

Update to the Brookline School Committee about Contract Negotiations with the Brookline Educators Union

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Read by Rebecca Stone

I am sorry to report that after 5 sessions with a seasoned mediator, we do not yet have agreements with the Brookline Educators Union.

For the record, here are the offers the BEU has rejected:

- For the teachers (Unit A), the School Committee has offered a 2% general wage increase for the next two years; in the current year, we offered to bring the increase up to 2% (half of which was already implemented at the start of this school year). This effective 2%-2%-2% for FY15-FY18 is consistent with the funds made available by the override, and is commensurate with contract settlements in comparable districts.
- When added to the automatic annual increases (known as Steps) that are built into the contract and cover about 70% of our teachers (30% are at the top step already), this is equivalent to raises of 5% - 7% in each year of the contract.
- In order to create space in the elementary schedule for the time teachers have requested, we have also proposed a fourth contract year that would add enough minutes in the elementary schedule to be able to provide longer prep periods. Our proposal would bring the workday of elementary teachers up to the workday already established for high school teachers, providing pay equity K-12. Fully two-thirds of the time proposed can be used at elementary teachers' discretion.
- To reflect the proposed workday increase for our K-8 teachers, we have offered a 3% increase on the base salary for that fourth year, plus a new "step" for all of our most experienced teachers already on the top step, bringing their wage increase to 4% in that year. Those increases would be for everyone in the bargaining unit, including the hundreds of teachers whose workday would stay the same.

To sum up, the offers we have made in mediation amount to a total of 4 years of guaranteed contracts, resulting in combined general wage increases of more than 8% on top of the automatic annual increase for those in steps, which average close to 4% each year.

In return for these increases, we are asking our K-8 teachers to have a workday that matches the workday of their teacher (Unit A) colleagues at the high school so that we can have breathing room in the elementary schedule to give them the prep time and discretionary professional time they have been asking for.

The BEU's response has been for general wage increases of greater than 5% each year, with a 7% general wage increase for the proposed Year 4 with additional time. (Just to put those proposals in perspective, every 1% costs approximately \$800,000.)

Paraprofessionals Contract: The School Committee is aware and concerned that Brookline's paraprofessional wages – especially for paras with extra special education skills – are not competitive, so we have made offers for both pay and hours worked that improve the pay scale for the largest number of our paraprofessionals.

In addition, we have offered a very substantial increase – half a million dollars in new money next year – to increase wages even more significantly for the almost 100 specially-skilled paraprofessionals who have been the most difficult for us to recruit and retain in Brookline. The BEU has rejected these offers as well.

While I am sympathetic to the complaints of all public school teachers that they have less autonomy in this era of state and federal education mandates, Brookline is still one of the best places in Massachusetts to be an educator. Our teachers are some of the highest paid in the Commonwealth, and they have a shorter work year than most (183 days) and shorter contractual workdays. The Town pays 83% of employee health insurance premiums at a time when other districts are negotiating that number to 70% and below. The School Committee fought successfully to protect the Materials Fee program so our teachers can have their children at school here in Brookline, and we consistently invest in professional development and opportunities for teachers to innovate in their classrooms, augmented by our generous partners in the PTOs, the BEF, and 21st Century Fund.

To those frustrated by the lack of an agreement, I share your frustration. We have made serious, respectful, responsive, and substantial offers. I hope very much that we will hear something from the BEU very soon besides 'No.'