



Watertown School Committee

WATERTOWN, MASSACHUSETTS 02472-3492

School Committee

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Dear Parents and Members of the Watertown Community:

Thank you for expressing your concerns about our schools. Be assured, we share the same concerns and have been working diligently to get the teachers' contract resolved with the Watertown Educators Association in a fair and equitable manner.

Contract negotiations have been ongoing for more than 18 months. In that time, countless hours have gone into trying to resolve many issues. This difficult process is something no one takes lightly, and we are always aware of a myriad of potential consequences.

Collective bargaining with unions is largely dictated by state law. Unfortunately, there are legal constraints to which we are subject, which make it impossible to share all information with the public freely and transparently. This frustrates us as much as it does you.

The School Committee is adamant that we will not enter into any agreement with the Watertown Educators Association that would cause additional jobs to be lost going forward. We are not going to increase class size further or cut more programs and curriculum to fund a raise for the teachers. The Nation's economic future does not look promising. Being mindful of that, we must act prudently and responsibly in order to ensure the best education for the children of Watertown this year, next year, and the year after that.

A few points you should know:

- Last year and this year, approximately 48% of our teachers are receiving a 5% or greater "step" pay increase in their paychecks, as negotiated in previous contracts. The steps have and will continue to grant raises to many teachers even when no cost of living raise is negotiated, and will continue to grant raises even if no new contract is signed.

- We have not asked teachers to take a pay cut, but rather less of a pay increase. The Watertown Educators Association has rejected this several times. Other unions in Watertown have voluntarily negotiated concessions in order to preserve jobs.
- Activities planned during the school day, such as field trips, are part of the school curriculum and, as in the past, are considered part of the regular school day.
- We continue to attract very talented teachers to the Watertown Public Schools. For every open teaching position, we have 10 to 12 very qualified applicants. The average starting salary for a new teacher in Watertown is \$50K. The Watertown Educators Association has continuously misrepresented that teachers are leaving the district for better wages elsewhere. We have researched our records for the last five years and found that a very small number of teachers have left the School System positions in other districts. The majority of teacher turnover is attributable to maternity leave or retirement.

We have made personnel, program and supply cuts, raised athletic, activity and transportation fees, and done whatever else is necessary to provide a quality education for the students within the constraints of our budget. There is nothing left to cut. We came very close to eliminating many music programs, to the dismay of parents and students, and the students in the high school have fewer electives from which to choose this year. We cannot in good conscience agree to a pay increase if that requires eliminating jobs to fund it. That would be irresponsible. Supporting student achievement must be our highest priority.

We also cannot and would not want to force the Watertown Educators Association to agree to anything. We have offered them many and varied proposals, which they have rejected. Our teachers will conduct themselves as the professionals they are regardless of whether or not they have a new contract. They are still being paid for their professional services under the terms of the previous contract. We value their expertise and dedication.

The only way out of this dilemma is for both sides to continue the negotiation process in good faith. We do not doubt the Watertown Educators Association's desire for a fair and swift resolution. It would be disappointing if they were to doubt ours. We have a common foe: limited dollars. We have a common goal: student achievement. Neither the School Committee nor the Watertown Educators Association can be successful alone.

Sincerely yours,



Anthony Paolillo, Chairman

On behalf of the Watertown School Committee