

January 6, 2023

Dear WPS Families:

We have recently received a number of emails from the community regarding the contract negotiations between the Westwood School Committee and the Westwood Teachers Association (WTA), the union that represents Westwood public school teachers. As you may know, the parties are entering mediation on Monday with the goal of determining a three-year contract agreement for the 2022-2025 school years.

The Westwood School District and the School Committee have a longstanding history of working collaboratively and respectfully with the WTA, and we place great value on this relationship. We know that Town residents share this respect and that residents recognize the value of our school system and the hard work our teachers do on behalf of children all year long.

Negotiations between the School Committee and the WTA began in February 2022 with the goal of reaching a new agreement before the existing contract expired on August 31, 2022. Last spring, the School Committee and WTA bargaining teams reached tentative agreements for successor contracts on two separate occasions. Both of these successor contract agreements were approved by the Executive Board of the WTA. However, when put to a vote, the full membership of the WTA rejected both proposed offers. The bargaining teams continued negotiations this fall to find a resolution, but these discussions did not result in substantial progress.

Massachusetts is a state that places great emphasis on education, and in Westwood, a community that has always invested in and supported its schools, we place a high value on our teachers. To provide context:

- Westwood teachers are among the highest paid in Massachusetts. According to the most recent salary data available on the [Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's website](#), Westwood's average teacher salary is ranked 16th in the state out of 317 districts.
- In Westwood, teachers receive both an annual 4% salary "step" increase for the first 15 years of the salary schedule as well as an additional negotiated annual salary increase.

We understand that WTA members are concerned about two main factors: money and time. With the two prior tentative agreements for successor contracts (that were rejected by the WTA membership), the Westwood School Committee addressed these concerns with offers that:

- provided teachers with the largest percentage salary increase over the duration of the contract than in any of their prior 5 contracts (i.e. the last 15 years);
- included an increase to the salary scale that was equal to or above what neighboring districts and their respective teachers' unions have agreed to during their recent contract negotiations; and
- agreed to provisions that provided teachers with additional self-directed time to complete professional work, while ensuring that instructional time was not impacted.

We recognize the impact of the current economic climate on our teachers and on residents. This fiscal climate is unfortunately also impacting our school budget as we are challenged by unusually high utility prices, transportation costs, and special education tuition increases. At our [School Committee meeting in](#)

[December](#), District administrators highlighted that these factors have already created a significant deficit in this year's school budget (budget discussion begins at :55), which has generated discussions regarding staff reductions and increased user fees in the development of next year's budget. These difficult discussions continue as we work diligently to support our teachers and provide the level of educational services for students that Westwood residents expect.

From the start, our goal has been to achieve a fair and equitable solution for the WTA, and we believe that continuing negotiations with the assistance of a mediator is the most effective, productive, and respectful way to achieve that goal. For this reason, the Westwood School Committee requested that the Massachusetts Department of Labor Relations appoint a mediator to help the parties reach resolution. We invited the WTA to join us in this request, but the WTA declined. We have since been assigned a state-appointed mediator and now look forward to engaging in the mediation process in order to reach a mutually agreeable resolution that supports our teachers and that our Town can financially sustain.

Sincerely,

The Westwood School Committee

Charles Donahue, Chair

Anthony Mullin

Dori Parmelee

Amanda Phillips

Maya Plotkin