



Dear Newton Community:

I write to you as the head educator of the Newton Schools and the sole employee of the School Committee.

While there is no set of conditions in which I think denying students their public education is a correct action, as a long-time teacher and educator, I do know what is distressing our school culture and our staff and getting in the way of obtaining all that we can for Newton students.

Fundamentally, the NTA leadership has transmitted to me that the past few years that trust has been a major issue between all parties in Newton. I think we can all agree that we are seeing that lack of trust play out in negotiations as well.

While I am a new Newton employee, I can state that what all parties have learned throughout bargaining has allowed us to align with union demands and come to the following agreements regarding the funding of this contract and my proposed budgeting for NPS for the next three years. I share this publicly now to signal my own trust contract with our unions of my serious intention to back many of their values and asks as they are good for our system and our students. Back in December, Mayor Fuller agreed to a one time infusion of money into the school budget starting in the FY 25 school year—equivalent to 5% increase for the NPS budget next year, in the form of funds that will supplement our base allocation from the City. These funds will remain in place for the life of this contract.

With this budget backdrop in mind, the parties have worked hard on many issues and have reached positive tentative agreements about changed contract language that provide major benefits for our staff and students. I feel positive about the alignment of values between all parties that have been revealed during our face to face negotiations over these days. The major issue that remains is the costs linked to various proposals. All of these proposals have to work in tandem to ensure a balanced and sustainable budget through the life of this contract. I cannot endorse a budget that makes cuts to our current level of services or to our current employees to fund this contract and budgets for the years of the contract. I also want to be able support and uplift the needs of our staff and improve their working conditions.

Here is what I have publicly indicated, with the support of the school committee, will be offered in combination in terms of both contract and budgetary priorities. I believe these items to represent values and agreements shared by the NTA, the School Committee, and me upon conducting my entry plan research. NTA union advocacy reassures us all that these items are ones we collectively value and are prepared to support fully..

- 5.7 social workers to be added to the elementary level—resulting in 50% of the district having a social worker added to schools for the upcoming school year (24-25) and guaranteed for the length of this 4-year contract.
- 14.25 high school staff to reduce class sizes in between 25-43 class sections (varies by subject and high school) in science and math at both high schools and restoration of some previously cut high school electives in engineering added to programming and guaranteed for the length of this 4-year contract.
- An expansion of parent leave that continues Newton's leadership in this arena and addresses the needs expressed by the NTA
- Guaranteed admittance and clarity non-resident staff children attending NPS
- Guaranteed 2.5% higher salaries for all full-time Category 1 Educational Support Professionals (ESPs) in addition to COLA increase (currently proposed and not yet agreed, at 2.5, 2.5, 3, 2.3 % over four years) and the removal of the lowest pay levels for all ESPs—eliminating lowest pay scale for our important esp colleagues.
- Agreed-upon standards and communication procedures for struggling educators who are placed on directed growth plans.

Here is what remains to be settled:

- How to restructure the elementary day to provide more planning time for educators and improve learning opportunities for students
- Allowances for principals to adapt meeting times and schedules for building meetings.
- Adding district day of professional development, use of time on day immediately prior to the start of student attendance at school.
- How to fund the cost of insurance benefits that the rest of the city has already transitioned from (competitive and comprehensive plan still provided)
- Cost of living adjustments to educator salaries
- How to structure healthcare moving forward, and align w other city units who have already transitioned to a new more economical model for healthcare (w no change in services)
- A variance in understanding that class size caps cannot be placed in collective bargaining agreements as they are driven by available budget each year

Once these items are discussed today, I feel we can come to alignment as both parties are moving to positively address these matters quickly.