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## **NEA Barrington responds to school committee statement regarding teacher contract**

Barrington, R.I. – The National Education Association Barrington today issued a response to the Barrington School Committee’s public statement last week concerning certain terms of the final tentative agreement reached between the parties on October 22, 2019. NEA Barrington ratified this agreement on November 6, and the Committee approved it on November 7.

“Last week, the Barrington School Committee released a statement concerning certain terms of the collective bargaining agreement with NEA Barrington. That statement was issued with neither knowledge nor input from NEA Barrington, despite all previous press releases having been jointly issued” said NEA Barrington President Mary Roberts. “As a result, several points made by the committee require clarification.

“NEA Barrington is proud of this new contract, and we agree that extreme dedication from both negotiation teams was required to achieve this result. However, the agreement was reached as a result of compromise from both sides to achieve outcomes that were both important and beneficial to each of the parties. It is unfortunate that the Barrington School Committee took this as an opportunity to impugn the credibility and professionalism of Barrington teachers, and to distort the terms of the agreement.

“Finally, now that the contract has been settled, NEA Barrington plans to publicly address the effects and consequences of the start time change at the secondary level,” added Roberts.

### **NEA Barrington Clarifications of School Committee Points**

1. **A continued commitment to academic support for students...**The teachers have reaffirmed their pledge to provide after-school help for students for as long as is reasonably necessary.

#### **NEA Barrington Response:**

Interestingly, this topic was never discussed during negotiations, and no such new agreement was reached on this subject, beyond what current contract language exists. In any case, the Barrington teachers do not need to “reaffirm a pledge.” As this community and the parents know, Barrington teachers are professionals who have always provided extra help for students including re-teaching central concepts to development and providing implementation of re-take opportunities when students perform below standard on assessments. More importantly, Barrington teachers certainly did not delay these teaching and learning opportunities until after the contract was settled as the School Committee suggested. For example, at Barrington Middle School, teachers have used our FAST (Flexible Academic Support Time) period during the instructional day to provide students with the help they need. At Barrington High School, students have the ALC (Academic Learning Center) available to them every day during the instructional day. Our mission and intent as secondary teachers is to continue these practices during the contractual school day.

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2. **Expanded parental engagement ...** The Agreement establishes new practices that provide for organized, meaningful opportunities for parental engagement with their student's academic experience. These opportunities will be differentiated by grade level and will build upon the teachers' longstanding commitment to "be available for parent conferences throughout the year."

**NEA Barrington Response:**

Again, teachers at the secondary level have always been and continue to "be available for parent conferences throughout the year." This is both a contractual and professional obligation that Barrington teachers have always met. In addition to Barrington's annual open house night, and the teachers' continued commitment to parent conferences upon request, NEA Barrington agreed to one additional day during the school year in which doors to schools and classrooms will be open to parents to build their understanding of what teaching and learning looks like at each building and in each grade level. This additional access to schools and teachers will be designed and implemented by the teachers in each building. This is not a day for individual parent-teacher conferences at the secondary level.

3. **An emphasis on fiscal prudence and fairness ...** For years, our lower-step teachers have received only step and no cost of living adjustments to their salaries. As a result, our entry-level teachers were among the lowest paid in Rhode Island, while contractual increases for our top-step teachers made them among the highest. The new agreement awards proportionately greater salary increases to our entry-level teachers in an effort to correct this disparity. When combined with the teachers' agreement to a schedule of increased copayments for prescription drugs, the agreed-upon salary increases are fiscally prudent and fair, yielding an overall budget increase for each of the three years of the Agreement of less than 2%.

