

4:00 p.m. - Thursday, Feb. 1, 2024

## Mayor's Newton Update

Below are remarks delivered by Newton School Committee Chair Chris Brezski on behalf of the entire committee at a press conference this afternoon:

*We've heard a constant refrain from the union during the long 14 days of this strike: "Enough is Enough." We couldn't agree more.*

*I want to repeat what I said at the beginning of this strike. It was the collective failure of the School Committee, the NTA and the City that we couldn't agree to a contract. But the strike itself is not a collective failure. It is a unilateral decision and a willful action to close our schools while negotiations progress.*

*The two parties have come to agreement on just about all the issues. Except one: the money. Days ago, we agreed to a parental leave policy - a creative solution put forth by the Committee to provide all employees 60 days of paid leave in a manner that responded to NTA demands and was sustainable for the district. We have agreed on how to address issues of class size and social workers in our buildings. **Now it is just about the money.***

*We have come to these agreements because the School Committee has gone repeatedly to City Hall requesting additional funds, which allowed us to:*

- *Add a 4th year to the contract*
- *Support the NTA healthcare demand*
- *Increase Unit C paraprofessional compensation*
- *Provide a retention payment for Unit C members in December 2024.*

*We have restructured each proposal, and thought through every line item of our budget, under the economic reality we now have to deal with: **WE HAVE GIVEN EVERY RESOURCE TO THIS CONTRACT THAT WE CAN WITHOUT HARMING STUDENTS.** Despite any limitations, when we compare this contract to our elite peer districts, we have put forth an incredibly competitive package - one that we are proud of.*

*By contrast, the union proposal is not grounded in any economic reality or any competitive analysis. The union's proposal, best I can tell, is based on advocacy from the Massachusetts Teachers Association for COLA percentages that one district paid their striking teachers. One district. But people don't pay their bills with percentage points, they pay their bills with real dollars, and **educators in that one district will earn less in 2026 – after their big percentage increases – than a Newton teacher earned in 2023.** That district also just announced a proposal to lay off approximately 4% of their staff to fund a contract that they couldn't afford.*

**And, so, the reason that our kids remain out of school is that:**

- **A teacher making \$62,116 today will make \$81,559 at the end of this contract and not \$83,222 as the union demands**
- **A teacher making \$91,251 today will make \$121,299 and not \$123,744**
- **A teacher making \$120,172 today will make \$135,277 and not \$138,036**
- **A paraprofessional making \$22.81/hr today will make \$32.66/hr and not \$35.18**
- **A paraprofessional making \$45.15/hr today will make \$51.18/hr and not \$53.81**

*All of this comes with additional longevity payments paid annually for long-tenured employees, and a package of benefits that are unrivaled among our peers. Newton teachers will continue to be among the top paid teachers in the state with many of the best benefits, some of which are unique to this district.*

*The Committee has focused, well before this strike ever occurred, on the mental health needs of our students. This commitment was evident in the package of funding we negotiated with City Hall back in December, which will allow us to hire more social workers and other supports at elementary schools. It is still evident in our proposal to increase the wages of our Unit C aides, some of whose earnings will increase 50% over the life of the contract. We know what students need today is different from what they needed even five years ago. But we also know that locking our kids out of school for a year is why this is the case. So the union's reaction to that - to lock our kids out of school once again - makes no sense.*

***The Massachusetts Teachers Association, who is leading elements of this strike effort and leading elements of the negotiation at the bargaining table, isn't concerned about the aftermath of what's left in its wake. It will move on to the next district, and wreak the same havoc there - likely seeking the same demands untethered to any economic reality. Because it's what the MTA wants. And kids will be kept out of school so long as the MTA doesn't get what it wants.***

***We recognize the need to end this. Today, we asked the NTA bargaining team to take our proposal to their membership for a vote. President Mike Zilles refused on the spot.***

***There is real damage being done here - to the Newton Public Schools, to the City of Newton, to the fabric of our community, and most importantly, to our kids - the children we are all supposed to protect - the reason the Newton Public Schools exist. That is why it is time to end this. By agreement, or by continuing to negotiate while our kids are back in school - just as the Committee has offered time and time again over the last 14 days. So, end this. For the sake of families who rely on NPS for two meals a day. For the sake of students with special needs who are disconnected from the adults they count on. For the sake of my kids. For the sake of all 12,000 students of the Newton Public Schools. Enough is enough.***

**Mike - Take the proposal to your membership for a vote.**

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*Today, the School Committee provided a revised proposal to the Newton Teachers Association. Please review the slide presentation linked below. Key provisions in the proposal that directly respond to NTA demands:*

- *Increased compensation for Unit C aides*
- *12 week paid parental leave*
- *Funding for an additional 5.7 social workers in the 2024-25 school year*

[Link to Slide Presentation of Key Provisions of Proposal](#)

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These are my remarks from this afternoon's press conference:

*Our Newton School Committee advocates effectively for the needs of our students and teachers and I am honored to link arms with them.*

*Let me be clear: We have provided every possible available dollar for the needs of our students and the settlement of this contract. There is no additional money. The operating budget and the one-time funds have been fully committed.*

*The School Committee negotiating team is offering a truly competitive contract that supports our schools, teachers, and students. It honors the asks of the union.*

*We have consistently said that we will not compromise the education of our students or the needs of our residents with layoffs. This offer makes sure that today and tomorrow we keep improving the quality of our schools without diminishing City services that our residents need.*

*Mr. Zilles: put this offer in front of your membership. Let them decide for themselves.*

Click below to watch the press conference on the Newton News Youtube channel:



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### What Happened in Court Today?

This morning the Newton School Committee filed an emergency motion for additional sanctions against the NTA and requested an immediate hearing. The Court did not hold a hearing today and will hear from the parties tomorrow at 3:00 p.m.

The motion requests that the Court increase the fines against the NTA as they continue to defy the Court's prior order (issued back on January 19) requiring that the union immediately end their illegal strike. The motion also asks that the NTA be ordered to immediately pay to the state the \$525,000 in accumulated fines, which so far have gone unpaid.

Sworn affidavits from Superintendent Anna Nolin, Assistant Superintendent of Student Services and NPS METCO Director were submitted to the Court detailing the significant and irreparable harm that students and their families are experiencing daily as a direct result of the NTA's refusal to return to school.

In other Court news, a second family with three students in the Newton Public Schools filed a motion yesterday to intervene in the ongoing case against the NTA. As with the earlier parent motion filed on Monday, the family alleges that the NTA's illegal action is interfering with their children's right to an education and is causing great emotional distress. The filing further notes the intention of NPS families to file a class action lawsuit against the NTA if the illegal strike does not come to an end.

In support of these parent motions, the Court received numerous letters from parents and students pleading with the judge to force the NTA to reopen schools. These letters are truly heartbreaking. To quote one 1<sup>st</sup> grader: *"I am missing*

*school! I should be learning! I miss reading and art and library and math and playing with friends."* These letters and School Committee filings are available on the Massachusetts Trial Court public website.

The NTA has formally opposed the participation of any parents or students in the lawsuit.

Finally, just after 4:00 p.m. today, the Commonwealth of Employment Relations Board (CERB) filed their own motion in Court asking for further assistance to end the strike. CERB has asked the Judge to consider twice daily status conferences with the Court and binding arbitration if the strike does not end by Friday, February 2 at 5:00 p.m.

Mayor Ruthanne Fuller



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