

## **THE PALISADES PARK BOARD OF EDUCATION**

April 5, 2021

In an effort to keep our residents and the general public more accurately informed, the Palisades Park Board of Education is providing the following statement with respect to the status of contract negotiations with the Palisades Park Education Association, which comprises of both teachers and secretaries:

The Board's contract with the Union expired on June 2019. The Board and the Union have been engaged in ongoing contract discussions. Regrettably, a settlement has not yet been reached, even after a lengthy mediation process and even after a Fact-Finding hearing through the States' Public Employee Relations Commission (PERC). Negotiations are still continuing. Notwithstanding the same, the Board has provided the teachers and secretaries with continued salary increases and benefits that they previously received under the expired contract. The benefits that the Union members are still receiving include health insurance, dental coverage, vision care, a prescription plan, tuition reimbursement, and even a perfect attendance bonus, as if a contract was in place.

The Board has proposed an agreement with salary increases and benefits that are commensurate with averages presently existing in Bergen County. The Board has also offered to reduce the Union members' health care contributions. On the other hand, the Union has sought annual raises in salary that would place it in the upper echelon of Bergen County raises. The Union also demanded additional reductions to health care contributions and retirement payouts for some of its members that would exceed the now legally mandated \$15,000 maximum for unused sick pay. The Board simply does not have the financial wherewithal to meet the Union's demands without increasing property taxes. In November 2019, a referendum that proposed to increase property taxes was defeated and our residents were clear that they would not support such an increase. Additional financial burden upon our community is something no one wants, especially now, when many of our residents are struggling financially due to COVID.

The Board understands that teachers are among our most valued assets in achieving our responsibility to educate our children. Of the school district's approximately \$29.4 Million budget, school employees' salaries and benefits comprise of approximately 81% of the total budget. The salaries and benefits increase every year in excess of 3% for them. Compare that with an annual 2% tax levy cap mandated by state law. The Union demands and the continued increases are simply unsustainable. Meanwhile, our buildings are in need of repair and classrooms need to be expanded as our schools service an ever-increasing population of students. The Board must be fiscally responsible and cannot compromise student safety to satisfy contract demands.

We hope this statement provides you with some additional insight as to what is actually transpiring with the contract negotiations with the Union. We hope for a resolution but will continue to act responsibly with your trust.