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**Negotiations Update from the Brookline School Committee—February 28, 2017**

The School Committee knows this has felt like a long negotiations process, and that many community members and educators want to see negotiations resolved. We do too. We hope this update provides a clear sense of the current status as well as the broader context within which we are all working.

Negotiating employee contracts that are fair to staff and responsible to the community is a shared responsibility of both the Brookline School Committee and the leaders of the employee unions. The School Committee's top priority is an excellent education for every student, and we are grateful that Brookline residents have been willing to support our teachers and staff at high levels to help us reach that goal. We are proud that our average teacher salary is the 5<sup>th</sup> highest in Massachusetts for K-12 school districts<sup>i</sup>, and that the Town pays a very high share of employee healthcare costs (82%) compared to peer districts. We recognize that our valuable paraprofessionals have not been paid competitive wages in recent years, so since the summer of 2015, increasing pay for paraprofessionals has been a priority on both sides of the negotiating table.

We are pleased to report that as of last month, five of our six collective bargaining contracts have been settled. The School Committee reached an agreement with the Brookline Educators Union (BEU) on the teachers' contract last September, more than five months ago. Last month we reached agreement with the BEU for educational leaders/administrators. We have negotiated and signed contracts for building maintenance and food service workers with AFSCME, and these have been approved by their membership. We have agreed to and signed a new contract for secretaries with the AFSCME–BESA Unit that was approved promptly. Although mediation for paraprofessionals between the BEU and the School Committee resulted in a mediator declaring impasse last fall, the two sides have continued to discuss this contract regularly in an effort to reach agreement.

The School Committee values the contributions of all of the Public Schools of Brookline's staff including paraprofessionals. We recognize the educational, physical, and emotional support paraprofessionals provide to our students on a daily basis. We respectfully extended public comment period at multiple School Committee meetings, and listened closely to the input of dozens of teachers, paraprofessionals, and parents, allowing everyone who wished to speak the opportunity to do so. All of the School Committee's offers to the BEU have included significant wage increases for paraprofessionals. By acknowledging and agreeing to more competitive pay rates, the School Committee is demonstrating the commitment we have long expressed to increased retention and satisfaction for paraprofessionals.

There are also competing imperatives and constraints. Student enrollment in our elementary schools has already increased more than 35% since 2005, which has put historic burdens on the budget and impaired our ability to achieve our goals. The still-growing student population continues to put pressure

on our school budget; the proposed FY2018 budget includes a projected \$1.3 million deficit that we must balance. Despite passage of a substantial three-year tax override in 2015, because of ongoing enrollment increases, the expansion of Brookline High School, and the construction of a ninth elementary school, we will need debt exclusions and an operating override to deal with the structural deficit. At the same time, we are mindful that preserving the economic diversity of residents helps make Brookline great; at some point overrides—which translate into tax increases—will threaten that diversity.

The members of the Brookline School Committee have worked very, very hard to keep our promise to voters to hold our FY 2016, FY2017, and FY2018 budgets within the limits of the funds provided by the 2015 override. Specifically, during that override campaign, we promised to limit compensation increases to an average pool of 2% annual wage increases and 3% annual steps and lanes increases—for a total of roughly 5% annual increases. We were grateful that BEU leaders literally campaigned side by side with School Committee members to pass the 2015 override against a well organized “No” campaign.

Unfortunately, recent negotiations on the paraprofessional contract have been frustrating. Despite fulfilling the promises to voters outlined above, and despite the School Committee’s offers of significant pay increases for paraprofessionals, the BEU has consistently demanded increases far in excess of those we jointly fought for in the last override. Despite the BEU’s claims, the hourly pay of paraprofessionals already exceeds Brookline’s defined standard for a livable wage, which is \$13.71 per hour. Under the existing contract, a first year paraprofessional in Brookline earns \$16.04 per hour. This means that the School Committee’s offer for paraprofessionals already fulfills Brookline’s livable hourly wage by-law, and again, the School Committee has repeatedly offered pay increases well above this amount going forward.

It is important to understand that in all school districts, including in Brookline, paraprofessional positions are not full-time, full-year positions. The actual pay of a first year paraprofessional who works 6.33 hours a day for 189 days (the current standard) is now \$19,189, which the BEU and the School Committee agree is insufficient and negatively affects retention. The School Committee has proposed increases in hourly rates and increases in standard hours that would raise annual pay for this first year paraprofessional to \$23,946—a 25% increase. The School Committee-proposed salary increases of between 20% and 36% over a four-year period are significant, and evidence a meaningful and good faith effort by the School Committee to address the concerns of our staff. The BEU has consistently turned down this offer.

The School Committee is prohibited from deficit spending, so all of these increases must be offset by reductions elsewhere. As an example, in FY2018 the Superintendent is recommending deferred student technology purchases and a 10% across the board cut in supply budgets, among other reductions.

We are one town, and our budget compromises need to be collaborative and work for very diverse constituents. We hope that an agreement on our last remaining contract can be reached prior to the next phase of negotiations—mediator ordered fact-finding—which will commence on March 10. We also hope that all actions that negatively impact our children and their education will cease, as we all continue to work hard together to resolve the final elements of the last remaining contract. We need to come together as a community to have a shared focus on our students’ best interests, and on the challenges we all face in supporting excellence in education as we respond to the extraordinary growth in our schools.

**The School Committee’s November 2016 offer to the BEU included wage increases that would raise paraprofessional salaries as follows by September 2017 (FY2018)**

	Existing Contract Annualized Pay in SY2016-2017 (FY17)*	School Committee Proposal Annualized Pay in School Year 2017-2018 (FY18)**	School Committee Proposal % Increase between 2016 and 2018
1 <sup>st</sup> Year classroom paraprofessionals	\$19,189	\$23,647	25%
Most experienced classroom paraprofessionals (top step) ***	\$24,932	\$29,820	20%
1 <sup>st</sup> year specialized program paraprofessionals	\$19,189	\$25,269	36%
Most experienced specialized program paraprofessionals (top step) ***	\$24,932	\$31,143	25%

\* Current annualized full-time pay calculated using 6.33 hours and 189 days

\*\* 2018 annualized full-time pay calculated using 7 hours and 189 days because paraprofessionals will be paid for actual hours worked rather than the contracted 6.33 hours per day. All paraprofessionals hired with one year of experience are contracted for 189 days.

\*\*\* Highest step is now Step 8. Under the School Committee’s November 2016 proposal, the highest step would become Step 9

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<sup>i</sup> Department of Elementary and Secondary Education,  
[http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/state\\_report/teachersalaries.aspx?mode=&year=2015&orderBy=AVERAGE%20DESC](http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/state_report/teachersalaries.aspx?mode=&year=2015&orderBy=AVERAGE%20DESC)