**NEA Barrington Response:**

NEA Barrington negotiated a salary settlement of 6% over three years for top-step teachers, who make up more than 80% of our membership. This is the equivalent of what our police, fire, Department of Public Works, custodians, and support staff received. NEA Barrington attempted to negotiate a 2% increase across all steps, which was soundly rejected by the School Committee. Indeed, in the last two contract cycles, NEA Barrington attempted to secure wage increases across all steps for the benefit of all members. This was rejected by the School Committee in 2013 and 2016. Each time, the School Committee insisted that step increases were sufficient and salary increases should only go to top-step teachers, which resulted in depressed wages for lower-step teachers. We certainly agree that our entry-level teachers deserved an increase not granted to them for the past two contracts. In fact, we strongly believe that all entry-level teachers deserve raises regardless of educational achievement. Unfortunately, entry-level teachers who only attain a bachelor's degree will be "rewarded" with a 1.5% increase over three years, which will hardly close the gap between steps and will contribute to continued disparity. Again, our proposal was a 2% increase for all teachers which was rejected by this School Committee.

4. **De-emphasizing longevity ...** Traditional payments awarding longevity in the District have been decreased for teachers hired on or after January 1, 2020.

**NEA Barrington Response:**

NEA Barrington maintains that the longevity schedule helps to maintain the employment of our highly educated professional staff. Although it was the aim of the School Committee to reduce longevity payments for teachers currently employed, our stand was that this, along with low salaries for our entry-level teachers, would serve to discourage our excellent teachers from remaining in Barrington. Although we agreed to reduced longevity payments for new hires, we did not eliminate the concept which was at the core of the School Committee's proposal.

5. **Educator quality will be the determining factor when filling vacancies ...** The Agreement reforms the process by which open positions in the District are filled. It states unambiguously and explicitly that the person selected to fill a vacancy shall be the most qualified based upon education, training, experience, ability, certification, previous employment record, and the specific requirements of the position. Only when applicants are equally qualified will seniority in the District be considered. While the Committee and the Union continue to respect the value that work experience brings to teaching, they recognize that length of service, in and of itself, should not be the controlling factor when hiring, transferring, or retaining educators. In order to provide the best for our students and to maintain a culture of excellence, Barrington looks to hire and retain the most qualified educator for each position.

**NEA Barrington Response:**

Interestingly, seniority has never been the controlling factor in hiring, transferring, or retaining educators in Barrington. It has always been and will continue to be a factor when filling vacancies when all other qualifications are equal. The new language agreed upon in this contract was clarified for the benefit of all parties.

6. **Clarification of proper use of educator personal days and sick leave ...** Personal leave provisions have been revised to make clear that this benefit is to be used to conduct personal business that cannot be conducted at any other time. The language regarding sick leave clarifies that such leave is to be used to care for oneself or one's family when sick or injured. Teachers and the District continue to work together to minimize absenteeism and improper use of these benefits so that our students benefit from our outstanding educator talent every day.

**NEA Barrington Response:**

Barrington teachers have one of, if not the, lowest absenteeism rates in Rhode Island. To suggest that Barrington teachers need to "minimize absenteeism and improper use of these benefits" is insulting. Unfortunately, due to later start and end times for secondary teachers, there may be an uptick in absenteeism as teachers can no longer get to doctor appointments without using their contractually allotted days for those purposes.

7. **Management control of leave of absence decisions ...** The new Agreement aligns the District's leave of absence protections with federal and state law, and reforms operation of the major illness bank, also known as the "sick bank." The changes to "sick bank" operations are the first of their kind in the State. Teachers will no longer be required to disclose protected health information to a panel of their peers in order to obtain financial assistance during an extended illness. These disclosures will be made only to administrators who are entrusted with evaluating and securing such disclosures. The decision to grant a long-term leave will be vested entirely with the Superintendent who is best able to ensure that the rights and needs of both teachers and students are respected and properly balanced.

**NEA Barrington Response:**

The Barrington Sick Bank Committee, composed of teachers and administrators, continues as a standing committee. The Superintendent will make recommendations to the Sick Bank without disclosing protected health information as per federal and state law. However, determinations will continue to be made by the Sick Bank Committee according to the length of leave requested and the amount of days remaining in the sick bank at the time of the request.