

Ramapo Indian Hills Education Association Speech given at the Board of Education Meeting on 1/22/18

Last night executive members of the RIHEA read a statement to the Ramapo Indian Hills Board of Education. This is the transcript of that statement read to the BOE:

In a closed meeting last week, the Ramapo-Indian Hills Education Association expressed their frustration and discontent with the Ramapo-Indian Hills Board of Education through a vote of no confidence. The Association took this vote in the wake of your unwillingness to settle a fair and equitable contract with the dedicated employees of the RIH school district.

The Association has been negotiating in good faith throughout the entire process and even offered major concessions in order to adjust the salary guides to attract the best and the brightest for our students while stopping the mass exodus of qualified teachers leaving the district. However, this Board seems to forget that negotiations are a two-way process.

The vote came on the heels of our late November formal fact finding hearing, where this Board continued to make unreasonable requests for additional sacrifices and concessions from the staff. At the root of the issue is the Board's unwillingness to offer meaningful relief of health benefit costs. We are simply looking for a permanent cap of the percentage of health care premiums that employees pay similar to Ramsey, Ridgewood and Mahwah school districts. The salary guides we brought to the Board, and that they tentatively agreed to, gave major concessions on longevity and in exchange, we simply needed an equitable health benefits percentage reduction in return. The Board simply refused.

To add insult to injury, this Board consistently over-budgets its spending while underestimating the amount of state aid they receive, leaving the district with a large surplus. I am going to have our chief negotiator, John Gaccione, explain the financial details.

According to a recent audit done by the district,

From 2011-12 to 2015-16, the district over budgeted their healthcare costs by an average of over \$1.2 million (\$1,201,367) per year. In that time span the district has actually saw decreases in healthcare costs in all but 1 year.

From 2011-12 to 2016-17, the district consistently underestimated the amount of Extraordinary Aid they received. Each year they estimated receiving \$0 but have received on average nearly \$300 thousand (\$293,478) annually.

From 2011-12 to 2015-16, the district consistently underestimated the amount of State Aid they received. On average they received over \$300 thousand (\$322,395) more than they estimated annually.

From 2011-12 to 2015-16, the district has underestimated its revenue by an average of more than one and half million dollars (\$1,658,530) annually.

From 2011-12 to 2015-16, the district has operated with an average surplus of nearly \$1.8 million (\$1,796,117) annually totaling a surplus of just under \$9 million over the last 5 years.

Even worse, this Board continues to issue press releases full of misleading statements and half truths. For instance the January 16th press release states the board does not want to "unfairly burden the taxpayers" insinuating that the Association would like to do this. This is not the truth! The truth is the board can settle a contract without increasing taxes or requiring further concessions. At the fact finding hearing it was made clear that this board has more than enough money to fairly compensate

their staff but they have no desire to do so. We are left to draw no other conclusion than to believe you do not value your employees for their dedicated work.

Both the December 22nd and January 16th press release, state “the board proposed a salary guide that would increase starting salaries and provide a fair distribution of increases to all teachers by leveling out longevity”. It was the association that brought these guides in principle to the board even though it included a freeze in salary in the first year of the contract for teachers with no retroactive pay and a major concession on longevity that will save the district hundreds of thousands of dollars every year from the first year of this contract onward. These guides were brought to the board as a package offer that came with a permanent cap of the percentage of health care premiums that employees pay. This board wants to take these guides and our concessions and not make any meaningful concessions of their own.

The January 16th press release also lists some items which the board was willing to give to the association as if it was being done out of benevolence but the release conveniently leaves out all the other concessions this board demanded for these items.

The men and women who dedicate their lives to the students of the Ramapo-Indian Hills School District and make the district successful deserve a fair contract, not a bargaining crisis that has extended itself for the better part of a year and a half. The bottom line is that we simply cannot support a board that does not make its staff a priority and continues to make a conscious decision to drain its most valuable resource.