

MARBLEHEAD SCHOOL COMMITTEE

November 17, 2024

Good Evening Marblehead Families.

We are at the end of a troubling week with our teachers still on strike and our children still out of their classrooms. In spite of 60+ hours of negotiations before a state-appointed mediator, we have not reached a contract agreement with the Marblehead Education Association.

The Bargaining Subcommittee feels it is important to address the major issues keeping us from an agreement with the teachers union.

First, we want to make clear that we know we have the best teachers on the North Shore, and they are deserving of our respect and our support. But we also have an obligation to the people of Marblehead to negotiate a contract that does not commit us to terms we cannot afford.

The Committee's offer is fair and reflects the realities of the Town's financial limits. It would raise the average salary of our teachers around 18% to just under \$100,000 and the top salary to close to \$109,000. Two-thirds of our teachers would be at that top salary. Our proposals are also fair to our paraprofessionals, custodians, maintenance personnel, bus drivers and tutors. We are offering our paras anywhere from 48% to 69% increases - as we recognize they play an important role in our schools.

Our proposals to improve parental leave are also generous. We offered a new benefit for the first 12 days of leave to be paid by the Town and increased the amount of additional time a teacher can take to be paid by the teacher's accrued sick time. We have already added a Sick Leave Bank for teachers and have offered to create a new combined Sick Leave Bank for tutors, paraprofessionals, permanent substitutes and custodians.

We would like to make our teachers the highest paid on the North Shore, but the union's 34% proposed increase is not affordable or sustainable. It would create a \$7 million hole in the Town's budget, and would necessitate a property tax override that would add more than \$900 to the average tax bill. Failure to approve an override would cause the loss of 75 staff members resulting in severe cuts in student services.

Our goal is to reach an agreement to keep teachers and staff employed and keep school class sizes smaller than many surrounding districts. We pride ourselves on that and it's part of why our students are getting the best education possible.

Negotiations are a two-way street. We have heard numerous statements about the Committee's lack of desire to get a deal done and its unwillingness to budge on our position. We can categorically state this is not true. We have presented proposals to the union, and are still awaiting a serious response.

We are hopeful the state's mediator can bring us closer together so your children can get back in the classroom and you can get back to your normal schedules. When teachers strike, the burden goes far beyond our schools' walls. The emotional toll of bargaining for fair, affordable and sustainable contracts is great. We wish it was simple. We know it never is. We hope we can agree to terms soon, and we plan to stay at the table for as long as it takes.

Best regards,

Jennifer Schaeffner - Committee Chair

Sarah Fox - Committee Member

Thatcher Kezer - Town Administrator

Marblehead School Committee – Bargaining Subcommittee