

8:00 p.m. - Sunday, Jan. 28, 2024

Mayor's Newton Update

On the eve of a seventh school day that is cancelled due to the illegal strike by the union, I know residents are frustrated, angry and sad. I am as well.

The Newton School Committee and I desperately want to reach agreement on a contract that pays our educators competitively and is sustainable for our schools and the City.



We know that the Newton Public Schools are the magnet attracting families to Newton. Our schools are our crown jewels. And, our teachers are what make our schools and community a great place to raise a family.

For over ten days, I have been writing to our community from the perspective that the School Committee negotiating team could sit down with the union and the two sides would negotiate in good faith on a new, competitive contract while students are in school and learning.

There is a reason the law in Massachusetts requires teachers to be in the classroom while we negotiate. This law protects our children. It is essential that our schools be open.

I am increasingly worried that the union leadership is losing sight of the fact that their decision to strike is really, really hurting youngsters. As one parent wrote, removing the school routine is wreaking havoc; children are feeling isolated at home; cancelling extracurriculars is removing joy and hurting mental health; high schoolers are feeling anxious and stressed out.

The City of Newton simply cannot afford what the union is asking for without causing great harm to the City's residents.

- The union is demanding raises that they know the City cannot afford. Agreeing to the NTA demands would mean laying off teachers and/or other City employees. (The Newton schools have over 2,000 employees while our next three largest departments - Police, Fire and Public Works - have respectively 210, 199, and 134 employees.)
- We are offering our teachers a contract that honors their valuable service in line with peer school districts. Similar to the Superintendent, I cannot endorse a union contract that makes cuts to our current level of School/City services or to our current School/City employees to fund it.

- Our community weighed in on additional funding for schools on the override vote in March 2023. Newton voted 53% to 47% not to increase our taxes. The union strike does not change that reality. We must live within our current revenues. While I am committed to trying again and putting another override proposal in front of our voters, we can't sign this contract counting on the next override passing.
- The Governor's proposed FY25 state budget that she delivered on Wednesday only has a 1.8% increase for Newton in Chapter 70 funds for education. This is well below the 3% average for the state, and below the City's forecast of 2.5%. It is also well below the increase in City funding for NPS next year.
- The City accrued more than usual one-time funds. We had a great financial settlement with a large commercial taxpayer. We have benefitted from unusually high interest rates and therefore have had high interest income. These funds have already been committed to improve our schools and the contract. The union continues to demand that I use our "surplus" to support NPS. To be clear, I agree and I have.
- The Newton School Committee is agreeing to a lot of the NTA proposals and presenting compromises.

The union is striking illegally and holding our kids' class time as a bargaining chip. I think they hope that by making this negotiation personal and inflicting a lot of pain on our children, parents/caregivers, and elected officials, the School Committee and/or the City will bend and cut services, programs or employees from within NPS or other City departments. In effect, the NTA (and the MTA) are bringing hard ball national politics to Newton. They are using a "take it or leave it" approach at the bargaining table. That is disappointing and undermines the good faith bargaining process required by law.

We will stay true to our core principles of prioritizing the budget for the Newton Public Schools, providing competitive wages and benefits to valued school and City employees, and having sustainable budgets without layoffs.

We can't and won't kick the can down the road only to face a fiscal crisis in the future.

We are unwilling to sign an unsustainable contract that results in teacher layoffs. Similarly, we are unwilling to lay off police, firefighters and other municipal employees to pay for a contract we cannot afford.

The Newton School Committee and the Mayor are elected to do what is best for our entire community, now and in the future, even when it is hard.

We will continue to negotiate in good faith.

I know what is most important to everyone is getting schools open. Our students deserve that. We know that. We are doing everything that we can, within our

financial means, to have our students in school.

The union leadership can decide right this moment to open the schools. If they do, the School Committee and I are committed to continue negotiating with great urgency.

The following is a message from the Newton School Committee sent out to the school community at 6:00

After months of mediation and ten days of a strike, today the NTA presented its first proposal on wages and salaries since December (when it increased its demands) and its first package proposal during this strike.

The NTA proposal was neither affordable nor sustainable.

The union attached a poison pill to their COLA demand that would have extended a 4% or 5% COLA, depending on the unit, if the next contract was not signed before expiration of this contract. No rational School Committee could ever agree to such a demand. Accepting the NTA proposal wholesale would have required a reduction in force of more than 70 valued educators and support staff throughout the life of the contract.

The School Committee presented its counter proposal at 3:15 PM. The School Committee's counter-proposal included:

- *A compounded COLA of 11.7% over the life of the contract*
- *An aggregate increase in educator wages of 21.4% over the life of the contract*
- *60 days of paid parental leave for all employees, which accepted the NTA's terms*
- *Increases in hours and starting wages for aides*

In addition, Superintendent Dr. Anna Nolin has committed to add social workers in elementary schools and to reducing High School STEM class sizes with additional teachers. Both the NTA proposal and School Committee proposals are attached.

The NTA President stated their package proposal "was take it or leave it," and walked out of the room without any discussion or negotiation, and was unwilling to consider the School Committee's proposal.

This was not bargaining in good faith.

We remain at the Newton Education Center and await the union's return to the bargaining table, so we can get our students back to school.

[NPS Counter Proposal to NTA](#)

[NTA Proposal](#)

Sincerely,
Newton School Committee
schoolcommitee@newton.k12.ma.us

Click [here](#) to read a message from Superintendent Anna Nolin tonight.



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