



MARBLEHEAD SCHOOL COMMITTEE

November 22, 2024

Good Morning Marblehead Families.

We start another day without a contract agreement with the Marblehead Education Association (MEA). School will again be canceled today.

The School Committee is in discussions regarding make-up days, and will make those decisions after the strike is over, when we know how many days we'll need to make up.

The MEA has consistently charged that the School Committee's negotiating team is not acting with an appropriate level of urgency. The Committee's negotiating subcommittee has been in mediation with the MEA since the union started its illegal strike, including weekends and evenings until after 10:30 p.m.

The subcommittee has devoted more than 125 hours in mediation and preparation since November 9th. It is not the lack of urgency or dedication that has kept the parties from reaching agreement. It is the MEA's demands for unaffordable wages that will require layoffs, larger class sizes, and cuts in programs for years to come that prevents agreement.

We recognize the enormous hardships that have resulted from this illegal strike. But we have the resolve not to agree to increases that will harm the education of our children for years to come. The "urgency" was created by the MEA when it walked out of their classrooms. The MEA can end its illegal strike and return to work while mediation continues, or it can reconsider its extraordinary demands and come forward with realistic and affordable proposals and stop using our students as leverage.

This week, the subcommittee presented the Union with a counterproposal to the MEA's latest proposal. The subcommittee offered a 10.5% increase in COLA wages for all teachers and an additional 4.5%, through the addition of two new steps, for teachers now at the top of the wage scale, which accounts for more than two-thirds of our staff.

We were not in a position to accept the Union's "Grand Gesture" proposal that they presented to us on Tuesday night. Unfortunately, the only thing "grand" about the MEA's proposal was the size of their wage demands. The MEA made two proposals contingent on different sized property tax overrides. The larger of the two proposals would give teachers a 30.5% increase in wages over a four-year period and cost \$7.6 million

dollars for 302 teachers. Plan B would still cost the Town \$6.5 million based on a 25.7% wage increase. There were similarly “grand” demands for the other five MEA units. None of the “gestures” are affordable, and all would result in layoffs of employees and cuts to programs.

Questions were also raised today about why striking workers were being docked for being on strike. If employees do not work, they are not due a paycheck.

We will continue to meet with the MEA in the hopes of reaching agreement. Late yesterday, the state judge that ordered the teachers back to work issued a new order that could change the nature of the negotiations if no agreement is reached by Monday. The judge ordered the parties to “engage in expedited fact-finding” with a neutral fact-finder or panel of fact-finders under the direction of the Massachusetts Department of Labor Relations.

Please take the time to review the information on our [“Negotiations Updates”](#) webpage. Have a good day and we hope to have better news tomorrow.

Best regards,

Jennifer Schaeffner - Committee Chair

Sarah Fox - Committee Member

Thatcher Kezer - Town Administrator

Marblehead School Committee – Bargaining Subcommittee