



Jersey City Public Schools
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Office of the Superintendent

Dr. Marcia V. Lyles
Superintendent of Schools

TO: Board Members

FROM: Dr. Marcia V. Lyles, Superintendent of Schools
Ms. Sangeeta Ranade, President – Board Member

Marcia V. Lyles
Sangeeta Ranade

RE: Negotiations

DATE: August 28, 2014

Many months prior to the expiration of the teachers' contract, the Jersey City Board of Education and the Jersey City Education Association began meeting in order to negotiate a new contract with the teachers. Although the Board and the JCEA have worked diligently to reach an accord, we find ourselves in agreement with the JCEA that it is in the best interest of Jersey City students, teachers and taxpayers to seek the assistance of a neutral mediator to help both parties to reach an accord. The mediator's job is to help us come to a voluntary agreement.

Fortunately, the State of New Jersey provides just that assistance to public employers and employees free of charge to the citizens. To that end, we have directed counsel to file a request with the State Public Employment Relations Commission for formal mediation with the Jersey City teachers' union. We believe this will be the fastest way to arrive at a contract that is fair to our teachers, our students and our community.

Our request for formal mediation follows 30 meetings between union and district representatives over the last 18 months (meetings that have approached a total of more than 100 hours). Unfortunately, those meetings, including 18 official bargaining sessions, have not resulted in an agreement.

We are proud that during the past two years we managed to cut taxes and costs. However, the financial realities have changed significantly. For example, while the state has kept our school budget flat, the opening of a new charter school meant the district lost a net \$1.8 million in state aid. And, even if we raised taxes to the state cap of 2%, because of these and other budget increases, the district is facing a \$10 million shortfall in reserves, leaving a projected balance of only \$5 million to address all emergencies that may arise.

Despite this projected deficit, the District believes it is critical to keep our current staffing levels so that we can provide our students with a high quality, world class education. We want to maintain our class sizes, which remain among the smallest in the county and the state. We want to keep music, art and world languages classes at the same levels at our elementary schools. We want to keep our young teachers as well as those with many dedicated years of service.

While we would love to be able to afford to meet the financial demands of the union, we also have to face our current fiscal reality. We have reviewed the average increases in teachers' union contracts statewide, which reflect incremental raises and longevity. The average for contracts settled during the 2013-2014 school year, *including increment and longevity*, is 2.41% for the 2013-2014 school year, 2.55% for the 2014-2015 school year, and 2.40% for the 2015-2016 school year. The District has offered a salary proposal in line with the rest of the districts in the state, reflecting the financial situation statewide. We have also attached a chart, so you can see how the decline in teachers' raises reflects the trend many workers in both the public and private sectors face.

Once our request is filed, PERC will assign a mediator to work with the District and the union jointly and separately. The goal is to reach a voluntary, amicable and expeditious settlement.

This administration wants the same thing as the union: Top-flight schools for every child in every neighborhood that prepare our students for college and careers. We are confident that, working with a mediator, we can come to an agreement that satisfies all sides and, most importantly, will be in the best interest of the students of Jersey City Public Schools, whom we all serve.

cc: Mr. David C. Hespe, Commissioner of Education
Honorable Mayor Steven M. Fulop
Jersey City Councilmembers