



Westford School Committee

Westford, MA

school-committee@westfordma.gov

Chris Sanders, Chair
Valery Young, Vice Chair
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Statement Regarding Ongoing Negotiations with the Westford Education Association

We have received questions about the status of the ongoing contract negotiations between the Westford Education Association (WEA) and the Westford School Committee. Specifically, there is ongoing collective bargaining with our Education Support Professionals (ESPs)—you may know them better as teaching assistants—as well as our teachers, counselors, and nurses.

The School Committee expresses its gratitude to the WEA for being true partners in prioritizing the education and care of our students. And in the spirit of partnership and collaboration, we have engaged in good faith bargaining with the goal of providing competitive compensation that won't disadvantage the talented individuals who choose to work in our district.

Recognizing that the compensation for some of our ESPs (Unit E) was, in fact, below that of comparable districts, the Westford School Committee has presented the WEA with multiple offers for three year contracts that would remedy that disparity. In December 2022, ten months after our first contract offer was made, the two negotiating teams reached an agreement on the terms of a three-year contract which featured the following:

- A pay increase over three years that ranges from 38% for our newest, entry-level ESPs to 11% for our most experienced
- Increased differential pay based on specific duties or student needs (this applies to Library and REACH ESPs, among others)
- Access to the same benefits package as all full-time town employees (our ESPs work year is 1104 hours; for reference, the widely referenced MIT Living Wage calculation is based on a work year of 2080 hours)
- Increased professional development for topics such as supporting student behavioral needs

Unfortunately, when this contract was brought by the Unit E negotiation team to the full membership for ratification on March 8, 2023, it was rejected.

Negotiations with WPS teachers and counselors (Unit A) and school nurses (Unit C) began in fall 2022. During the course of these negotiations, the WPS administration and School Committee have acknowledged that in the past several years, teacher salaries have fallen behind those of their colleagues in comparable districts. While the successful tax override in 2017 boosted our teacher salaries as intended, the state has adjusted our "market basket" of comparable districts (5 of 10 have changed since the override) and those districts have been financially able to increase their salaries at a higher rate than anticipated.



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The unfortunate reality is that it is simply not possible to remedy the current Unit A pay disparity within the projected future operating budgets for the Westford Public Schools. That said, we remain optimistic that continued, good faith bargaining with the WEA and collaboration with our town partners can result in finding a positive path forward.

The School Committee appreciates everyone who makes the town of Westford the special place it is: dedicated staff, passionate volunteers, and informed residents. We invite all parties to engage with as much of the town budget process as possible:

- Attend School Committee and SelectBoard meetings.
- Attend Finance Committee budget hearings in the leadup to Annual Town Meeting.
- Watch the ["Show Me the Money!" video](#) (presented by the Westford League of Women Voters) as a good primer on town finances.
- Ask questions of your elected officials.
- Participate in Town Meeting.

Thank you for your continued support of our town and schools.

Chris Sanders
Chair, Westford School Committee