacher under the School Committee proposal would earn \$121,924 next school year.]

This information is available at the NPS website under the Human Resources tab.

Complete information on the School Committee offer is [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#).

The bottom line is I respect and admire our teachers. I empathize with our parents/caregivers who are scrambling. I worry about the additional stress for our students if there is a strike. I believe we should be continuing our negotiations with the mediator appointed by the State rather than having our students unable to attend their classes. I know I will keep prioritizing funding for the Newton Public Schools. I echo the statement of Chair Chris Brezski, our collective focus right now should be on keeping our kids in school.

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