

Dear Board of Education Member,

I would like to thank you in advance for taking the time to read my letter and for taking my thoughts and my story into consideration as you move toward a contract with the GEA negotiating team.

I am a Geneva taxpayer, parent, and teacher. I am writing you from all three perspectives.

As a taxpayer, I am proud to write a check to pay our taxes every June and September. I know this money has a positive impact because of its use within the school district. I task you, the elected school board officials, with spending that money wisely. I love the chance to save money as I know the board does; however, I know that money best yields a return when invested (whether the “return” be the exhilaration of an adventure across the Rockies, the experience of a different culture, the smiles on the faces of those you’ve helped, a financial return, etc.) Please know that my wish is for you to invest our saved taxpayer funds in teachers so that all of Geneva (and the wide world beyond) can reap the return of the positive effects teachers will have on all students.

Speaking of students, I have an incredible daughter and son, in the 6th grade at Geneva Middle School South and the 3rd grade at Harrison Street School, respectively. I want their school experiences to be as wonderful as possible. So far, this wish has been fulfilled, but I know some days it’s at the expense of their educators’ own well-being. What is expected of teachers and the time for which they are compensated is imbalanced. So many hours are dedicated to just getting the minimum done some days, and so many more hours are given up because teachers see how much their kids need beyond what the bare minimum provides. I want my children to feel the effects of that amazing passion, but I want their teachers to be compensated at a fair, sustainable level so they’re not stretching themselves by taking on additional jobs because it’s financially necessary.

As I said earlier, I love to save. I love to budget. It’s a good thing, too, because our family needs to budget down to the penny each month. I’m in my 11th year of teaching. It should not be so tight each month. In my third year of teaching in Geneva 304, I am making less than I did in the 2011-2012 school year, the last year I taught in my previous district (West Aurora 129). I am 42 years old, I have a strict family budget, yet I have to work 10-15 additional hours per week running a part-time photography business so that we can get by. I am worn out. I am not the best me I can be when I get to this point. Yet it’s necessary, so I keep pushing. I want to always love my passions, like teaching and photography. I don’t want to resent them. I work well beyond contractual hours every week. I spend time at school just about every weekend. I need to do that to be the stellar teacher I know I can be. However, I’m not always that. Worn thin by extra hours taking pictures, editing, hours on weekends and in evenings preparing for school, taking care of household emergencies and necessities, being a mom (a job at which I also don’t always do the best), I find myself being a subpar teacher some days. This is the case for many teachers across the district. I don’t believe you want that for the district of which you are so proud.

My words and the words of my fellow Geneva residents, fellow parents, and fellow teachers are for you. Please listen. Please act and agree to a strong, fair contract that all of Geneva deserves. You have the ability to make a district and community proud.

Sincerely,

Heidi Gibbons

Geneva Taxpayer, Harrison and Geneva Middle School South Mom, Western Avenue School Teacher