

From Rebecca Stone, Chair
Brookline School Committee Negotiations Subcommittee
2/29/16

School Committee Update on Negotiations

Because the School Committee negotiates in executive session with the Brookline Educators Union (BEU), it is not appropriate to comment publicly on specific proposals being discussed in the three separate contracts before us (Unit A Teachers; Unit B Administrators; and Paraprofessionals Unit). We hope, however, that what follows will correct some of the misconceptions in the public discussion and clarify what is actually occurring in the negotiations process.

Importance of the 1-Year Agreements in 2015

The 1-year contracts successfully negotiated last year were the result of months of negotiations and discussions that included multiple exchanges of proposals and counter-proposals from both sides, respectful discussion of the issues raised, and eventual agreement on a series of language changes and wage increases in response to issues raised by the BEU. Those wage increases committed well over one million dollars of new money each year to raise every teacher's and administrator's salary by 2% and to raise paraprofessional wages by 3%.

Impact: The general wage increases mid-2015 of 2% across the board means that, for example, the salary for a Brookline teacher with a Master's degree at step 7 (the middle of the salary schedule) is currently \$70,247 for a work year of 183 days (180 school days with students; 3 preparation and/or professional development days). *Note:* A recent Facebook post showed the Brookline teacher salary scale from 2014, not the current salary scale. The 1-year agreement that went into effect August 31, 2015 raised all of those salaries.

Negotiating in Good Faith

It is simply untrue that the School Committee has ever refused to meet with or negotiate with the BEU. We meet regularly on days and times to which both sides have agreed. The School Committee has given serious and detailed proposals to the BEU, and we have discussed at length the issues raised by the BEU negotiating team in order to understand and try to address them. That is what "bargaining in good faith" means. We continue to do so.

Since July, 2015 when our current negotiations began, we have held more than a dozen sessions with the BEU and spent countless more hours in preparation for those sessions, gathering information to inform our discussions with the Union and preparing proposals or responses to proposals. At the bargaining session with the BEU on February 1st, we agreed on future dates for negotiations including dates through the end of April. Everyone hopes we won't need to use all those dates and that agreements will be reached soon, but it takes both sides to agree to a contract. We are all eager to reach agreement and will continue to bargain in good faith toward that goal.

What are the Obstacles to Agreement?

To understand why we have not yet reached agreement, it's important to understand that the proposals put across the table by the School Committee stay within the parameters and limits of the Override budget passed last spring. The override was based on detailed budgets that reflected what the Schools will need in the next three years in order to:

- 1) hire enough teachers to maintain class sizes so that teachers may give sufficient attention to every child;
- 2) hire more classroom support personnel such as psychologists, guidance counselors, social workers, and specialists to meet students' needs and to maintain safe learning environments; and
- 3) improve our technology infrastructure which will, over time, improve educational opportunity and innovation, and reduce the time spent on paperwork.

These are issues the teachers have repeatedly raised, and the override was the School Committee's most dramatic response to address them. Its success means we have been able to grow in order to meet higher enrollments, to hire the additional teachers and support personnel, and to maintain class sizes (which still average 21). We have increased the number of specialists in our school buildings who support students and teachers. Over the next two years, the hiring contemplated in the Override budget will continue.

It is true that the administration has also added positions to help run a much larger and more complex school district, manage data to keep ourselves accountable to meeting students needs, and put in place special education and human resources supports necessary for the size and complexity of the district. But it is simply not true to say that administration is the only place override dollars have been spent.

The School Committee will continue to honor its obligation to spend override funds as promised. By contrast, the Union's proposals would require committing to even more staff hiring than contemplated in the override budgets and at higher cost. Their proposals collectively would cost many millions of dollars more than what was in the override.

Distance between the two sides in negotiations on such issues is to be expected, but closing that distance takes time. The School Committee continues to bargain in good faith with the BEU with the goal of reaching new agreements that are good for our students and fair to our terrific teachers and staff, and that are within the bounds of the override budget for which the citizens of the town voted.

Work to Rule

The School Committee fully acknowledges the right of the BEU and its members to publicly express their concerns regarding the status of collective bargaining with the School Committee and to exercise their rights of action under the law, *but such actions do not change the nature or status of negotiations*. Our top priority continues to be the students who attend school in Brookline, and we are distressed by any actions that involve students with these contract disputes. Our students deserve to spend their school days focused on learning.