

Urgent Letter to Mayor Fuller, the Newton School Committee, and the Newton Teachers' Association
January 29, 2024

The **Newton Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SEPAC)** and other parent-led organizations have been coming together to support one another through this difficult time. Collectively, we volunteer endless hours organizing events, supporting enriching learning experiences for the students and families, and cultivating relationships with school leaders and staff. In addition, the Newton SEPAC has worked for years to fulfill our legislatively mandated mission to advise our school and city leaders on issues related to special education. Despite parents' many commitments, **WE PRIORITIZE OUR SCHOOLS** to create lasting positive memories for our students, staff, and city as a whole. With this in mind, as the Newton SEPAC Board, we share the following:

- We believe that a contract must be meaningful to our teachers AND sustainable for our community.
- We believe that there continues to be insufficient funding to maintain our school system's quality at the level that all students deserve.
- We also believe that our **STUDENTS MUST RETURN TO SCHOOL NOW.**

Although the SEPAC community shares many values, there are differing views on how a reopening of schools should be accomplished. From the perspective of the SEPAC Board, we ask that all parties involved in negotiations take a **HARD PAUSE** to consider our children's experiences right now. All students are feeling the negative effects of schools being closed, but there is an inordinate impact upon our students with disabilities. These children rely upon the routines, services, and supports provided by our schools, and they are getting **NONE** right now. As you place our kids in mind, consider the following requests:

To the School Committee and Newton Teachers' Association negotiating teams:

- **STOP DIVISIVE RHETORIC IN THE MEDIA.** If you deeply care about our students, you must soften your stances and language, and cease public blaming immediately.
- **PRIORITIZE OUR KIDS BY CHANGING YOUR ASKS.** If you truly understand the compounded impact that the pandemic and current school closures are having on our students—especially those most vulnerable, you must take action to adjust your offers. The NTA's requests must be **FEASIBLE** within the context of available funding. If they are to track more closely to that, then the School Committee must respond **MEANINGFULLY** to meet them in the middle.
- **REJECT POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS.** If you want this to end now and send our kids back to school, you must ignore the backdrop of creating precedent in our state and do what's right for **OUR** children.

To Mayor Fuller:

- **RESCUE OUR SINKING SHIP.** Offer additional financial assistance to the School Committee and NTA in a fiscally reasonable manner, **IF—and only IF—the two parties can first agree upon a number that will solve this immediately and send kids back to school tomorrow.**

Hear us now. If you don't, students will continue to suffer the consequences—especially our students with disabilities and other vulnerabilities. NPS will lose valuable teachers to other districts, and the previously strong, mutually supportive relationships between parents and teachers will continue down a damaging path. **THERE IS NO MORE TIME TO WASTE.**

Respectfully,

The 2023-2024 Newton SEPAC Board

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