

Dear Board of Education Member,

I would like to express my great disappointment at the state of the GEA's negotiations with the board. I have spent my entire career of 21 years in Geneva. I clearly remember a time when the board supported the teachers, believed in education, and was our partner in this community. Our teachers were the best, the board supported further education so teachers could improve their skills, experience was something to be honored, and loyalty to the district was rewarded. Those times have vanished. We now seem to be engaging with a board whose intent is to find the cheapest teachers, deny the value of further education, and not honor its experienced employees. How has it come to this in our community, where I also live as a resident and taxpayer? I ask you to consider the following point, which I believe with my whole heart, teach my students and feel is the core issue at stake here. Education is the most important gift you can give yourself. It provides you the wings of opportunity upon which you can fly. For the Board of Education to think or make offers, without that at the core of their decision making being, is the ultimate affront to their duty.

Does it make sense to you that administrators in this district can go to school and get a PhD paid for by the district, but that the teachers who directly work with students are given nothing to go to school to improve their skills with further education? Do you want the best teachers or not? It is sadly ironic that in our district our Board of Education does not value a teacher furthering her experience through higher levels of education. What possible logic contributes to this thought? Study after study tells us that the one thing that makes the greatest difference in a classroom is an expert teacher. Why would you not want the best educated teachers? As a resident in this town I want the very best educated teachers, not the cheapest. One makes a difference in the life of a child, the other saves money. Which is the legacy you want to promote?

Another question I have is why, after a teacher spends tens of thousands of dollars of their own money trying to better educate themselves, must they wait for three years to receive a boost in their pay in this district? Again, there is absolutely no logic that supports this policy. These teachers go into debt to go to school. They have sacrificed for several years their time and money to be better teachers for our students. They have finished the hours to make a jump in the lanes to a master's degree and deserve to be compensated immediately upon completion of that degree. The students receive the benefits of their learning immediately, not three years later. I would ask you to change the policy of restrictions on lane movement and give graduates the respect they deserve with an immediate boost in salary upon completion of their degree. Again, the irony of a Board of Education that does not believe in rewarding education is shameful.

Finally, the board's response that our step and lane salary schedule is not sustainable, lacks any degree of factual merit. From my understanding, the board has offered no supporting evidence for this statement. For 50 years, this has been sustainable and it will continue to be sustainable as teachers retire and new teachers come in. This system was also sustainable when the district shared the cost with teachers to get higher level degrees. The fact is, the education fund has over 20 million dollars in it, in no small part due to the sacrifices made by teachers in this district over the last two negotiations. So, there is money to fund a step and lane salary schedule, support teachers financially when they seek higher education, and to respect them by giving them immediate lane advancement upon the completion of their degrees.

I would ask you to reconsider the position that the board has taken on all three of these issues and treat the teachers in this district with the honor and respect I believe they have earned. I speak as a teacher, a resident, and a parent when I say you can do better.

Sincerely,
Maggie Villwock ~ Heartland Elementary

